

# Charity as the Heart of Social Work: A Catholic's Perspective

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*The purpose of this article is to examine the virtue of charity in its two key senses, as theological virtue (Caritas, Love) and as the virtue of aiding the poor and downtrodden. The essay examines these virtues in their historical relation to each other and to the history and current practice of social work. The factors that led to the distancing of professional social work, clinical and activist, from charity in either sense are discussed. The article uses Christian exemplars of charity as love and at the same time as aid to the downtrodden to examine how Christian social workers may grow, by grace, in charity that is integral both to their faith life and their professional practice. Benedict XVI's discussion of these issues and his advice and cautions to the Church's own social workers are analyzed as a guide to the integration of Christian love and professional helping.*

*It is our care of the helpless, our practice of lovingkindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!' (Tertullian, Apology 39 [about 200], Quoted by Hart, 2009)*

*The criterion of true Christian spirituality, affirmed by the Gospel over and over again, is the practical and concrete love of neighbor that leads us to make the sacrifice of our own desires, convenience, and comfort in order to meet the needs of others. (Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World*, 2008)*

*And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. (1 Cor. 13:3, KJV)*

**T**OLSTOY ([1885], 2003), WHO NOTWITHSTANDING HIS OWN WEIGHTY novels, came to believe that the essence of art was the parable (Tolstoy, 2011), calls one of his later short stories “Where Love is, God is.” Written in 1885, the story tells of Martin, an old cobbler who only recently and with the help of a pilgrim and daily study of the Gospel, had emerged from the despair and self-preoccupation into which years of grief and loss had plunged him. He works out of his small basement home, from the window of which he is able to look out only on the feet of passersby, most of whom he recognizes by their shoes. One night in his sleep he hears a voice telling him to watch out for him the next day, as he will come by that window.

Next day, Martin works away while keeping an eye out for an unfamiliar pair of boots in the street above. In the course of the day he sees, out in the snow-covered street, a hungry, broken-down old man, a mother in worn summer clothes struggling to keep her baby warm, and an old woman scolding her grandson who had stolen an apple. He invites each of them in to his modest room and gives them “food and comfort both for soul and body” (p. 195).

I will not give away the conclusion—if only because the reader will already have figured it out, but suffice it to say that when Martin reaches for his Gospel to continue reading where he had left off, the book opens at a different page, which he reads instead.

“I was a hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger and ye took me in. “

And at the bottom of the page he read:

“Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren even these least, ye did it unto me.“

And Martin understood that his dream had come true; and that the Savior had really come to him that day, and he had welcomed him (p. 201).

Tolstoy here expresses his Christian understanding of charity, the sense that nineteenth century critics regarded either as “sentimental” and “disorganized,” or like Scrooge at the start of *A Christmas Carol*, as a practice made redundant by tax-supported government programs. For professional social work, which grew out of the first critique and came in more recent times to embrace something more like the second, the Christian virtue of charity has been something of an embarrassment.

### **Defining Charity**

Social work is in principle a virtue-driven profession. That is to say, it is a social practice that requires and develops certain virtues (Adams, 2009; MacIntyre, 1984). The character of a social worker is formed by the choices

she makes—choices that form habits of the heart and mind (Tocqueville, 2003) and constitute her as the person making each subsequent choice (Finnis, 1983). For Christians, the greatest of these moral excellences is the theological or grace-dependent virtue of charity (*agape, caritas, love*), the Holy Spirit's greatest gift (Pinckaers, 1995).

Charity is a source of ambivalence for social workers. Love or charity is the very definition of God (1Jn 4:8), it is generally regarded as the greatest virtue (Jackson, 2003), and it is at the heart of the Church's mission to the poor and oppressed, an organized social activity of the Church from the beginning. Yet it is something of an embarrassment for professional social work, which arose out of an attempt (mostly by Christians) to “organize” charity and replace its sentimental attempts to help by scientific practice. Unlike “justice,” charity appeals neither to social work's professional nor its activist tendencies. And love, as charity is usually rendered in its theological context, does no better. Both its overtones of Hallmark card sentiment and its religious roots make it something of an embarrassment to clinicians and activists alike. Moreover, in contrast to the virtue of justice, charity or love does not seem the kind of virtue that *can* be acquired and developed through secular professional education and practice. We can see the difficulty if we consider how Christians have thought of charity as a virtue.

### **Charity as Queen of the Virtues**

Charity or love also gets short shrift in the academic field of virtue ethics. With some notable exceptions (Geach, 1977; McCloskey, 2006), it is little discussed. Yet for any understanding of the place of the virtues in social work or especially in the formation of the Christian social worker, the virtue of charity cannot help but be central. Charity is inescapably a theological virtue. Like faith and hope, it is not part of the classical, pre-Christian understanding of the virtues and Christians from Paul on have understood it as a special gift of God's grace rather than as a natural process that can be understood in Aristotelian terms simply as a matter of training and habituation.

Charity has a special place among the virtues, even the theological ones. As Geach (1977) points out, following Aristotle, it would be vulgar to praise God as if he had certain human virtues. What would it mean, for example, to ascribe to the Divine Nature cardinal virtues such as temperance and courage or, for that matter, the theological virtues of faith and hope? But Love or *Caritas* is just what God is. God as Love is prior to and independent of any of his creations and does not need them to be Love. “God is Love,” Geach (1977) argues, “because, and only because, the Three Persons eternally love each other” (p. 80).

Christian understanding of charity as a human virtue stems from the complete self-giving of God as man and for humanity, and from Christ's

call to us as creatures in his image to love him with all our hearts, souls, and minds...and (in consequence) our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:36). As Benedict XVI (2006) puts it, exhorting those whose work is to carry out the Church's charitable activity, "The consciousness that, in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others" (p. 86).

Charity, thus, is about self-giving, a love that, like God's, is super-abundant rather than calculating. It is a matter of will, not simply emotion—for I can choose to love someone despite my emotions, for the love of God. But intensity and self-sacrifice are not enough to define the virtue of charity. Intense commitment, as in the case of the most dedicated Nazis, may involve great self-sacrifice in the cause of evil. "Love can be thought of as a commitment of the will to the true good of another," suggests McCloskey (2006, p.91)—the word "true" implying that charity, though superabundant, cannot be blind. Christian charity is first and foremost the friendship of human beings for God, to which God invites us. The "love for God above all and love for neighbor *because of God* is the most important virtue of the Christian life" (Kaczor, 2008, p.130, emphasis added; Geach 1977).

### Origins of Christian Charity

Charity, like justice, is not simply a quality or abiding state of the individual character but also finds expression in social activities and arrangements. Charity as a virtue, and still more as definition of God, may include but cannot be reduced to the altruistic practice we currently describe by that term and that is too readily associated, not with poor cobblers but with upper middle class women and clergy in the nineteenth century. Charity is the practice of relief or help for those in poverty. The focus on those in need distinguishes charity as discussed here from the wider practice of philanthropy that includes giving to scientific research, universities, opera and symphony organizations, and museums. But charity as activity focused on the poor and vulnerable may or may not be infused with the Christian virtue of charity as selfless self-giving out of friendship for God and neighbor.

Nevertheless, charity was from the Church's beginnings an organized ecclesial activity. Christians' giving of their own time, treasure, and talent in aid of those who were sick, in prison, poor, homeless, and strangers or outcasts rested on a new social ethic that sharply differentiated the Christian revolution's norms from those of the prevailing pagan world (Hart, 2009; Stark, 1996; 2011). Charity as a Christian practice therefore took on a different form and extent, and rested on different relations of love among providers, recipients, and God (Oden, 2007).

The historical sociologist Rodney Stark (1996; 2011) has shown how different the Christian response to the great plagues of the late Roman Empire in the second and third centuries was from that of the pagans and

how important that difference was for the rapid growth of the Church. Like Hart (2009), Stark emphasizes the revolutionary impact of Christian doctrine in the ancient pagan world in which it took root. He shows the importance of that doctrine and especially the centrality of a God of Love who held individuals accountable for their love in enabling Christianity to thrive and grow rapidly at the expense of traditional pagan religion.

In both theological and practical terms, these second- and third-century plagues overwhelmed the resources of the pagan tradition. The pagan gods required placatory sacrifices but did not love humanity or expect humans to love one another. The pagan response, as described by both pagan and Christian writers, was to flee for the hills, to avoid all contact with families where a member had been infected. The sick and dying were abandoned without nursing care—even food and water—or religious consolation and they died at an enormously high rate. Something like a third of the empire's population and two-thirds of the population of the city of Alexandria was wiped out in the first plague, which broke out in 165 AD, (Stark, 1996; 2011). The great pagan physician Galen abandoned Rome for a country estate in Asia Minor until the epidemic was over.

The Christian response was different. As Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria, and Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, explained, the plague was a time of terror for the pagans, who had no loving God and no hope of eternal life with God. Christianity offered explanation, comfort, and a prescription for action. The Christians did not abandon their sick and they nursed pagans too as they could. Many sacrificed their own lives to care for others.

This contrast between pagan and Christian charity was clear even to those most hostile to Christianity, like the apostate emperor Julian who wrote, "The impious Galileans [i.e., Christians] support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us" (quoted by Stark, 1996, p.84). Julian made energetic efforts to organize the pagan priests to emulate the Christians and develop their own charitable activities (Benedict XVI, 2006; Hart, 2009; Stark, 1996; 2011).

This differential response to the great epidemics points to the revolutionary character and depth of the Christian commitment to a new social ethic. Today it takes an effort of historical imagination to appreciate the power of this new morality in those first centuries of the Church's history. Christ's teaching—eventually to be adopted in secular form as a core social work value—of the equal worth and dignity of the human person as *imago Dei*—had a force not yet moderated by centuries of familiarity. Both pagan and Christian writers recognized that love and organized charity were central duties of Christian faith, not only in its scriptures but also in the everyday practice of the Church.

The Christian understanding of the relation of divine to human, of religion to the virtues, was fundamentally different from that of the pagan world. Julian attempted to emulate Christian charitable work, which he saw

as the religion's one admirable feature, and to root his new pagan charity in Hellenistic rather than Judeo-Christian tradition. But that pagan culture lacked the moral resources for a social ethic of love that was, in contrast, central to the Christian faith (Hart, 2009).

In the context of what Gibbon (1787, quoted by Hart, 2009), himself no admirer of the Christians, described as a pagan "religion which was destitute of theological principles, of moral precepts, and of ecclesiastical discipline" (p.192), Julian attempted what could only be a superficial and ineffectual imitation of Christian charity. Christianity, however, was rooted in a very different Jewish tradition in which, because God loves humanity, we cannot please God unless we love one another—a thought that, with the possible, partial exception of *xenia*, the Greek concept of hospitality toward strangers, alien to pagan ideas of the relations between human and divine (MacMullen, 1981; Markos, 2007). Mercy, and so works of mercy aimed at helping widows, orphans, the impoverished and downtrodden, was, in the eyes of the Greek philosophers, their Roman followers, and some moderns like Nietzsche or Ayn Rand who were nostalgic for paganism and contemptuous of the Christian social ethic, not a virtue but a character defect (Judge, 1986; Stark, 2011).

### **Christian and Secular Charity Today**

Not only was Christian charity important to the growth of the Church, but also continues to be at its heart. Christians have not always behaved as well in subsequent plagues as they did in those first centuries. But we find in every century examples of heroic self-giving as exemplified by St. Damien of Molokai (Daws, 1989; Bunson & Bunson, 2009) in nineteenth century Hawaii. A missionary from Belgium, Father Damien de Veuster asked his bishop in Honolulu for permission to serve the leper colony to which many of his parishioners were being sent. Men, women, and children who had contracted the disfiguring and debilitating disease of leprosy (Hansen's disease) were segregated, as a public health measure, to a remote, isolated part of the island of Molokai. Like those third century Christians who nursed the plague-stricken, he tended and ministered to the sick, heedless of the danger to himself, until eventually he contracted and died of the disease.

Or consider in our own day, the men and women of Christian religious communities who serve the people of Southern Sudan (Solidarity with Southern Sudan, 2010; Kristof, 2010a, 2010b). Much charitable activity is organized through dioceses and parishes—AIDS ministries, prison ministries, food pantries, and the like, as well as in the form of contributions to larger efforts like Catholic Charities, Catholic Relief Services, Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, and other charitable activities of all kinds of Christian communions across the globe. From its earliest days, the Church understood charity as one of its essential organized activities, along with

administering the sacraments and proclaiming the Word (Benedict XVI, 2006). Charity was the responsibility of each individual member *and* of the entire ecclesial community at every level. From the original group of seven deacons, the *diaconia*, the well-ordered love of neighbor has been understood as involving both concrete and spiritual service, corporal and spiritual works of mercy (Benedict XVI, 2006). Through its institutions and individuals, both saints and sinners, the Church has been engaged in helping the poor and downtrodden. It is a record that extends through the work of deacons, monasteries, dioceses, parishes, to the social service organizations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the development of modern social work.

### **Professionalizing Charity**

Modern social work emerged as a profession out of the Charity Organization Societies (COS), as an effort to adopt “scientific charity” in place of the disorganized efforts of the “sentimental” givers of alms. Social workers, like scientists, became professionals and like them distanced themselves from amateurs and their long historical association with the Church. (For discussion of the contemporaneous shift in scientific work from clerical avocation—e.g., Copernicus, Mendel—to freestanding secular profession in the late nineteenth century, see Hannam, 2011.)

The COS movement aimed not only to replace “sentimental” with scientific, organized charity; it also and at the same time sought to bring back personal concern and friendship to the relation of giver and receiver in charity. In a world where charity had become either a formal, impersonal, and demoralizing system of public poor relief supported by taxation or else casual and random handouts to beggars, they aimed to bring the ordered love that Christian charity entails.

The various existing societies for giving aid to the poor were uncoordinated, readily abused, and lacked ongoing help based on a real understanding of the specific needs of the poor families involved. It was disorganized charity. Among the COS responses were individualized assistance to the poor “client” (Mary Richmond’s term), with clinical assessment or social diagnosis, case conferencing, intervention in the form of “friendly visiting” (later professionalized as social casework), research, and coordination of charitable giving in the community (from which the community chest and eventually the United Way evolved).

How did professionalization change approaches to helping those who were poor and downtrodden? Scientific charity required a more thoughtful, data-based, organized approach to helping. It recognized the Christian duty of charity, personal caring and neighborly concern for the person and family, including subjective as well as material needs. It offered, through friendly visiting, “not alms but a friend” (Leiby, 1978).

But in growing industrial cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, neighborliness of the affluent and the poor could not arise organically as part of a network of relationships in a shared neighborhood. The large social and, increasingly, physical distance between friendly visitor and client prevented ordinary neighborliness and rendered their relationship awkward and uncomfortable. It was not the friendship of an actual neighbor whom you could ask for a cup of sugar without fear of being refused and offered instead—as the COSs “friendly visitors” were wont to do—advice on managing the family budget (Leiby, 1978).

Charity is friendship, according to Aquinas, but friendship implies a degree of equality between the friends (Bro, 2003). Love between God and humans is possible only because of God’s “condescension,” but condescension among humans is not the stuff of friendship and so is incompatible with the virtue of charity.

This is a paradox in that condescension in its sublunary form is precisely what charitable activity came to involve. It was the gratuitous and so arbitrary activity of the business and professional classes and the clergy, often marked by motives other than self-giving love and commitment to the true good of the other—motives involving social status or display or complacent self-satisfaction of the giver. Such activity by definition is not charity, though called by the same name. Rather, it is the kind of activity of which Paul says that without charity, I the giver am nothing (1Cor.13.3).

Professionalism offered a solution to this awkwardness, a way of understanding the helping relationship as more akin to that of lawyer and client than that of Good Samaritan and person in need of help (Leiby, 1978). Professionalism required a body of knowledge, formal organization, and a code of ethics. It was a path to ensuring quality of service. If not yet evidence-based practice, at least it offered the informed and educated judgment of a competent professional. It was also a path to status, legal recognition, and funding of professional social workers. To note that reality is not to belittle the importance of knowledge and competence on the part of those whose aim is to “enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2008).

The point, rather, is to suggest how the striving for a more scientific, professional approach to helping carried with it the potential failure of the challenge and duty of Christian charity out of which, in part, the effort arose in the first place.

Professionalization of charity in the form of social work required such attributes of a profession as a specific body of knowledge, skills, and values, a code of ethics, and the quest for licensure by the state. All of this required a distancing from the very word charity, whether as poor relief, sentimental giving, or even organized charity.



If the new professionals came to cringe at the term charity, charity's reputation also suffered precisely from the attempt to organize it and make it more scientific and professional. As the poet John Boyle O'Reilly (2008) put it in 1886,

The organized charity, scrimp'd and iced,  
In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ.

Charity thus came under fire from all sides. Socialists attacked it for maintaining the capitalist *status quo* and promoting an alternative to their own class struggle for a different order. They saw the settlement houses as competitors with the Socialist Party in Chicago and elsewhere. Social casework was condemned in the same terms its advocates recommended it to the business and professional classes. As the London COS put it, social casework was the "true antidote to Bolshevism" (Woodroffe, 1974, p. 55). Meanwhile the supporters of "sentimental charity" in the spirit of Dickens, Tolstoy, or John Boyle O'Reilly, deplored the ways in which charity had gone cold and scientific. Social workers, on the other hand, came to see charity as unprofessional.

Of particular interest here, because it challenges professional social work as well as charity, is the critique that charity, whether as casual almsgiving, tax-supported poor relief, or proto-social-work, was itself uncharitable. This oxymoronic paradox is captured in the phrase of Karl Jaspers (cited by Pieper, 1997), "charity without love." The phrase points to a recognizable reality and problem, yet such charity clearly is not charity in the sense of the Christian theological virtue, which is not self-regarding, smothering, or morally superior in attitude, but involves a commitment of the will to the true good of another.

Efforts to help those who are poor and downtrodden, as required of the Church in its individual members and as an ecclesial body, may fall short of the virtue of charity in several ways. One involves precisely an overemphasis on the giver—on good intentions and spiritual, social, or psychological benefits rather on the outcomes for those helped (Lupton, 2011). The virtue of charity requires by definition willing the true good of the other as other and so a focus on what actually helps. That is, it requires the cardinal virtue of practical judgment or prudence to discipline and direct the good intentions. This is the legitimate question raised by the proponents of "scientific charity" in the nineteenth century as well as, today, by advocates of a more empowering, partnership-oriented approach to charity, such as the asset-based approach to community development advocated by McKnight (1996) and Lupton (2011).

Another way in which some social workers dispense with the virtue as well as the practice of charity is to substitute a focus on provision by the state—whether as Scrooge does because he already pays taxes to support social welfare institutions or because of the belief that rights-based

claims on the state are more just and dispense with the arbitrariness and condescension of charity.

Taking up the justice-based argument against charity, Benedict XVI (2006) acknowledges its force as put forward by Marxism's critique, but rejects the notion that any political order, no matter how just, will ever eliminate the need for charity. "Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary even in the most just society," he writes. "There is no ordering of the State so just that it will eliminate the need for the service of love" (p. 69). Such a utopian program of rendering charity unnecessary leads in practice to the hypertrophy of the bureaucratic state. It stifles those charitable impulses that find their natural expression in the structures—of family, neighborhood, church, and voluntary organization—that mediate between individual and state (Berger & Neuhaus, 1996). Or, as Benedict (2006) puts it, "The state which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing the suffering person—any person—needs: namely, loving personal concern" (p. 69).

Benedict (2006) argues that for those who work in the Church's charitable agencies, professional competence and effectiveness are necessary, but not sufficient. "Charity workers need a 'formation of the heart': They need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others" (p. 79). He has a particular concern that the Church's own professional social workers may be infected with ideologies that deride charity as a stopgap, a substitute for justice that serves the *status quo*. This tendency is strong even among social workers whose own jobs depend on charitable support of their agency. "What we have" in such ideologies, Benedict states, "is really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the *moloch* of the future. . . . One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now" (p. 81).

Benedict (2006) addresses himself specifically to the "charity workers" who carry out professionally the Church's ministry of *diakonia*. He assumes an identity of Christian purpose between the Church's "ecclesial charity," which is integral to its very being, and the professionals employed in carrying it out. He warns rightly (not least in light of the experience of liberation theology several decades ago) of the dangers of activism in the name of parties and ideologies that are alien to that shared purpose.

How does all this relate to the profession of social work, the secular inheritor of scientific charity? It is a profession that includes many Catholics and other Christians who have chosen this field of relatively low pay and prestige precisely because of their Christian understanding and commitment to serving the needs of the poor and downtrodden. It also includes many—and (we may suspect) *especially* in its leadership—who are non-religious and even hostile to the Church.

### Love Among the Ruins: A Romance of the Near Future

Drawing its heading from the evocative title of Evelyn Waugh's 1953 dystopian novella of the welfare state, this final section addresses the implications of these complex pressures and entanglements for those who strive to be both good professional social workers and faithful Christians. Where does this tension between the theological virtue of love (*caritas, agape*) and the language of justice, individual rights, and the state leave the professional social worker who is also a faithful Christian? These issues touch on the central question for social work and social welfare, the relation of formal to informal care and control, of professional caring to personal caring on the one hand and on the other to the caring capacities within families and communities (Adams & Nelson, 1995; Burford & Adams, 2004; McKnight, 1996).

These new developments—ideological, political, fiscal—pose challenges both to professional social workers of faith and also at the level of religious authorities like the archdiocese of Denver discussed by Chaput (2008; 2009), which is under strong secularist threat or blackmail, and to faith-based charitable organizations like Catholic Charities. At this level, leaders are pushed to define the limits of accommodation beyond which a Christian charity loses its soul and may as well drop its religious affiliation and become an offshoot of the bureaucratic-professional state (Anderson, 2000; Chaput, 2009).

“Government cannot love,” Chaput (2009) argues. “It has no soul and no heart. The greatest danger of the modern secularist state is this: In the name of humanity, under the banner of serving human needs and easing human suffering, it ultimately, ironically—and too often tragically—*lacks humanity*” (p. 29). The secularist direction of law and policy described here is leading to a hypertrophy of the state, with all its bureaucratic-professional rigidities, that is increasingly inhospitable to the Christian virtue of charity as a total self-giving aimed at the good of the other.

Although “Government cannot love,” St. Vincent de Paul in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Damien in the 19<sup>th</sup>, Mother Teresa in the 20<sup>th</sup>, and the early Christians in the plagues of the second and third centuries could and did. They offer a model of love as a virtue of the Christian social worker. The question arises, then, of how best to preserve or cultivate in social workers the virtue of charity; and how to do this in a context where the professionalizing, bureaucratizing, and secularizing of such work seem to render it all but impossible?

In his 2006 encyclical, *God Is Love: Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict offers some guidance for workers in the Church's own charitable agencies that applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Christian social workers in any setting. His remarks offer the necessary theological starting point of this all-important virtue in the context of the Christian social worker.

It is important, as we talk of love, to recognize knowledge and competence as the *sine qua non* of the professional social worker. They are, Benedict (2006) says, necessary but not sufficient. Social workers also “need a ‘formation of the heart’” (p.79). The two—one a matter of knowledge and skill, the other of character—do not stand in opposition to each other. As recent empirical research has re-emphasized, the quality of the client-practitioner relationship, and so the character of the social worker, as distinct from the specific theories or methods employed, is a key aspect of professional competence and effectiveness (Adams, 2009; Drisko, 2004; Graybeal, 2007; Wampold, 2007).

If we examine theologically the issue of proselytizing on the job, we can see that the virtue of love (love of neighbor because of love of God) proscribes it insofar as it involves coercion or manipulation. (Requiring attendance at a religious service as a condition of receiving food would be an example.) It is not simply a compromise between state and church about government funding of charitable activities. “Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieving other ends” (Benedict XVI, 2006, pp. 81-82). This proscription does not mean that the Christian social worker can leave God out of her understanding of the social situations she addresses, since Christian love is always concerned with the whole person and the absence of God may itself be a cause of deep suffering. But Christian social workers:

...will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak (p. 82).

Formation of the Christian social worker's character in the virtue of love, from this perspective, is not separate from developing professional competence but part of it.

Speaking to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity and warning them against being diverted into a radical utopian activism in the name of justice, Benedict sees that, more than anything, these workers (and we could say Christian social workers in any setting) “must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening in them a love of neighbor” (p.85).

The social worker whose character is formed in Christian love has, as a deep part of her character, a radical humility—which is necessary both to the virtue of love and to professional competence.

My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to

others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift (Benedict XVI, 2006, p. 87).

Benedict invokes here the radical humility of Christ on the Cross, which in Christian understanding, redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. In helping we also receive help, Benedict (2006) says—being able to help is no merit or achievement of our own. “This duty is a grace” (p. 88).

Finally, I want to highlight Benedict's emphasis on the importance of prayer “in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work” (p. 90). The significance of prayer does not lie in Christian social workers' hope of changing God's mind about the situations they address in their practice or because prayer is more efficacious than, or a substitute for, advocacy at the legislature. A personal relation with God in a Christian's prayer life sustains love of neighbor and helps keep her from being drawn into ideologies and practices that replace love with hate, whether it is class or religious or ethnic hate. It also, though Benedict does not say this, protects against burnout. Hope involves the virtue of patience and faith leads practitioners to understand charity as participation through divine grace in God's love of the human person. In this way hope and faith, the other “theological virtues,” give rise to and sustain the queen of virtues. All are central to the formation of Christian social workers.

It is a mistake to see social engagement as an alternative or necessarily in opposition to a life committed to prayer, participation in the liturgical life of the Church, and the love of God. As the experience of exemplars of charity like Mother Teresa, Dorothy Day, Father Damien of Molokai, or the religious sisters of South Sudan, indicates, the love and service of God powers and sustains love and service of those most in need of care, “even these least” (Mt. 25:40).

These saintly people committed themselves to the true good of the other as other, without sentimentalizing or romanticizing their work among the most poor and oppressed members of society—Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day both warned their enthusiastic young helpers that, as Day put it, the poor are ungrateful and they smell (Barron, 2002). Their love was unconditional, expecting no return or personal gratification, and concrete in its practical expression. At the same time, they made no separation between their sacramental and spiritual lives on one hand and their practical work among the poor on the other. On the contrary, their spirituality and participation in the liturgical life of the Church powered and sustained their social engagement.

Day's (2011) diary, *The Duty of Delight*, instructive as well as inspiring, is an invaluable text for social workers. The book chronicles and reflects on a life of selfless love and commitment to social justice and is at the same time a great spiritual classic. It offers an incomparable account of

how to integrate deep faith and the Christian virtue of love or charity into day-to-day practice. The diaries show that in the midst of extraordinary challenges of leading and sustaining the Catholic Worker movement, Day herself was sustained by daily worship at Mass, the sacraments, and the Divine Office or liturgy of the hours (the Church's cycle of prayers, psalms, Gospel readings, and meditations for each part of each day).

Day also drew nourishment for her work by reading and following the practice of great spiritual masters. Among these were two Jesuit priests, the order's founder St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) and Jean-Pierre de Cassaude (1675-1751), with his emphasis on the spirituality of the present moment and on equanimity—doing our part and leaving the rest to God (De Cassaude, 2011).

Ignatius offers a kind of spirituality that may be of particular value for social workers. The daily examen prayer is a transforming practice, widely used by spiritual seekers of all kinds, that invites us to review our whole day in terms of our relationship with God from moment to moment. It cultivates a sense of gratitude, which positive psychology is rediscovering as a protection against depression and burnout (Seligman, 2002). Through a five-step process, repeated daily, it helps us to see our day as God sees it, to be aware of the habits and tendencies that contribute to and detract from our love of God and neighbor, to discern God's promptings and our responses to them, and to cultivate the "courage to love" (Gallagher, 2006). As a specific discipline, developed and sustained over half a millennium, the examen is also accessible, being supported by guides online and in books (for example, Gallagher, 2006; 2007; 2009; for a very brief introduction intended for Christian social workers, see Eppele, 2011). There are many spiritual directors and retreats to guide this practice. It is one path to the "formation of the heart" that social work requires and, by grace, develops in its practitioners.

As Day drew consolation, energy, and encouragement from such spiritual sources, modern social workers also draw on Day's own diaries and other writings. Most social workers, of course, practice in agencies very different from the settings in which Day or any of the exemplars exercised the virtue of charity. The context of secularism, bureaucracy, and state funding does not conduce to a practice that is both professional and also rooted in a Christian charity that Tertullian, Bishops Cyprian and Dionysius, St. Damien, or Mother Teresa might recognize. But as the Church reminds us, the call to be saints, to be perfect (Mt 5:48), the call to love God and neighbor, is for all, not only those who are recognized for their heroic virtue or martyrdom. The "beacons of many generations" (Benedict XVI, 2011) discussed here, like exemplars of the other virtues, help us understand what the virtue in question is. They offer inspiration and guidance for growth in the virtue. They challenge Christian social workers to apply the virtue consistently, always informed by the other virtues of justice, prudence, and courage, in their personal and professional lives. ❖

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