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The ineffable joy of forgiveness

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Abstract

The article analyses the concept of forgiveness, in the context of the contemporary debate, especially in French philosophy. The study concerns four main points: we will consider the notion of forgiveness as the main gift, on the basis of the proposal of Jankélévitch and Gabriel Marcel; the strict relationship between the notion of forgiveness and the one of mystery, with regard to the work of Gabriel Marcel on this theme; the difference between the act of forgiving and the one of excusing, and the extension of the concept of forgiveness, on the basis of the Catholic interpretation of it.

Keywords: Christianity; Donation; Gift; Mystery; Problem.

If we really want to love, we must learn to forgive.

Mother Theresa

1. The need to be forgiven: forgiveness as a gift.

One must not write an article about forgiveness to feel the need to be forgiven. On the contrary, the need to be forgiven appears as essential for a proper psychophysical balance. We will seek, therefore, to motivate this thesis.

Furthermore, we cannot speak of extending forgiveness, because there can be, someone who does not feel the need to forgive, even if when it comes to being forgiven, everyone wants forgiveness, as if it were something due.

However, to claim forgiveness is not only impossible but also meaningless, because there cannot be forgiveness if there isn't also a donation, a generous gift.

Etymologically, the word forgiveness comes from the Latin *perdonare*, which means to give completely (for-give). Giving

completely means, in this context, according somegracein order to *give* the absolution for a sin committed.

The importance of this act is clear and it's at the core of emotional well-being. First of all, the man who is capable of forgiveness is not affected by anger and he can continue to move on. In effect, unsolved angers keep us from moving forward, because they lock us in ourselves and in our bitterness. Furthermore, if we allow unforgiveness to continue, we are likely to experience depression, bitterness, or both. That's why it's important to clarify what forgiveness is in order to learn how to forgive.

In the *compendium* dedicated to the moral philosophy of Jankélévitch, in a chapter dedicated to forgiveness, he writes that true forgiveness is necessarily a gift:

[...] True forgiveness, on the margin of all legality, is a gracious gift of the offended to the offender; true forgiveness is a personal relationship with someone. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1001).

Pope Francis, on the occasion of the Angelus of St. Stephen 2015, affirmed that forgiveness is a gift; In fact, "as the word itself says, forgiveness is the highest expression of the gift" (Pope Francis, Angelus, December 26, 2015).

So it would be necessary, before we speak of forgiveness, to define what is meant by a gift.

Speaking of the theme of gift means to speak about a theme that assumes a central role in Christianity. This role is so pivotal that St. Paul affirms that all is gift, because, whatever is, is by virtue of a gift. "What do you have that you did not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4: 7).

What is a gift?

As testament to the importance of this theme, there is currently an abundance of recent literature that offers considerations and reflections on this subject, especially in French philosophy, e.g. in Gabriel Marcel's production. We will, then, analyze this theme with respect of his production. This is to testify the importance and the centrality of this theme.

The act of giving means to deliver a good to another person. In this sense, giving is exchanging. Moreover, the peculiarity of the act of giving, i.e. the generosity, obliges us to radically distinguish it from the exchange

or transfer. In effect, the act of giving is a social act that intends to build a communion between the members of the relationship:

The gift is a social act that makes the man highly worthy of living a life. Through the gift, the individual inaugurates a relationship; he sanctions and seals a community relationship. In this communion, the man who gives and the man who receives the gift form an inseparable dyad. They touch each other, they open their arms at the same instant, they walk and drive in the same path. (Serra, 2015, p. 7).

It was the French philosopher Gabriel Marcel, in the text called *The Mystery of Being*, who affirms the impossibility of identifying gift with exchange. Indeed, even if the transfer of operation actually takes place, the gift presents itself as the expression of something quite different.

What is a gift? Should we consider it as a mere transfer? The most elementary reflection shows that it is not. [...] To transfer, it would be simply to pass a certain object, a certain possession from one account to another. Now, even if this operation actually takes place, it presents itself to me, and also to the one who receives it, as the expression of something quite different. (Marcel, 1951b, pp. 119-120).

Looking at the status of the *Gegebenheit*, we see that a gift, in order to be authentic, must meet at least three characteristics: first of all, it must be the fruit of a gratuitous and generous action, then it must present itself as an asymmetrical and unilateral movement and, finally, it must present itself with a certain unconditional character; that is, it must not be for specific purposes.

Marcel (1951b) reported that, "the soul of the gift is generosity" (p. 119). This supports the social norm that for a gift to truly be a gift it needs to be not only gratuitous and free, but also the fruit of one specific goodness called *generosity*.

If we accept this to be true then we also need to analyze the qualities of generosity: what's generosity?

Normally, generosity is defined as the disposition to give and donate with liberality. In this sense, it is not only the soul¹ of the gift but also a

¹ Saying that generosity is the soul of the gift is something profoundly different to affirm that it is the cause of it. The cause of something is what determines an event. In this sense, the cause is the reason or the motive. We have already seen that the gift cannot have a cause; in fact, the gift appears to be free from any cause-effect relationship; we cannot say, in

virtue. Indeed, no gift can be accorded except through the virtue of generosity.

Here we encounter the first problem; it appears to be impossible to define generosity without speaking of the gift, and vice versa, we cannot talk of the gift without referring to generosity.

To be aware of it, it will suffice to consider the source of the generosity itself. Where does generosity come from?

Doubtless, it can be said that generosity is something that one obtains. However, when we properly reflect on this assertion it is false, because to obtain means to snatch with effort. Moreover, it is obvious that generosity cannot be the result of a certain effort. Indeed, one can strive and even struggle to obtain it, but one never succeeds, except by the gift and the grace.

This amounts to saying that generosity is not obtained, but, on the contrary, it is received: it is a gift. Gabriel Marcel rightly pointed out that "generosity itself appears as a gift" (Marcel, 1951b, p. 121).

As we have already seen, speaking of gift means talking about gratuity. In fact, giving is nothing else but that which is given *freely*, without the need for exchange or the accumulation of debt.

The second characteristic of the gift must therefore be its unilaterality; that is, its asymmetry in relations. In other words, the gift does not need reciprocity, as a prerequisite. Why?

We can say, as it has been reported by Bianchi that:

We have different ways to answer this question. But I personally think that the act of giving is possible because the human being has the capacity to accomplish this action without a calculus. The human being is *capaxboni* [and] *capaxamoris*. (Bianchi, 2015, p. 11).

Once again, we can see the strict relationship between love and forgiveness.

However, even if it does not require reciprocity, this does not necessarily imply that a response cannot take place. It only implies that reciprocity is not necessary to the economy of the gift:

fact "I give you because of this or that", for there would be only a transfer there. The soul of something is, on the contrary, the vital reason of the gift; it is its bearing structure, from which it feeds.

The recipient will be able to respond to the donor and a reciprocal relationship may then be developed, but it may also be that the gift is not welcomed or that there is no response of gratitude. The logic of gift, in fact, is not measured by the equivalence of exchange, but by the unilateral character of the offer. (Bianchi, 2015, pp. 11-12).

Affirming this is like saying that a gift is not a reciprocal movement but uniquely asymmetrical because, even if it was not accepted, the action of the *Gegebenheit* is the fruit of the generosity and graciousness of the subject. The word 'free' reminds us, in fact, that the action must be actually *gratuitous*; that is to say, it must remain outside the logic of *do ut des* (I give so that...).

Indeed, talking about gift means nothing but sharing for free, without exchange - as it was already mentioned. It is exactly this meaning of grace - *gratia*, which cannot but derive from the past participle *gratus*. Grace is, therefore, gratuitous favor and which, as a subject, we have done nothing to merit i.e. "it is not to be deserved" (Bianchi, 2015, p.24) because it is the result of free and unconditional love. Thus the gift does not complete the exchange but it is already beyond such finality.

To say, for example, to someone: "I give this house to you, but on a condition that you introduce only such change as I have specified, or receive only such persons whose name I shall give you" it is not really giving. (Marcel, 1951b, p. 119).

Apart from "this logic of sacrifice" (Steffens, 2016, p.67), where it is believed that everything must be paid for or made to pay, Christianity teaches that the sacrifice has already taken place as an original gift: "that it belongs to the Christianis therefore only the grace to receive the gift" (Steffens, 2016, p. 68).

However, to assert that the gift is an asymmetrical movement does not necessarily imply unilaterality. Indeed, one can think of gift as the most authentic expression of sharing that, by creating links among the subjects, inviting them to enter into a kind of *co-esse* of communion. This is not in contrast to what was said before; in fact, it is the nature and level of these bonds that change: we must move from the logic of utility and functionality to that of love. To do this, we will consider the third aspect of gift: the unconditionality.

The unconditionality² plays in the economy of gift, a decisive role. In fact, making a gift does not mean simply delivering a good in the hands of others, but also, in doing so, expecting nothing in exchange:

"To give" means delivering something into the hands of others without receiving anything in exchange. [...]. When a gift is given, there is a subject, the donor, who in freedom, without constraint, generosity and love, makes a gift to another person, a gift that does not depend on the response he will receive. (Bianchi, 2015, pp. 11-12).

Thus, gift also implies unconditionality and the latter implies freedom:

This is the greatness of the dignity of the human person: he knows how to give of himself with freedom: this is the *homo donator*! (Bianchi, 2015, p.12).

One cannot aim for a gift outside the dimension of freedom. In fact, a gift vitiated by some constraint, would cease from the beginning to be a gift. This does not mean, however, that the gift has no preconditions to satisfy, but on the contrary, that these conditions do not belong to the order of necessity, linked to the exchange, but rather to that of freedom.

To assert that gift is other than simple exchange means to recognize, among other things, that it does not have the finality to exercise a determined "attractive" power over our neighbor, but on the contrary, that it is an occasion to show him our love beyond every utilitarian logic.

[...] We must add that we do not give with a definite purpose. For example, to attach yourself to the recipient by way of recognition. To give is not to seduce. [...] To give is to spread, to extend oneself. (Marcel, 1951b, p. 119).

Thus if a man gives it is because he is capable of love, *capax amoris*. This highlights a paradox. In fact, it was said that the donation frees utilitarian logic from the *do ut des* philosophy that constitutes the debt. However, the action of

²The word of unconditionality means "unconditioned", "not limited" by any external circumstance. In this sense, saying that the gift is unconditional means, by not being determined or conditioned by whatever a cause, that it is also absolute. Indeed, the absolute term in its Latin etymology *ab + solus*, means exactly this: free from each link or cause, i.e., unconditional.

spreading implies that the setting in motion of a relational movement, leads to an openness in relations that have the possibility of envisaging a possible debt. What then changes is not the fact that the debt has completely been eliminated, but on the contrary, it's meaning now, is that it is from love. In this sense we can borrow the words of St. Paul where he says, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" (Romans 13: 8).

If everything we have just said is true for the donation, then it is even more so valid for forgiveness, which is the purest and the most authentic expression of gift, as we have seen. So we must now deal with forgiveness.

2. *Forgiveness and mystery: the mystery of forgiveness.*

The word "forgiveness" is one of those words we often use. It is used so assiduously that to propose a reflection on this theme could appear either discounted or useless. However, it is exactly when things get discounted that it is useful to analyze them again in order to find and search for their original meaning. What is forgiveness?

On the basis of all that has been said before, we have concluded that forgiveness is a gift and that above all, the gift of the self is the most authentic. Having unmasked this intimate connection between gift and forgiveness, we must now discuss forgiveness, *strictusensu*.

To write a discourse on forgiveness is not easy because, as Jankélévitch (1998) observes, "The impetus for forgiveness is so palpable, so controversial, that it discourages all analysis" (p. 1000). If the definition of the term "forgiveness" is so difficult, it is first of all because it appears in its pure nature, as genuine and authentic like a mystery impossible to describe.

...] In the clear transparency of this innocent movement, what could we find to describe? Inenarrable is the moment of brevity, indescribable is the mystery of a *simplicissime* cordial conversion. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1000).

Therefore to find a definition of "forgiveness" is difficult, by virtue of its mysterious nature and it's impossibility to problematize. What is then a mystery?

We can try to define the mystery, as opposed to a problem.

A problem is something we have in front of us and have to solve it in order to move ahead. It is completely external and foreign to us. Mystery, on the other hand, is something in which we are involved as a subject:

A problem is something we encounter, which blocks the way. It is all before me. On the contrary, mystery is something in which I find myself engaged, the essence of which is therefore not entirely in front of me. (Marcel, 1935, 145).

If problem is completely outside of us,³ mystery is rather a situation in which one finds oneself engaged in the first person i.e. an ontological situation, which must first be recognized:

Would it not be of the essence of what is ontological alone that can be attested? [...] It is of the essence of the mystery to be recognized; the metaphysical reflection presupposes this recognition which is not within its purview. (Marcel, 1935, pp. 143-145).

Recognizing a mystery, therefore means identifying something in which the subject is involved, where we can no longer make "the distinction between *in me* and *before me*" (Marcel, 1935, p. 145). We do not possess the mystery, but instead, we *live* it. It is an actual and real situation. In effect, forgiveness is not a concept, but an experience for the person who chooses to live a positive relationship with another who has offended them. In this context, we can see how it's difficult, almost impossible to find the causes of forgiveness; in effect, if they only spread by the gentle heart of ourselves, this means there is not any external cause. That's why a philosophical discussion about forgiveness is so hard to handle

The superiority of the nature of mystery, in relation to the problematic, is attested because the latter is the unique category capable of expressing not only Being but also the truths of the mind, which are impossible either to formulate rationally or to oppose totally to the subject. Thus mystery is the only category capable of expressing the non-original purity of the life of the mind:

³The elementary equation $ax = b$ can be assumed as an example of a scientific problem. This problem, to be solved, does not "need" us - as subjects, in the sense that anyone who is able to use a scientific method can solve it. It is completely outside us. This is also testified by the language when we say "there is this problem *before* me."

[The mystery] guards the essential, and reveals the original[thought] removed from discursive reflection, it gives to philosophical thought the most fruitful ground for its exercise [...] (Ballanti, 2012, p. 27).

It is for this reason that one is struck by such a great difficulty when it comes to formulate a definition of the word 'forgiveness'. Indeed, it is always difficult to state definitions of the truths of the mind. One can, however, draw two conclusions from what has been just said.

Firstly, forgiveness cannot necessarily be considered as a problem, but we must, nevertheless, recognize the nature of the *meta-problem*, i.e. of the mystery we live *hic et nunc*.

Secondly, as a situation in which one is involved, forgiveness is not an asset one possesses, but once and for all, it is an ever-present path; a path or a "process from the part of the one who has been offended with regard to the offender" (Bianchi, 2015, p. 45).

For these reasons, therefore, we will endeavor to describe forgiveness, not as a thing-or merely as 'a having' -but as a spiritual adventure.

3. *The difficult path of forgiveness: to forgive and to excuse.*

Some of the greatest obstacles to forgiveness are the misconceptions about what it is.

Forgiveness is neither something we can claim, nor it's a due, but, on the other hand, a path to build. Of course this path is not an easy one because it's not always easy to forgive; as it has been said:

[It is] an obscure and enigmatic path full of difficulties to cross [...]. But in that path, those who donate and those who receive them are not alone, they are not solitary in a solitary way. There, they move by taking their hands, guarding their lives, forming and giving consistency to a human shield able to withstand, with tenacity, the inevitable avalanches and weather that time and space have reserved for them. (Serra, 2015, p. 7).

The act of forgiving involves a gift. Not only does it imply a gift, but what it involves is the actuation of the perfect gift; "of the perfection of the gift" (Serra, 2015, p.52). This perfect gift is a selfless giving of itself. Indeed one might ask, "why forgiveness"?

Like all gifts, even forgiveness must bring something to the others. What forgiveness brings to the other is the liberation from the fault committed; "one forgives so that the other can live, and live without being crushed by the fault" (Serra, 2015, p. 52). This definition of forgiveness could confuse two acts, which, although similar, are in fact different: that of forgiving and that of excusing. We must now deal with the terminological difference between the two.

To do that, we must explain what are the *sine qua non* conditions of forgiveness; i.e. its transcendental dimensions. We have already discussed in detail about donation; here it will be necessary to insist on its eventual nature. According to two different modalities, a distinction between the act of forgiving and the act of excusing can then be drawn. First of all, we can do it by considering the definition of the two terms. After that, we can consider what the "non-eventual" nature of the excuse is.

A gift is an event, and forgiveness as the supreme gift is an *eventa fortiori*. It's an event of love, grace and freedom and it was for these reasons that the words of Mother Theresa were cited at the beginning of this text. In fact, just as we cannot make someone love us, we cannot force someone to forgive, because forgiveness is nourished by love and *vice versa*. Their relationship is reciprocal, and if love is an event that happens in the history and in the life of two people, in the calmness and serenity of a relationship, to enlighten and to mark a new path, forgiveness can also accord the present a new chance.

True forgiveness is a dated *event* that happens at a given moment of historical development: true forgiveness, despite all legality, is a *gracious gift* of the offended to the offender; true forgiveness is a personal relationship with someone. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1001).

This means that forgiveness occurs and appears in history in a particular moment as a donation. There is a moment of the inner life of the subject, which, in a burst of freedom and grace, decides to give itself to others⁴. It is

⁴ The etymology of the word is clear. The word "event" is something that happens. *Ad+venire*. Every single thing, that came as an event, is a gift because, coming from outside, we do not choose it, we can only certify its actuality. So the act of forgiveness, for the simple reason that it is the fruit of the grace, is an event.

for this reason that Jankélévitch could affirm that "the event [...] is [...] the decisive moment of forgiveness" (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1001).

In showing the eventual character of forgiveness, nothing else has been done but to emphasize again its nature of the mystery, because, in fact only the mystery is an event which is always the result of an interioreffort; of an effort of re-elaboration, and of conversion, which enables the offended to overcome the offense. As John Paul II said in his speech on the World Day of Peace:

In reality forgiveness is, above all, a personal choice, an option of the heart that goes against the spontaneous instinct of doing evil for evil. This option finds its element of comparison in the love of God.

This quote resumes all that we said earlier. Moreover, it can raise some questions. First of all, does not this act of conversion also occur with an excuse and therefore with the act of excusing?

We must now concentrate on the act of excusing in order to see what it entails. In doing so, we want to show that this act is not, unlike forgiveness, an event.

To excuse means to justify an offense by finding extenuating circumstances for the offender. It also means not really holding the offender responsible for his actions. There were, indeed, external causes, which played a fundamental part, which may have obliged the offender to do what he did. "To apologize constantly, to clear the man of his responsibility, is something infantilizing" (De Bellescize, 2016, para.1).

We look for rational justifications, for example, on the life of the subject himself and of his past. An excuse is also a form of negation because if one excuses it, it's because he has minimized the fault until denying it completely. This is why the excuse does not consist in treating the offense in all its gravity, but in accepting it because it was caused by rational events.

That is the first difference. While, what precedes the excuse is the tendency to minimize evil, making it rational, what precedes forgiveness is the responsibility to take the evil seriously, as an irrational scandal.

If we rationalize evil, we tend to deny it as an event. We rationalize and minimize the insult, but in doing so, as Jankélévitch said, forgiveness is rendered useless:

Neglecting evil and wickedness, [it] minimizes at the same time insult; by minimizing insult, it makes forgiveness useless. There is no forgiveness because there is, so to say, no offense and absolutely no offense, although there has been an offender. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1001).

We can still go on in our comparison between forgiveness and excuse, saying that what the latter implies is not a gratuitous gift, but a certain clemency. That's why we cannot mix the act of forgiveness and the one of understanding; in effect the two acts are essentially different. We can continue in this analyze.

With the concept of clemency, there arises two problems.

First of all, it should be noted that clemency is not, strictly speaking, an event; that is to say, it is not a free and disinterested gift, but on the contrary, it is always the fruit of reflection or rationalization. "Clemency does not imply any particular event" (Jankélévitch, 1998, pp. 1002).

Second, the concept of clemency raises the problem of otherness. It has been rightly said that forgiveness, to be authentic, is always a relationship and, therefore, forgiveness towards someone. But clemency tends to minimize, all the more, this relationship. Here's the reason why.

Clemency, in fact, is not the privileged moment of the relationship with others, because it is not the gift that happens in the depths of disintegration, but rather the fruit of certain grandeur of the heart of the offended:

Clemency is a kind of forgiveness without interlocutor: moreover it does not pronounce the word of forgiveness for a true partner in flesh and blood. [...] clemency excludes really all transitive and intentional relationship with one's neighbor. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1002.).

Thus, it can be said that clemency is not relational, but solitary:

There is in guilt a dimension of confinement in the narrowness of the self, where a vow is liberating and cannot take place except in the light of a glance that loves us and which hopes for us. (De Bellescize, 2016)

It is an opportunity to display the alleged superiority, as Jankélévitch used to say, "it is a question of being the strongest" (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1003). It has been said that it is like "an old barren woman who digs her own grave" (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1003).

Now that we have distinguished between the act of forgiving and the act of excusing, we must continue our analysis by asking what the limits of forgiveness are; that is to say, to what extent one must be forgiving.

4. Forgiveness as a Requirement of Faith: the extent of forgiveness.

When we talk about forgiveness we cannot avoid speaking about Christianity. This word traverses the whole Bible and comes as a divine prescription. In effect, all Christians want to be forgiven for their sins. Sin is the heavy burden that brings the tenseness of guilt and the anguish of knowing that we have acted against the will of our Father in Heaven.

For this reason, forgiveness is something all of us want to receive but most of us hesitate to give. Jesus makes it clear, however, that we can't have it without giving it: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mt 6: 14-15).

Forgiveness is the true moment of self-giving and sharing. We forgive for selfless love towards our neighbour. Or, it's not only important but also essential for the man of faith to forgive: why?

Firstly, that's because that's a compulsory act, asked by God himself: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you". (Col 3:13).

It's mandatory for all the Christian community to forgive evil. In this way, we can both imitate God's love and aspire to his kingdom; that is a fundamental precept: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." (Eph. 4:32).

In effect, as we have said, when we forgive we learn to love and, for this reason, we can be a little more similar to God. On the other hand, when we refuse to forgive, we refuse to prove love and we move away from him. That's the core of the Lord's Prayer or *Pater noster*: "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." (Mt. 6: 12).

We can see then that forgiveness involves love and love involves forgiveness backwards. Or if we aspire, as Christians, to the love of God, we cannot neglect to love the others. Loving the others implies, as we had seen, the act of forgiving.

That's why forgiveness is a necessary event for the man of faith, who can, thanks to this act, remembering the past, to assimilate it.

But are there any limits to forgiveness? Can we forgive everything or there are some events that are truly unforgivable?

As a continuation of the Gospel of Matthew, we find the apostle Peter, who asks Christ: "Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven. (Mt. 18:21).

This dialogue can help us to tackle the problem of the limits of forgiveness because it capitalizes on the crux of the problem: is there a limit to forgiveness?

To ask ourselves whether we can set limits on forgiveness means, as we have said before, is to ask whether we can set limits on grace and love, by which forgiveness is nourished.

When Jesus answers Peter that forgiveness must spread and multiply, he wants to open to the possibility of infinite forgiveness and the reality of continual pardon. It is absurd to interpret these words of Christ literally, but on the contrary, what Christ means by this is that there is no limit to the action of forgiving and that between the offended and the offender there must always be forgiveness.

Indeed, the act of forgiveness, in its unconditionality, is infinite: it forgives once and for all, and in doing so "it opens up to the culprit an unlimited credit" (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1140).

To say that forgiveness extends to infinity means to affirm, first of all, that there is nothing unforgivable, and secondly, that forgiveness has no limits. An explanation of these two passages will be sought in the rest of the text.

"We must forgive always and always without conditions" (Bianchi, 2015, p. 72). To affirm this means to recognize either the unconditionality of forgiveness or its potential infinity; we can always forgive anything.

Again, it is a comparison with the excuse that allows us to shed light on this passage. Indeed, there are certain acts or crimes that are justly impossible to excuse, because the evil that has been done is impossible to rationalize. There is no excuse. Yet, even in this impossibility, there is always the possibility of forgiving them. With forgiveness not being a rationalization, it can be extended even to the inexcusable:

Forgiveness is meant precisely to forgive what no excuse can apology:

For there is no fault so grave that one cannot, as a last resort, forgive it. [...] Forgiveness, in this sense, can do everything. [...] for if there are such monstrous crimes that the perpetrators of these crimes cannot even expiate them, there always remains the possibility to forgive them; for forgiveness being done precisely for these desperate or incurable cases. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1142).

Even when evil becomes inexcusable, it is pardonable, forgiveness being a mystery of love, which is offered in the generous freedom of the subject:

Forgiveness [...] extends to infinity. Forgiveness does not ask whether the crime is worthy of being forgiven, whether the atonement has been sufficient, whether the grudge has lasted long enough ... which amounts to saying: there is the inexcusable, but there is no unforgivable. (Jankélévitch, 1998, p. 1141).

We can therefore affirm that with God and in faith, forgiveness acquires a dimension of eternity. In this sense, forgiveness has no limits and according to the prescription of Christ, we can even forgive up to seventy-seven times.

A man of faith experiences forgiveness not only as a precept, but also as a genuine need. For the Spirit of God always gives us the possibility of meeting with the other, beyond every despair and guilt. One can, in power, forgive everything, offering the gift of gracious and gratuitous love to our neighbor.

Not only, therefore, does pardon have no limits of extension, but it nevertheless has not an original cause, let alone this gratuitousness of the gift that its etymology suggests.

Here we can report the words of Father André Fils Mbem, who affirms:

To conclude, forgiveness is, above all, a personal choice. It is an option of the heart that goes against the spontaneous instinct of doing evil for evil. This option finds its element of

comparison in the love of God, which welcomes us despite our sins, and its supreme model is the forgiveness of Christ. (Mbem, 2014).

To conclude, we can say that there is, in the Christian faith, this all-powerful spring of forgiveness, unconditional and universal, witnessed by the words of Christ on the cross "Father forgive them: for they do not know not what they are doing"(Lk 23:34).

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