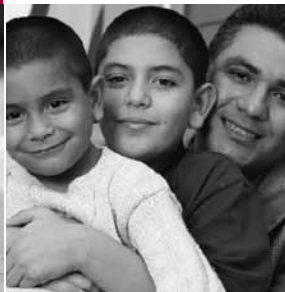


# SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY

JOURNAL OF THE NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION  
OF CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK



## **SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE: VIRTUES AND CHARACTER IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE**

Preparing Christians for Social Work: Forming  
Character and Fostering Virtue

### **ARTICLES**

Introducing a Virtue Perspective for Social Work and Helping

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

Faith as Virtue in Social Work Practice: A Reformed Perspective

Gratitude: Duty, Virtue, and Practice

The Virtue of Generosity

Justice as a Core Virtue for Social Work Practice

Adding Virtue to Faith: Strategies for Developing  
Character in Christian Social Work Students

Recommended Resources: Virtue and Character

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*Social Work & Christianity (SWC)* is a refereed journal published quarterly in March, June, September, and December by the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW) to support and encourage the growth of social workers in the ethical integration of Christian faith and professional practice. SWC welcomes articles, shorter contributions, book reviews, and letters which deal with issues related to the integration of faith and professional social work practice and other professional concerns which have relevance to Christianity.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

NACW is pleased to announce that this issue focusing on “Virtues and Character in Social Work Practice” represents a special double issue of *Social Work & Christianity* (SWC). Approximately double the length of a regular issue of *Social Work & Christianity*, this special issue is being published as SWC Volume 41, Numbers 2 and 3 (counting as both the Summer and Fall issues for this year). The next issue of *Social Work and Christianity* that will be published after this special double issue will be SWC Volume 41, Number 4, published in December, 2014.

### VIRTUES AND CHARACTER IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

# Preparing Christians for Social Work: Forming Character and Fostering Virtue

*Terry A. Wolfer & Cheryl Brandsen*

*A virtue perspective offers a fresh and provocative contribution for the social work profession. In particular, it provides a helpful counterpoint to an emphasis in social work education on competency-based education and practice.*

**I**N THE SUMMER OF 2010, CALVIN COLLEGE, WITH SUPPORT FROM THE North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), hosted a social work seminar for social work educators on character and virtue formation. The participants represented various branches of Christianity—Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Mennonite, and Reformed—to name just a few, as well as both secular and faith-based universities, colleges, and practice settings.

### Framing Questions

The seminar's theme emerged from questions asked by Miroslav Volf (1996) in *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. In this book, Volf explored the question of "what kind of selves we need to be in order to live in harmony with others" (p. 21). Although Volf recognized the importance of "social arrangements" in structuring society, he bracketed such a discussion to focus instead on "fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive" (p. 21).

Volf is not a social worker nor was his book written primarily to social workers, yet his questions about forming particular kinds of selves is certainly pertinent to the social work profession. Social workers do spend much of their time thinking about social arrangements—about the kind of policies and programs that will help people flourish and further justice—and this is critically important work. But it is also important to think about what kind of people social workers need to be, at their core, to work effectively with people often very different from themselves and to effectively shape social arrangements. Further, it is important to think about how best to nurture such professionals, particularly in an era where competency-based social work education may leave a void in terms of professional formation.

Consequently, the summer seminar focused on ideas related to forming the character and virtues of Christians who are social workers. Each participant came to the seminar having read a common set of readings related to understanding the virtue tradition in philosophy and theology, social work's engagement with a virtue framework, and pedagogical practices for virtue formation.

In addition, each participant came to the seminar with a working paper that addressed questions such as these:

- What character traits and virtues ought Christian educators to nurture in social work students and practitioners, to properly prepare them to engage with and serve their clients and communities? What sorts of dispositions, commitments, and practices do educators aim to instill in students and practitioners?
- What resources do Christian educators draw from to shape a vision for the type of social worker they hope to cultivate? What is the role of the church in the character and virtue formation of Christian social workers?
- What educative practices (i.e., pedagogical, curricular, continuing education) best contribute to forming social work students and practitioners with the necessary character traits and virtues?

## **Consultants**

Because we recognized the expertise of the participants was primarily in social work and because any attempts at thinking in cross-disciplinary ways, particularly with respect to intersections with theology and philosophy, moved the participants into less-familiar intellectual territory, we invited two consultants to participate. Dr. Ruth Groenhout, professor of philosophy at Calvin College, helped the group work more deeply with the philosophical resources of a virtue framework in thinking about formation (Groenhout, 1997, 2004). Dr. Mark Thiessen Nation, professor of theology at Eastern Mennonite University, helped the group work with the theological resources of the Christian tradition in terms of virtues and practices (Murphy, Kallenberg, & Nation, 1977/2003). The Philosophical work of Alasdair MacIntyre in reviving the virtue tradition in ethics framed many of the group's discussions (MacIntyre, 2001, 2007; Murphy, Kallenberg, & Nation, 1991/2003) as did the theological work of Stanley Hauerwas on virtue (Hauerwas, Berkman, & Cartwright, 2001; Hauerwas & Wells, 2004; Wells, 1998/2004). Drs. Groenhout and Thiessen Nation effectively helped participants navigate these ideas and appropriate them for social work education.

## **Articles Growing out of the Seminar**

Because each participant came to the seminar with a working paper, the majority of the seminar week was spent reviewing and sharpening each other's work, with an eye toward revision and publication. By the end of the seminar, we agreed that the virtue approach was fresh and provocative and offered a significant contribution to the profession. In particular, as social work moves toward prioritizing competency-based education and practice, little attention has been paid to holistic development of practitioners. A virtue perspective helps fill such a gap. Eventually we came to a common organizational "template" for future revisions, and the articles in this collection reflect this organizational structure.

The first article in this collection, "Introducing a Virtue Perspective for Social Work and Helping," works toward orienting readers to a virtue framework and makes an argument for why such a perspective is useful for social work. It provides a theoretical context for the articles that follow. Subsequent articles discuss individual virtues. The final article, "Adding Virtue to Faith," focuses on some specifically Christian strategies for developing character in Christian social work students.

The virtues discussed in this collection—charity, faith, generosity, gratefulness, and justice—are not the only virtues germane to social work formation and practice. There are many other virtues worth mining for their intellectual and formative capacities. The particular virtues discussed

here are simply ones that reflect the interests of the authors. Further, they also reflect the authors' unique professional and theological identities. We hope that readers will be motivated to think about virtues generative to their own professional and theological development, to explore them, and eventually to write about and share them with the profession.

### Our Thanks

The writers of these papers wish to thank the seminar group for thoughtful and challenging remarks that helped shape and sharpen these articles. As well, we wish to thank Ruth Groenhout and Mark Thiessen Nation for their willingness to work with us, read and respond to our papers, and live with us, if only for a few days, in a social work landscape. The seminar group is also indebted to the *North American Association for Christians in Social Work* and to the *Summer Seminars in Christian Scholarship* program at Calvin College for their financial and in-kind support. We especially thank the Calvin College Social Work Department for underwriting most of the costs through a generous gift donated to the department by the late Dr. Theodore R. and Jeanne Deur. ❖

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**Editor's Note:** 2010 Calvin College Seminar on Virtue and Character Participants: Paul Adams, Cheryl Brandsen, Rebecca Christine Burwell, Rick R. Chamiec-Case, Denis Malachy Costello, Linda Plitt Donaldson, Ruth Groenhout, Mackenzi Anne Huyser, Joseph Kuilema, Marleen Milner, Mark Thiessen Nation, Jill Comerford Schreiber, Samantha Fitzgerald Vo, and Terry A. Wolfer



# Introducing a Virtue Perspective for Social Work and Helping

*Jill C. Schreiber, Ruth E. Groenhout & Cheryl Brandsen*

*Virtue ethics provides a helpful framework for reconciling disparate traditions such as social work and Christianity. This article begins with a summary of traditional ethical theories that are organized around agents, actions, and consequences. Virtue ethics, an agent-centered theory, is then explained more thoroughly using Alasdair MacIntyre's concepts of practice, tradition, narrative, and the good life. The role of virtue ethics in the Christian tradition is explored in the third section. It concludes by considering how a virtue perspective provides resources for addressing issues relevant to religious faith and social work.*

*The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing 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. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.*

*Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients.... Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of*

*organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals' needs and social problems.*

*The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession's history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective: service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence.*

**M**ANY READERS WILL RECOGNIZE THIS AS THE PREAMBLE TO THE *CODE of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers* (NASW, 2008). Along with the *Code's* corresponding principles and ethical standards, it provides a foundation for social work education and social work practice. So central, in fact, are these values and principles to the social work profession that accredited social work programs must ground themselves—their programs and their curricula—in them.

Questions remain, however, about how to develop social workers who, at their very center, claim the profession's values, principles, and ethical principles as integral to their identity. That is, how are practitioners formed who *love* justice, who *care deeply* about people and their flourishing, who *settle for nothing less* than doing their work competently, and whose *core posture* toward their work is one of doing it with integrity? Stated a bit differently, what character traits, or dispositions, or virtues ought to be nurtured in social work students and practitioners such that they can properly engage with and serve their clients and communities? Miroslav Volf (1996), to an audience larger than social workers, asks the question this way: How do we go about “fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive?” (p. 21). These are the questions that shape this exploration of virtue and character in social work.

In recent years the notion of the virtues has offered help in thinking about connections between social work formation and practice. A virtue perspective offers a richer account of human life and well-being than some other ethical theories. It also seems to have more room for traditional religious beliefs, which is something that is evident in other articles in this collection. Virtue theory focuses on the question of what sort of person one ought to be, and for our purposes, what sort of person a social worker should be. Because of this focus, a virtue perspective puts squarely in the foreground questions about identity, about how things such as religious faith structure ethical interactions between people, and about whether social workers in a variety of specializations may need to become reflective about questions of character in addition to questions about basic rules of conduct. And because a virtue perspective raises a different set of ethical questions than those traditionally dealt with by principle-based or conse-

quentialist ethics, virtue is an important additional account of ethics for the social work practitioner.

Because many social workers might be unfamiliar with a virtue perspective, this introduction provides an essential starting point. We begin with a summary of ethical theories in general, something most social workers are familiar with, using a relatively standard distinction between agents, acts, and consequences. Virtue ethics is an agent-centered theory, and requires a more detailed account of the agent's context than do either act or consequence-based theory.

Because this account of virtue theory is derived from Alistair MacIntyre's account of the virtues, we turn next to MacIntyre, focusing specifically on the four concepts of practice, tradition, narrative, and the good life. Beginning with a few theoretical descriptions and categorizations provides a structure for the discussions that follow, as well as a shared language and a clearer understanding of the theoretical concepts that we rely on in interpreting various actions, principles, and policies.

All four of MacIntyre's concepts are complicated by the fact that we live in a pluralistic world, with widespread disagreement about what practices ought to look like, which traditions are good ones, and how human lives should be structured. These are clearly large questions about how we envision common decisions under conditions of wide disagreement. The third focus in this article will consider a very small slice of these large questions by focusing on the Christian tradition and the virtues.

We conclude by considering how a virtue perspective offers resources for addressing issues relevant to religious faith and social work, including how virtue ethics can provide tools to reconcile conflicts when these two traditions diverge.

### **A Brief Introduction to the Three Branches of Contemporary Ethical Theory: Agents, Actions, and Consequences**

Although this collection is not primarily about resolving ethical dilemmas using virtue ethics, a brief look at a general map of contemporary ethical theory is useful to understanding what is unique about a virtue perspective. Looking at ethical theory first also provides a way into a virtue perspective by beginning with something generally familiar to most practitioners, i.e., principled and consequentialist ethical theories. Be patient, as this discussion might seem to be disconnected from the main questions of professional formation. Be patient also as the connection to professional ethics using a virtue approach is not as direct as connections to professional ethics using principled and consequentialist approaches. The latter two perspectives attempt to spell out guidelines for decision making explicitly, while virtue ethics focuses more on the qualities of the decision maker, an approach that is less direct and immediate when making difficult decisions.

Ethics deals with questions of right and wrong, with what should be done and what should not be done. In order to address questions of this sort, all ethical theories must address the three essential components of any ethical analysis: Agents, Actions, and Consequences. Agents, those who act in ethical (or unethical ways) are obviously central to any understanding of ethics. Actions, what agents do, are likewise central. Consequences, the results of those actions must be addressed as well. Contemporary ethics tends to divide into three camps based largely on which of these three the theory makes basic to its analysis. And it is worth noting that no theory can completely neglect any of the three—the question is not which are included, but which one is the primary unit of analysis, and which are considered secondary. For the most part, theories that focus on agents are virtue theories, theories that focus on acts are principle-based, and theories that focus on consequences are utilitarian or consequentialist.

### **Consequentialist Ethical Theories**

Starting with the last component, then, we find that utilitarian and consequentialist ethical theories make the consequences of things like actions, rules, and social structures the fundamental unit of analysis; those that produce (on balance) good consequences are good; those that produce bad consequences are bad, and so on (Dolgoff, Harrington & Loewenberg, 2011; Reamer, 2013). For example, a consequentialist would argue that whether or not faith-based concepts such as sin should have a place in a counseling relationship depends on whether client outcomes are improved by using such language. Likewise questions about the relationship between religious faith and social work practice would be resolved largely by analysis of the results of various types of religious faith and particular practices. Consequentialist reasoning usually finds itself offering some version of a cost/benefit analysis to determine right and wrong.

Many people find this emphasis on results to be too limited, however. The consequentialist theory has no intrinsic way to evaluate what a “good” or “bad” consequence is. Questions of the relationship between religious faith and social work practice, they might argue, should not just be resolved by looking at costs and benefits. We need to be concerned about issues such as the basic autonomy of clients, or the professional’s duty to respect professional boundaries. When we focus on these types of issues—autonomy, respect for professional boundaries, the rights of individuals, and the like—we are less likely to use consequentialist reasoning, and more likely to be using principle-based reasoning.

### **Principle-Based Ethical Theories**

Principle-based ethical theories, which are sometimes called deontological or duty-based, focus on the nature of the action itself: what is it that someone is doing when they act in certain ways? From this analysis of action, these theorists derive principles of right or wrong action (Dolgoff, Harrington & Loewenberg, 2011; Reamer, 2013). Kantian thought, for example, whatever makes rational coherence the standard that actions must meet—when one makes an exception in one's own case to rules that one rationally expects others to obey, one is acting immorally. Traditional Natural Law thinking, on the other hand, holds that there are standards built into nature itself, and actions that contravene those standards are inherently wrong. When people argue that no matter what the consequences might be, certain types of actions or social structures are just wrong in themselves (e.g., using a professional client relationship to proselytize), they are usually operating from within a deontological framework.

Both the consequences of an action and the nature of an action itself are important ethical considerations. But if we restrict our focus to just these two issues, we may still be missing a vital part of ethical thought. It isn't enough, some might think, to respect the limits of a professional relationship; social workers also need to be the sorts of people who don't just respect boundaries because of professional codes. Social workers need to be the sorts of persons who are able to have deep compassion for their clients and are highly motivated to help clients' meet valued outcomes. Further, a large portion of what social workers do in their work involves helping clients figure out what sorts of people they should become in order to live good lives, and in order to have healthy relationships with those around them.

### **Virtue-Based Ethical Theories**

Virtue ethics, our third type of theory, expresses these sorts of concerns. It focuses on the agent, on what kind of person he or she is, or should become. In virtue theory, actions and outcomes are interpreted in light of the character of the agent (Kallenberg, 1997; MacIntyre, 1984). The evaluation of character and an account of actions derived from character traits that are conducive to being a good social worker or to living an emotionally and socially healthy life forms the centerpiece of a virtue ethics approach.

Further, since character traits are the sorts of things that are developed by socially-constituted beings in the context of complex social structures, virtue ethics usually involves some analysis of the social structures and practices that develop and deepen (or prevent/diminish) certain types of character traits (MacIntyre, 1984). Contemporary cultural critics, for

example, who argue that excessive violence on TV shows produces people who are desensitized by or prone to violence themselves, are offering a version of a virtue ethics argument. Debates over the structure of delivery of care in social work likewise often center on issues of how social structures develop character. Do certain types of care foster dependency? Do other types of structures encourage the development of self-awareness and resilience? These considerations reflect virtue concerns.

Although all three of the ethical theories described above have been applied to social work, most social workers use either principle-based or consequence-based ethics (Osmo & Landau, 2006). These ethics fit well with the need for efficiency, avoidance of error, and risk management by describing social work in terms of procedures and outcomes (McBeath & Webb, 2002). However, virtue ethics is also a good fit for social work (Adams, 2009; Clark, 2006; Houston, 2003; McBeath & Webb, 2002; Osmo & Landau, 2006; Pullen-Sansfacon, 2010). Virtue ethics allows for the flexibility needed to make decisions in complex human interactions. It also fits social work because it looks at the trajectory of life and the critical impact of both contexts in which people live their lives and meanings that persons attach to their lives. Both context and meaning are significantly shaped by cultures and communities and require a theory that goes beyond a narrow focus on individual actions and behaviors.

Virtue ethics offers a rich conceptual understanding of competent and ethical social work practice. Virtue ethics also suggests that there is much more to professional practice than merely acquiring a critical mass of relevant knowledge, skills, and values and complying with a rigid set of rules or codes of conduct. From a virtue perspective it is clear that social workers need to have some sense of who they are as persons, and of how their choices and actions structure the nature of their whole lives. Virtue ethics does more than set “best practice” guidelines in order to limit risk or the damage of ethically-challenged social workers. McBeath and Webb (2002) put it this way: “Doing the right thing in social work is not a matter of applying a moral rule, it is not the work-as-activity that is morally right, but rather the worker-as agent expressed in the range of and subtlety of use, of the virtues” (p. 1026). Paying attention to virtue has the potential to enrich and deepen social work practice.

Like all ethical theories, any adequate virtue theory will, of course, need to account for the ethical nature of particular types of actions. This is usually done in terms of how performing, or failing to perform those actions, shapes character (e.g., telling many lies leads to becoming a fundamentally dishonest person). Virtue theory will also need to account for the place of consequences in an ethical theory.

Virtue ethicists traditionally address these issues of action and consequences, in part, through the concept of practical wisdom. It is important to

note that what virtue theorists call practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, is not the same thing as what is termed 'practice wisdom' in social work, though there are aspects of overlap. Practical wisdom is a general philosophical term for the virtue of seeing how to act well and wisely in complex and contingent circumstances; practice wisdom is the term generally used for the more specific attribute of seeing how best to practice social work (Powell, 2008).

Practical wisdom is a specific virtue (or character trait) that we see in some people who have the sort of wisdom necessary to make good choices in matters of concrete practice, to integrate the other virtues into a coherent whole, and generally exhibit good judgment in complex, under-determined circumstances (Zagzebski, 1996). This virtue is clearly lacking in someone who consistently makes bad decisions, regardless of how much we might assess that person as well-intentioned, and even virtuous in other ways (e.g., courageous or generous).

Experienced social workers know that some practitioners seem to have an innate sense of how to get things done well, while others, no matter how hard they try, rarely seem to have much success. The difference between the two isn't generally one of theoretical knowledge—both might have gone through very similar graduate programs, and have had similar practices. The difference has to do with a grasp of the subtleties of functioning in practical contexts. That is what is meant by practical wisdom.

Without practical wisdom, one cannot be fully virtuous, because ethics is not just about motives, as important as they are, nor just about theoretical concerns. Being a virtuous person requires the ability to live well, and help others live well, and this is a practical matter that must be evaluated in the context of everyday life. Practical wisdom is judged by seeing the outcomes of actions and decisions (that is, the consequences of actions) and evaluating whether or not an individual actually knows how to accomplish what a good moral agent ought to accomplish. It reflects an agent's motives, and it demonstrates that they have the sort of hands-on understanding that is required for good practice, not just an intellectual grasp of a subject matter.

The structure of action, agent, and consequences serves us well for seeing the differences among the various dominant ethical theories, but we will now leave it behind and focus more broadly on a virtue framework and its account of human life and morality. One of the most significant accounts of virtue theory in the contemporary world is offered by the philosopher Alastair MacIntyre (2007); the next section offers a brief introduction to his theoretical account and descriptions of the key concepts. His development of virtue ethics relies on four key concepts: *practices, traditions and narratives*, and the *good life*. By developing these concepts he provides an account of the virtues.

### Contemporary Virtue Ethics: Alasdair MacIntyre

In *After Virtue*, a book that has played a key role in the revival of the virtue ethics tradition in recent decades, MacIntyre offers an account of how to describe and analyze the virtues. It is an account of the virtues that works with a series of nested concepts—virtues are defined in terms of practices, practices are defined in terms of traditions and narratives, and traditions and narratives are constructed within the context of the concept of a good human life. We'll follow that structure in our discussion.

#### Virtue

MacIntyre begins with Aristotle's notion of a virtue. A virtue is a character trait that is desirable to have. (Undesirable character traits are vices, and most virtue and vices come in sets of three, with a given virtue, say, courage, juxtaposed between two vices, rashness and cowardice.) Just which character traits are considered desirable, however, has changed over time and through different historical periods. There is no single list of 'the virtues' that all humans seem to think are good and worth developing. During Ancient Greek times, for example, humility was considered a vice, while during the Christian era it became a virtue (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 165).

There are, then, competing lists of the virtues, both across time and across cultures. For MacIntyre, this is problematic, although contemporary social work tends to see pluralistic lists of virtues as generally a positive feature (Banks & Gallagher, 2009; Clark, 2006; Houston, 2003; McBeath & Webb, 2002). Houston (2003) suggests that the path to discerning virtues comes from dialogical exchanges between committed inquirers. Conversation partners include, but are not limited to, current scholars, historical traditions of communities, and people with diverse perspectives from within the current community. When we discuss which character traits comprise the virtues that social workers should embody and advocate, then, there are a number of voices that should join the conversation including practitioners, teachers, clients, and others affected by whatever decisions will be made. The articles in this collection explore virtues that some Christian social workers identify as important to their work. This list is not intended to be exhaustive for or exclusive to Christian social workers.

For our purposes at this point, we simply note that character traits (both virtues and vices) shape actions, making virtues of central relevance for social work analysis. Of course, the opposite is also true—our actions contribute to forming our character—because there is a circular cause and effect mechanism between character and action. Because of this relationship between character and action, virtues cannot be acquired without practicing particular actions over and over again. For example, if honesty

is a virtue, a person develops that virtue by consistently speaking and behaving in honest ways. We practice virtue like we practice piano. One does not become virtuous simply by an act of will; virtues are only acquired through extended practice.

The term 'practice,' however, has two different meanings in the context of virtue ethics. So far we have been using it in its everyday sense, to mean the simple repetition of an action. In virtue ethics, however, the term practice has a more technical meaning, used to describe particular culturally constructed systems of activity that have a history and a set of conventions for how they are conducted.

### **Practice**

MacIntyre notes that we develop character traits (whether virtues or vices) in the context of practices defined in this more technical sense. His definition of practice has been very influential in social work theory as well as in other philosophical contexts because it captures so much of what makes something an important force for shaping character. The definition runs as follows:

[A practice is] any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence, which are appropriate to and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 187)

When we speak of practices in the rest of this essay, then, what we will be discussing is this more specific definition of a practice. Because this definition is dense with meaning, let's consider some of its key phrases.

Social work includes a number of different practices in MacIntyre's sense. One could debate whether it is better to analyze social work itself as a single practice, rather than the fields of specialization within social work as specific practices. Because the various specializations aim at quite different outcomes, however, it seems more in keeping with MacIntyre's analysis to see social work overall as a broad tradition (as discussed in the next section) and the various specific parts of social work as the practices that fit within that overarching tradition. If we look at the various sorts of social work specializations, such as direct practice with individual and families, or community development, or clinical work in a hospital setting, in each case we can see the ways that the specific field fits MacIntyre's definition of a practice.

1. Each of these specific types of specialization is *coherent and complex*. One cannot simply practice social work in the abstract. The complexities of the field are such that an experienced practitioner needs to have been trained to work in the area and needs to know the particular body of knowledge and set of skills the work requires. Individual counseling, for example, involves a complex set of concerns about interacting with clients over time and providing assistance without generating dependency. As each client brings a different set of issues, and lives within a different set of social circumstances, the complexity a social worker needs to deal with is enormous. But this complexity is balanced by an internal coherence of basic, agreed-upon values, goals, and strategies that endure over time. Counseling is a coherent activity because it aims at the development of life skills and improved capacity for flourishing in clients, giving that particular social work practice ongoing coherence and continuity.
2. Each area represents a *form of socially established co-operative human activity*. Effective social work practice is never conducted in isolation. Working in community development, for example, requires the active participation of and cooperation of other social work colleagues in the same field; human networks outside of social work that provide support, resources, and connections; and the social work profession at large that establishes ethics, regulatory bodies, human services organizations, etc. All of these various social structures function cooperatively to shape the way that community development works. Because of this, community development functions differently than other social work practices which are, in turn, shaped by a different set of socially established cooperative structures (e.g., the structure of contemporary health care delivery, in the case of social workers doing clinical work in a hospital setting.)
3. Each of these individual practices *has goods internal to the practice*. Like any practice, all of these various fields of social work will involve a mixture of internal and external goods or rewards. The external rewards such as money, stable employment, and health insurance are shared with almost all employment. Goods internal to social work might include such things as the internal satisfaction and fulfillment that comes from contributing to client or community flourishing, improved client functioning, or achievement of social justice in some area. These are the kinds of internal goods that make social work meaningful and worthwhile.

Acquiring social work knowledge and skills depends to a large extent on the teaching and development/refinement of techniques

of social workers who came before us. This is why any practitioner, in addition to specializing, needs to learn how to perform his or her job in the field, with experienced practitioners. In the course of learning the job, one also learns what values structure the practice. To pick one example, a clinical social worker in a hospital setting will probably not find that developing long-term relationships with clients is a particularly central goal (or internal good) for his practice. A community organizer, on the other hand, is likely to find long-term relationships absolutely central for her work, and perhaps one of the most rewarding parts of her job. Conversely, a clinical social worker in a hospital setting may learn the satisfaction of working intimately with people in situations involving intense suffering, pain and sometimes death. But the community organizer will seldom experience this level of intense relationship.

4. The internal goods of these various practices, in turn, generate *standards of excellence, which are appropriate to and partially definitive of, that form of activity*. Standards of excellence for social work practices are determined and endorsed by the social work profession precisely because it is practitioners who know what counts as good practice. What counts as good community organizing, for instance, is determined largely by how community organization has been conducted in the past, and by the internal standards of excellence that have developed over the years as practitioners have discovered what works, what doesn't, and the best ways of doing things. For many practices, when outsiders ask why things are done this way (rather than another way), the quickest answer is because that's what works best. What works best can only be discovered by actually engaging in the practice, guided by education and practice standards that have emerged over time and informed by research.
5. Finally, each of the specializations we have considered offer examples of practices in which *human conceptions of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended*. In each, as social work's understanding of effective practice grows, new approaches and strategies are developed. Individual counseling today is different in many respects from individual counseling thirty years ago because as practitioners have worked in the field, they have come to see that the picture of counseling, including its goals and purposes, that the original practitioners worked with needed modifying. For example, social work has a long history of focusing on problems and pathology. This way of working was premised on certain un-

derstandings of clients being in need of “fixing.” More recently, social work has developed and implemented robust models for working with clients from a strengths perspective. This is informed by a strong belief in client resiliency. Experienced practitioners are able to work within both frameworks and find the right balance of how best to understand human beings. Our knowledge of what good counseling looks like has been systematically extended by the work of practitioners in this field, actively engaging in practice, and also asking reflective questions about the desired outcomes of practice.

Practices, then, are historically and socially situated systems of human activity that aim at, and develop, particular goals and ends. When people engage in those practices, their character is shaped in particular ways, and they develop character traits (virtues) that in turn allow them to engage in those practices well; not only to function as a medical social worker or community organizer, but to be a really effective in this work. And the particular traits that each practice will inculcate in its practitioners will differ, depending on the practice. A community organizer, for example, may need to develop character traits of aggressiveness and confrontation that would be much less helpful in a counselor; a social worker in a health care setting will need skills of translating between technical medical jargon and everyday languages. Engaging over long periods of time in the particular practice shapes who one then becomes so that an effective practitioner will exhibit the virtues appropriate to that identity.

By defining the virtues as he does, MacIntyre grounds them concretely, so that they can be identified in a relatively objective way. At the same time, because they are always relative to particular practices, virtues can be historically and socially variable, and we can understand how one trait can be a virtue in one context and a vice in another (e.g., there would be virtues of a community organizer that would not be the virtues of a therapist). The combination of objectivity and situational relativity is a very powerful one.

Situating the virtues contextually in this way, however, sets up a potential problem for MacIntyre: if two or more practices dictate competing virtues, how can people choose among them in non-arbitrary ways? MacIntyre’s solution to this is to add another layer to his analysis. Practices are not free-standing, he notes, but take their places in the context of a broader tradition that sets the context within which the practice makes sense. These traditions are embodied primarily in narrative structures, which are themselves embedded in a general sense of what a good human life must involve, but we will begin with the notion of tradition itself.

## **Tradition**

Practices are developed in the context of broader traditions that shape our understanding of ourselves and our lives. Higher education, for example, is a tradition that has developed over centuries in order to provide a particular sort of intellectual and personal development. Obviously people could be (and have been) educated in other ways in other cultures and historical periods, but the world most of us live in is a world where education is provided at an advanced level by a particular set of practices structured by the tradition of Western higher education. Arguments that fill the news about the place of distance learning are arguments about whether one aspect of that tradition needs to change. The general profession of social work, as a category within which the various practices we have been discussing so far fit and find their meaning, is likewise a tradition.

Traditions structure the patterns of our thought in ways that shape us profoundly without our always being aware of it at any conscious level. Many social workers assume that social work just is part of how the world is—it is one among many types of structures in our world (education, social work, medicine, business), and is assumed to need no explanation or justification. But social work has changed profoundly over time and differs profoundly across nations at the present time. MacIntyre emphasizes that a tradition is generally neither stable nor conservative. Instead, he notes, “Its common life will be . . . constituted by a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be or what good farming is or what good medicine is. Traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 222). Further, he notes, without conflict, a tradition is dying or already dead. If practitioners are working within a living tradition they will need to keep arguing about what their goals are, how they fit with the tradition’s overarching purposes, and whether those purposes need to be redefined or adjusted. “A living tradition then is a historically extended, socially embodied argument, an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 222).

We see this in the case of social work, which has a lengthy tradition of development, through which various individual practices have arisen. Think, for example, about the recent emergence of an emphasis on global social work, a field of practice not in the profession’s imagination in its early years. Further, part of learning what social work is involves learning how social workers have disagreed about what social work should look like. Think for example about the perennial question of how best to care for the poor. Poor laws and poor farms, the Charity Organization Societies, and Settlement Houses stand as exemplars of the profession’s grappling with the goals and purposes of social work related to individual change versus social reform. The on-going debate about the goals and purposes of social

work has shaped the contemporary nature of social work and social work education in profound ways; the future of social work, likewise, will be shaped by the questions and debates of the contemporary field.

Social work is itself a tradition, but it is certainly not the only tradition of which practitioners find themselves members. Social workers come from a wide variety of traditions, both religious (Jewish, Christian, Buddhist) and non-religious (they might belong to a variety of ethnic or cultural groups, and so on). Although some of these traditions share similar practices and even similar virtues with social work, these practices and virtues may be undergirded differently by these different traditions. For example, because both social work and the Christian tradition are independent (though connected) institutions, individuals who are members of both traditions will sometimes find that the virtues, practices, and attitudes standard in one context come into conflict with the other. Or it may be that basic assumptions about how to reason or what counts as a valid source of data or truth in one context will conflict with the other. All of these tensions generate challenges for the Christian social worker, as they do for social workers from other faith or cultural traditions.

How to address the challenges of simultaneous membership in diverse traditions will be addressed later. But before leaving the topic of tradition, one more issue needs to be addressed—the issue of how traditions function in our lives. For MacIntyre, traditions are carried along in human history largely through the medium of narrative, or story. Think, for example, of the Christian tradition. Although it is often codified into doctrine, the Bible is largely a repository of stories, and it is those stories, particularly the stories of Jesus's life and ministry, that have shaped the Christian tradition over the past centuries.

### **Narrative**

Social work, like other traditions, is shaped by narratives, or stories, and it functions by offering (or sometimes criticizing) the narratives of its own and other traditions. Standard histories of social work, such as John Ehrenreich's *Altruistic Imagination* (1985), Specht and Courtney's *Unfaithful Angels* (1995), or Reisch and Andrews's *The Road Not Taken* (2002) provide a narrative structure that explains where social work practices began, how they developed, and what they have become today. Likewise the practices that embody the tradition of social work are passed on, in part, by case studies—stories that illustrate really good social work practices or, perhaps, stories that offer dreadful examples of social work practice gone horribly wrong, usually delivered with the implicit message that the hearer must **never** do likewise. Stories of this sort shape our understanding of our actions, and the meaning of those actions in the broader context of the various traditions of which we are a part. They shape us by providing a

context within which we understand what has happened to us and what this means for our lives.

When we think about our lives, we think about them in the terms of narratives or stories that are the collective property of our cultural milieu. Some of these are simplistic, and perhaps not well-suited to shaping our lives (Disney Princess, anyone?) while others seem to capture deep truths about how we understand our lives and identities. And which narrative structures we use to understand ourselves—whether the lone cowboy riding into town to do justice, or the Norman Rockwell socially-enmeshed citizen—will in turn structure which practices we see as good, which as neutral, which as harmful. If I ‘tell my story’ in terms of the standard Western, for example, I will think of as problematic practices that require emotional closeness and intimacy, while if I think of myself as a Disney princess, emotional closeness may be all I desire.

Every culture and historical setting has a number of narrative structures that are taken for granted in people’s thinking. Many of these stories come to us from religious traditions, whether Christian, Jewish, Islamic, or Hindu. Others come from common cultural heritage; Americans could interpret events in terms of the Br’er Rabbit stories, for example, or tall tales like Paul Bunyan and John Henry. More commonly in the contemporary world we can recognize the narratives found in popular television shows and movies as providing the stories that make sense of our lives; the Twilight series, for example, has generated quite a bit of controversy over just what ‘story’ it offers young women developing their sexual identity.

The narrative structures that shape our lives usually function at a level well below consciousness. Unless we are asked specifically to explain actions or choices, in fact, we often don’t recognize that what we are doing, and who we are becoming, is shaped by particular narrative structures. In one way or another, all stories portray certain lives as ones that are good lives for people to live, while other lives are bad ones. They have built-in value-systems that allow people to make judgments about how to live, what matters in life, and who they should love or hate. They offer a picture of what MacIntyre calls the good life for a human.

### **Good Life**

The traditions and the narratives embedded in various traditions make sense only with some sense of what the goal of life is, or what constitutes a *good life*. We generally don’t have a single simple picture of what a good life would involve, but all traditions have some general picture of what elements are essential for any life to be called a good one. Belonging to that tradition generally involves also adopting some (or all) of that picture of the good life as part of the story of one’s own life. So, for example, a central part of the Christian narrative is the idea that humans are created by God to live in

harmonious relationship with God and with each other. Human lives that lack this central feature of a good life lack an essential element of what all humans need to truly flourish. The social work tradition shares with Christianity the notion that humans are essentially relational beings, but social work does not require the particular relationship with God that Christianity does.

Given this complex structure, it is possible to see how MacIntyre thinks all of these various pieces fit together. A (somewhat vague) picture of the central parts of the good life is embodied in a tradition in the form of various stories and narratives. The tradition is built out of a whole range of concrete practices, and the virtues are the character traits that allow people to function well as people who are shaped by, and pursuing, that particular vision of the good life. Social work, for example, considers the creation of a healthy, functioning community to be an essential part of any good human life. The practices of social work are designed to generate specific types of good things that are essential pieces of that healthy community, and the character of social workers is then, in turn, shaped by those practices.

MacIntyre's concept of the good life is probably the most controversial part of his account of virtue ethics for a social work context. While each of us may be comfortable with the notion that we became the professionals we are in part because of a particular picture of the good life, the idea that there is a single, over-arching account of *the* good life contained within the social work tradition is enormously controversial, and would be rejected by many leading scholars.

To pick but one example, Clark (2006) claims that social workers should do no more than set standards for the *adequate* life that represent a "thin account of human well-being" (p. 76). He does not think that "it is the role of the organs of the state to shape the broad aspirations to ways of life; [instead] the job of social services is limited to preventing gross impoverishment, infringements of basic human rights and the flouting of fairly minimal standards of decency and public order" (Clark, 2006, p. 75). This is a standard picture of how social work should function. For example, many social workers would argue that it would be inappropriate for a child welfare worker to hold a specific standard of a good life when working with a dysfunctional family. Her or his job should be limited to determining minimum standards of parenting that must be met to avoid the removal of a child from the family. Social workers with this view can legitimately set standards for an adequate, or a minimally decent life, but would over-step their authority if they tried to tell clients what a good life consists of. Clients themselves often have actual and specific values for the good life that need to be respected, and protecting their individual right to self-determination is incompatible with any single account of the good life.

At the same time that social workers are expected to respect client self-determination, however, they are also mandated "to promote human

and community well-being” (Council on Social Work Education, 2008). This central tenet of social work suggests that there are standards for the good life implicit in the tradition of social work. One of the things that make social work a complicated practice, however, is the fact that part of what social work means by human well-being is precisely the ability of individuals to be self-determining and to function autonomously, a conception which interestingly enough reflects a Western liberal democratic tradition not shared around the world. Human well-being cannot be imposed in a top-down manner if it inherently involves self-determination. But when we examine the various barriers to self-determination that social work regularly combats, it is clear that even self-determination is defined within the context of a general account of the good life for humans. Substance abuse, for example, is generally considered to be a barrier to self-determination, not an expression of self-determination.

So while Clark is correct in noting that social workers probably function best when they operate within ‘thin’ conceptions of what the lower limits of acceptable life choices are, this is not because that is all that social workers hope for their clients to achieve. It is simply that achieving a higher standard of a truly good life is something the individual must do for him- or herself past a certain point, and others can only provide the context within which such a life is possible. But that hardly entails that social work has nothing more than a thin picture of the good for human lives; social workers may have a very robust picture of the good human life, including healthy interpersonal relationships, fulfilling work, and a safe, thriving communities. This is consistent with MacIntyre’s belief that conceptions of the good life come from communities, traditions, and culture rather than from some universal understanding of what is good.

### **Fitting the Pieces Together**

In summary, then, MacIntyre (1984, 2007) claims that the virtues are character traits that are essential for engaging in practices. Practices only make sense within the context of particular traditions and the stories embedded in those traditions. Finally, traditions are held together by a picture of what the good human life must look like. Aggressiveness and a willingness to engage in physical combat are not virtues in most contexts, for example, but if one is engaged in the practice of high school football in the U.S., running as fast as you can into somebody, head first, makes sense. And high school football is embedded in the tradition of smaller towns in the U.S. telling their stories of traditional identity in part by recounting the wins and losses of the local team. The good life assumed in these stories is one that bears a striking resemblance to warrior myths in other cultures and times.

This, then, is the basic structure of virtue ethics: we identify virtues by their location in specific practices. Practices are evaluated by their relevance to the story of a life, and a life is evaluated in terms of how it fits into particular cultural and traditional narrative structures. These structures themselves contain, implicitly or explicitly, embedded assumptions about what the true good for humans is. We can identify these assumptions, and we can compare them across cultural or historical differences, but we cannot make absolute claims about which is the best account of the good for humans by purely theoretical means. MacIntyre (1984, 2007) thinks the only test of the truth of a story's claims about the good life for humans is to see how that story plays out over centuries in the lives of whole cultural groups. Over time a story's capacity to accommodate changing historical circumstances, its capacity to structure human lives in ways that make them rich and flourishing, and its ability to continue to be relevant to new generations all reflect on its adequacy as an account of the good life.

With this in mind, what does virtue ethics have to say about professional helping in a pluralistic society, structured by a wide diversity of traditions and practices? For example, the narratives of particular religious communities and the narratives of secular society might not always coincide, generating conflicts for social workers with regard to the social work practice, virtues, and visions of the good life that flow out of these different narratives.

In order to consider these issues, one religious tradition, Christianity, will be considered alongside of social work as an example of how a person of faith could integrate multiple traditions. In order to do this, we will first provide a brief summary of the role of virtue ethics in the Christian tradition.

### **Virtue Ethics in the Christian Tradition**

Virtue ethics offers Christian theorists ways of thinking about how lives are formed (or ought to be formed) within the context of a religious tradition and in the light of the stories of Scripture. The emphasis on analyzing and developing character traits fits well with the Christian recognition that we are called to become certain types of people. In this section, we discuss the thought of one particularly influential Christian thinker, Stanley Hauerwas, a theologian whose work reflects almost every feature of MacIntyre's theoretical structure (Berkman & Cartwright, 2001).

Hauerwas speaks from within and primarily to other members of the Christian community—he can thus assume that what structures and gives meaning to their lives and thoughts are the stories of Scripture as handed down through the years in the community of the church. His work is thus framed by the Christian *tradition*, and more specifically by the way that tradition is embodied in the practices of the church community. Hauerwas

tends to use the language of community more than the language of tradition; for our purposes we will treat the two terms as largely the same (Berkman & Cartwright, 2001).

The Christian community has developed *practices* over the centuries that embody that tradition in specific actions. The practices of reading scripture, communal worship, and prayer, for example, are found in almost all Christian communities. It is easy to take these for granted, but these practices have been central for shaping the lives of believers over the years precisely because, as MacIntyre has argued, specific Christian practices can inculcate virtues that are essential for living the Christian life well.

Many contemporary theorists, for example, note the ways that liturgy—the regular practice of a form of worship—can provide structure for our actions in ways that are rarely conscious (Smith, 2009). Think of the most basic components of sacramental worship, for example. Communion and baptism both turn ordinary acts (eating, washing) into sacred ones and locate both in the context of a church community. While it is certainly possible to take communion weekly without feeling any connection to the choices we make about hospitality and sharing food with others, the ritual enactment of a communal meal has the potential to make eating both sacred and communal in our everyday lives as well. From that perspective, it is easy to see generosity and hospitality as virtues we need to develop and express.

Additionally, all Christian communities are defined in one way or another by their connection to the stories of scripture, and their location within specific parts of that *narrative*. But these stories are not static: as people live out traditions, their own lives and responses to that tradition can act to modify it and bring new possibilities to light. In the context of American slavery, for example, African American appropriation of the Exodus narrative changed the way many Christians understand what it means to live as a member of the Body of Christ. Rather than emphasizing character traits of obedience and submission, this living out of a central Christian narrative emphasizes the struggle for liberation and justice for the oppressed, and courage in standing up to the powerful. In the context of this story, read and appropriated by this community, submission to earthly rulers is not automatically seen as a virtue.

The ultimate end of the Christian stories is eschatological in nature—they all look forward to a time when all things will be made right. (Think how different this is from Greek tragedies where characters live out the dreadful consequences of the gods' whims.) But they are also stories that offer a clear-eyed perspective on the ways that the world we currently inhabit is not perfect, but rather wracked with sin and suffering. The church community tries to live out the story of scripture in ways that are both faithful and innovative, and in so doing it develops particular practices that are central to that story.

### **Integrating Disparate Traditions: Living the Tensions**

There are two categories of questions that can arise concerning tensions between traditions. One involves the tensions felt when one's own tradition is in conflict with that of someone else. For instance, social workers do not always see eye-to-eye on difficult issues such as gay marriage or abortion. Sometimes social workers and their clients do not see eye-to-eye on difficult questions. Such differences might spring from being grounded in a religious tradition versus grounded in a secular tradition, or it might spring from two different religious traditions, recognizing that religious traditions are not homogenous. The second category of conflict is not external, between people who hold different pictures of the good life, but internal, between the complex traditions to which one individual belongs. Social workers, for instance, who belong to religious traditions sometimes find their values challenged by a secular tradition of professional helping. Wanting to honor both, they are not entirely sure how to negotiate the conflict. A virtue perspective, with its commitment to and cultivation of certain virtues, helps prepare social workers for dealing with both internal and external conflicts.

MacIntyre (1984, 2007) suggests that when traditions come into conflict, it is not possible to resort to reason to decide which is right precisely because the conflicting traditions may hold to conflicting standards of rationality, as described previously. My own tradition is largely rational by its own standards, yours is rational by its standards, and there is no position of absolute neutrality from which we can make a non-biased judgment between the two. This dilemma, however, does not require us to give up dialogue across boundaries; in dialogue we may find that your tradition has productive ways to deal with difficulties that seem unresolvable within my own tradition. Over time, as MacIntyre sees it, one or another tradition may show itself more adept at resolving intellectual difficulties and tensions, not only within its own boundaries, but for its rival theories as well (MacIntyre, 1990). In such cases we often see the tradition with greater interpretive power gradually win out over its rival, not by showing it to be false, but simply by doing what traditions do, but doing it better than its rival.

How individuals deal with internal tensions between competing traditions that shape their individual identity is a different question. There is nothing new in the recognition that each of us lives out an identity that is not a monolithic whole, but rather a mosaic pieced together out of a number of identities that fit together more or less well, and that can generate difficult conflicts. Social work has become a secular tradition, though often practiced by people of faith. Further, the employment contexts within which social workers function can generate very different types of conflicts. For example, Christians working in faith-based settings and Christians working in secular settings have different opportunities for and limits to integrating their faith and work explicitly.

However, a virtue perspective itself can offer resources for conflict mediation. Both social work and virtue ethics share a common goal of articulating and working toward a good life. Even though those visions might compete, each would likely agree that certain behaviors (such as abuse or coercion) and conditions (addiction or poverty) are not compatible with living a flourishing life. In this case virtue ethics provides a shared language for finding what John Rawls calls an overlapping consensus (Rawls, 1999). Likewise the recognition that the development of certain character traits is essential for living healthy lives allows the language of the virtues to mediate between traditions.

A second source of mediation is the recognition of the importance of tradition for identity. Social work recognizes the centrality of cultural traditions for client identity. Social work also has a long tradition of emphasizing the need for practitioners to be self aware and reflective about their own traditions. The motivation for practitioners to be self-aware has often been framed in terms of being able to differentiate one's professional self from clients' efforts to be self-determining. But it is also possible to think of this in a more positive way, that is, a practitioner must be reflective about her or his own cultural identity in order to offer an honest self-presentation. Clearly this doesn't mean that professionals need to disclose their life-narrative to clients, but it does mean that the professional ought not pretend to be an anonymous cipher. It is possible for the social worker to be honest about who he or she is, while being respectful of client autonomy at the same time.

The place of narratives in a virtue perspective is another key feature that permits negotiations among divergent traditions. The stories we tell about our lives, the stories that we live out (even unreflectively), and the stories that situate our actions in meaningful contexts; all of these are essential for understanding ethics and living accordingly. Even in the context of multiple traditions, we can often create a relatively unified story of our lives and action, while the connections between the narratives of different traditions provide bridges for understanding and mutual dialogue. The technique of re-writing stories, of re-envisioning the over-arching structure of a situation so that we can move forward past seemingly intractable conflicts, is one that social workers are familiar with. So long as one is stuck with a particular narrative, change seems impossible. But when the narrative is re-written, so that a victim can become a survivor, then suddenly it becomes possible to see new possibilities and opportunities for growth.

This emphasis on narratives, of course, is intimately connected to good social work. Social workers are trained to understand life stories, to pay attention to the way that social groups understand themselves and their challenges, and to focus on a deep understanding of the structures of meaning that play such central roles in people's lives. Virtue ethics offers a perspective on ethical matters that social workers deal with every day that

makes that narrative structure both apparent and salient. So valuing narratives is one way that Christians can engage in the social work profession.

A socially embodied discussion of virtues is part of what is necessary for the living tradition of social work. Christians are called to participate in this discussion first by modeling virtuous behavior (both individually and collectively as the Church). Second, Christians in social work can use a virtue perspective as a shared concept to promote a dialectical relationship between Christian faith and the profession.

### Conclusion

We have introduced both virtue ethics and MacIntyre's larger account of how virtues function in human morality. We have also begun to think about the intersections between virtue theory, Christian faith, and social work. Moving forward in this collection, we think these ideas will be useful to us as we address questions about the formation of social workers who possess certain habits or dispositions or virtues as part and parcel of their identity. ❖

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

Paul Adams

*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 Eppe, 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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# Faith as Virtue in Social Work Practice: A Reformed Perspective

*Joseph Kuilema*

*This article is concerned with how Christian faith might impact social work practice. In particular, it explores the potential resource of faith as a theological virtue, with a special emphasis on perspectives from the reformed tradition. The article explores both definitions of faith and the nature of faith as understood within a virtue perspective. Finally, it presents implications for social work practice in several areas, including global practice and dimensions of burnout. Ultimately, the paper concludes that for many Christians faith understood in these ways serves as both comfort and calling.*

**T**HIS ARTICLE IS CONCERNED WITH CHRISTIAN FAITH. IN PARTICULAR, it explores the potential resource of faith as a theological virtue, with a special emphasis on reformed perspectives, my own faith tradition. Faith is one of the three “theological virtues,” a term used to differentiate them from other pre-Christian Aristotelian virtues, and most often identified with the thirteenth chapter of Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth. Thomas Aquinas labeled faith “first among the virtues” (Aquinas, 1947).

In many Christian traditions, including my own reformed tradition, faith, along with hope and love, is understood as a free gift from God. While other virtues can be developed through careful practice, the theological virtues flow directly out of God’s grace. Indeed the status of faith as a virtue is predicated on the existence of God, for if God does not exist, faith is not a virtue (Chappell, 1996).

My interest in faith as a virtue stems from my own practice experience in the field of child welfare. I worked for more than ten years with a small non-denominational summer camp and year-round ministry that worked to promote racial reconciliation with children ages 8-17. It was immensely challenging work, but also tremendously rewarding. Some of the most challenging situations involved sending kids home from summer camp

as a result of inappropriate behavior. As a staff, we worked to provide an environment of support where any child could succeed, but at times we simply did not have the capacity to continue. This was true particularly when children came to us from institutional settings where restraints were used regularly (we operated as a hands-off facility) or from homes with a history of abuse. The most heartbreaking of these situations involved knowingly returning a child to an abusive home. As a staff, we took our responsibility as mandated reporters seriously, and dutifully filed many reports every summer, but as most social workers know, reports are by no means a guarantee that CPS will intervene immediately, and only very rarely will such reports result in removal.

As camp director, I was the last stop on the behavior management chain, and would often be called upon to intervene in crisis situations to de-escalate children who were losing self-control. In the majority of cases, when the child would finally stop the torrent of profanity and slowly let go of the bravado of “not giving a \*\*\*\* what you do to me” there would be an point of realization, followed quickly by crushing remorse and regret. At these times the tears would flow and children would beg not to be sent home to their parents, and relate stories of beatings and abuse, having moved suddenly from anger and detachment to fear. While we would report these, and often there were already open files on the individuals in question, at the end of the day we were not a residential or detention facility. We were a summer camp and children who had physically harmed other children had to go. The camp was an hour and a half drive from the city where the majority of campers came from, and that drive was never longer than when there was a terrified child sitting in the back seat.

I relate this story because for me it illustrates the potential that faith might have for social work. There is a tremendous amount of evil in the world, and social workers are often confronted with it on a daily basis. This evil makes some practitioners enraged, and rightly so. It causes others to become calloused and emotionally remote, and it causes still others to leave the profession entirely. In Christian thinking this is referred to as the problem of evil, why an all-powerful and loving God would allow suffering in the world. There have been many attempts at answering the problem of evil, called theodicies, throughout Christian tradition. Such answers are beyond the scope of this article, and significantly beyond the depth of my own theological imagination. Instead, this article will examine how faith as a virtue might serve to impel social workers into the global arena, and mitigate the burnout many social workers experience both there and in their practice at home.

Faith and social work are often presented as oil and water, thoroughly incompatible. While there are no doubt tensions, some of which will be explored, characterizing faith and social work in this way is not only ultimately unhelpful, it also ignores the reality that for tens of thousands of

social workers in North America, faith provided the motivation to become a social worker and daily sustains them in their work. If academic social work literature is to truly dialogue with the profession at the grassroots level, it needs to speak to faith.

Before proceeding I would like to acknowledge that questions of the integration of faith and social work practice are serious ones, and rightfully approached with a degree of caution. When Christians use their position to promote their faith to clients, they are abusing their authority. David Sherwood (2002) rightly points out that there are similarities between evangelism and sexual exploitation of clients. Christians do need to exercise caution in how their faith integrates with and impacts their practice. This article discusses faith as a virtue and its implications *for* practice, rather than a direct element *of* practice.

### **Faith as a Virtue**

In his treatise on ethics, Aristotle spoke of a virtue as “that which is intermediate, not the excess nor the defect” (2005, p. 64). A virtue is the ideal balance between too much of an attribute or too little. Bravery is the balance point between folly and cowardice. This presents some difficulties when thinking of faith as a virtue, since traditionally Christian thinkers have been loathe to say that one should attempt to limit the quantity of one’s faith in any way. While danger lurks at both extremes for many virtues, faith has been seen as qualitatively different. Faith shares this distinction with hope and love, the other theological virtues that Thomas Aquinas sets apart from the natural virtues (Penelhum, 1977).

In addition to not suffering from excess, the theological virtues have traditionally been seen as special gifts of God’s grace. Aquinas (1947) states, “Therefore faith, as regards the assent which is the chief act of faith, is from God moving man inwardly by grace.” John Calvin (1989), in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, offers this definition of faith:

We shall now have a full definition of faith if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit. (p. 392)

One of the guiding creeds and confessions of my own denomination is the Heidelberg Catechism, which was written in 1563. The document is written in question and answer format, and the 21<sup>st</sup> question and answer address: “What is true faith?” The answer follows:

True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-

rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation.

Note that in this tradition, faith has little, in fact nothing, to do with the person in whom it is kindled. Faith is revealed to us. Calvin (1989) states that, "God would remain far off, concealed from us, were we not irradiated by the brightness of Christ" (p. 387). In a more straightforward manner, Paul Tillich (2001) writes "Neither arguments for belief nor the will to believe can create faith" (p. 38). The gift of faith is then sealed by the work of the Holy Spirit. In the words of an anonymously written hymn from the 1890s,

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew  
he moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;  
it was not I that found, O Savior true;  
no, I was found of thee.

It is perhaps helpful to point out that from this perspective the gift of faith is best understood in hindsight. It is in reflecting back on one's journey that the Christian perceives the grace of God in the gift of faith. Richard Mouw (2010a), relates a story his uncle Tunis, a Baptist preacher, told him on this point:

'The way I see it,' he said to me, 'we have to paint above the door of salvation the words 'Whosoever will may come.' I hope, though, once a repentant sinner walks through that door, he will look up and see that the Lord has written on the other side, 'You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.' (p. 47).

From this perspective, Christians believe that we were found, not that we found God, and it amazes us that in the midst of our brokenness God offers us grace. As Calvin (1989) puts it, "in all men faith is always mingled with incredulity" (p. 389).

Contrary to some perceptions, faith is not only cognitive but also active. Popular conceptions of faith centered on belief or assent may relegate faith to the mind. In contrast, in the Jewish and early Christian traditions, faith has always been intimately and necessarily linked with action. The author of the book of James writes in Chapter 2:14-18 (NIV, 1984),

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You

have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

While the reformer Martin Luther may have famously declared the book of James “an epistle of straw” in his 1522 preface to the New Testament, he dropped the comment from later editions and indeed himself stated that, “Faith, is a living, restless thing. It cannot be inoperative. We are not saved by works; but if there be no works, there must be something amiss with faith” (as cited in Bainton, 2009, p. 341). In distinctions between faith, works, and salvation, the primary difference is a question of motivation. In some Christian traditions salvation is accomplished by good works, by living a good life. Against such a view, the Heidelberg Catechism states,

we do good because Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us. And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits (Q&A 86).

Thus, in the Reformed perspective, salvation is through grace by faith, and good works are an expression of gratitude for God’s grace.

The distinction between faith that is active and that which is purely cognitive is one of the keys to the discussion of faith as a virtue. Thomas Aquinas (1947) draws a distinction between “living faith” and what he calls “lifeless faith,” stating that while living faith is a virtue, “On the other hand, lifeless faith is not a virtue, because, though the act of lifeless faith is duly perfect on the part of the intellect, it has not its due perfection as regards the will.”

From this perspective, faith is more than either the cognitive set of ideas or an emotive personal experience. Faith is different than belief, especially as meanings of the word “believe” have changed to diverge from the original Latin “credo” which connoted offering one’s heart in complete devotion (W. C. Smith, 1998). Indeed, one of Calvin’s personal mottos, and the motto of the institution where I teach, is “My heart I offer to you, Lord, promptly and sincerely.” The sort of belief produced by faith is an all encompassing and necessarily active one. In the book of James, Chapter 2:19, the author provocatively states that, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” It is clear that faith is more than belief. Against describing faith as a set of cognitive beliefs or assents, Calvin (1989) states,

no mere opinion or persuasion is adequate. And the greater care and diligence is necessary in discussing the true nature of faith, from the pernicious delusions which many, in the present day, labour under with regard to it. Great numbers, on hearing the term, think that nothing more is meant than a certain common assent to the Gospel History (p. 387).

While the word “knowledge” certainly sounds like it could be a cognitive belief, Calvin chooses the word over alternatives partly in rebuttal to doctrine at the time which suggested that one could have “implicit” faith merely by attending Church and going through the motions. Calvin (1989) sharply critiqued such a position, asking, “Is it faith to understand nothing, and merely submit your convictions implicitly to the Church? Faith consists not in ignorance, but in knowledge—knowledge not of God merely, but of the divine will” (p. 388). This knowledge is not only more than belief it is also beyond our cognitive abilities. Calvin (1989) states that, “By knowledge we do not mean comprehension, such as that which we have of things falling under human sense” rather “what our mind embraces by faith is every way infinite, that this kind of knowledge far surpasses all understanding” (p. 398). Before examining what such a conception of faith might mean for social workers, those seeking to take an interest in the welfare of others, it is necessary to examine faith as a concept in the social work literature.

### **Faith in the Social Work Literature**

Currently, in the vast majority of social work literature, the word faith serves mostly as a synonym for religion, spirituality, or both (Canda & Furman, 2009). In this regard, the literature frequently references “people of faith,” “faith-based agencies” or “faith communities.” While not seeking to minimize or delegitimize such definitions, they represent a departure from traditional and theological definitions of faith as a virtue. I seek to return some of the richness of these previous definitions to the current conversation, particularly as a resource for practitioners. As mentioned, there are difficulties in attempting to do so, and the idea of mitigating potential negatives is common in discussions on the integration of faith and social work. However, in this article I seek to push the dialogue a little further forward. Social workers understand that is impossible to separate the faith from the rest of the self, that we cannot exist without beliefs, that persons are intimately connected to their environments, histories, and relationships. We understand identity to be intersectional and in many ways indivisible. All this is to say that for the Christian in social work, faith is an inseparable element even if they would not profess it as such. It is not a question of whether faith will impact practice, but how.

Therefore, while acknowledging that faith brings with it the possibility of exploitation, it should be possible, and prudent, to examine the faith of the practitioner through a strengths perspective. To extend Sherwood’s metaphor, in most practice contexts evangelizing clients is as ethically suspect as engaging in sexual relationships with them, but we cannot ask practitioners to remove their sexuality at the door, to become professionally androgynous. Likewise, the practitioner’s faith is at their core, “bubbling up

from the very center” (Brandsen & Hugen, 2007). It would seem appropriate to cautiously explore how that faith might move from a risk that must be managed to an asset that may be utilized in the pursuit of competent and professional practice.

The faith of practitioners is often discussed as a potential liability, and as I previously mentioned, rightly so. When faith is discussed as an asset, it is almost universally in reference to client populations and not practitioners. When faith is discussed as an asset it also seems more likely to reference religions other than Christianity or faith among vulnerable populations. For example, there are several recent articles on cultural competency and the faith of Muslim clients (Bushfield & Fitzpatrick, 2010; Graham, Bradshaw, & Trew, 2010) as well as articles on the faith of survivors of colorectal cancer (Clay, Talley, & Young, 2010), those suffering from depression (Loewenthal, Cinnirella, Evdoka, & Murphy, 2001), faith among minority populations such as African Americans and Chinese Americans (Antle & Collins, 2009; Brade, 2008; Lee & Chan, 2009; MacMaster, S. A., Jones, J. L., Rasch, R. F. R., Crawford, S. L., Thompson, S., & Sanders, E. C. I., 2007) and how faith might be useful for the development of social capital (R. K. Brown & Brown, 2003; Candland, 2000).

There is an additional large and rapidly growing body of literature on faith-based programs (Hugen & Venema, 2009; Kaseman & Austin, 2005; Popescu, Sugawara, Hernandez, & Sewan, 2010; Stasi, 2009; Tangenberg, 2005; Wineburg, Coleman, Boddie, & Cnaan, 2008; Wubbenhorst & Voll, 2003). In recent years this body of literature has focused particularly on outcomes and evidenced based practice (Ferguson, Wu, Spruijt, & Dyreness, 2007; Smith & Teasley, 2009; Steinberg, 2010). Given the public funding of such private and religious programs, this research is much needed, but does little to shed light on the topic of this paper, the personal faith of the practitioner.

The literature on the potential benefits of personal faith for the practitioner is quite limited. There is a developed and growing social work literature on mindfulness, and some has been written about the benefits of meditation, but little about the potential benefits of Christian faith. One article examined potential benefits for Christians regarding coping mechanisms to reduce burnout and stress, themes this article will also examine (Collins, 2005, p. 263). Collins sees in the command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” the command to love the self appropriately, and create boundaries to avoid burning out (2005, p. 265). Collins (2005) recommends several practices, including Sabbath keeping, Holy silence, expressing gratitude, expressing spiritual essence, developing a sense of compassion, and embracing a principle of stewardship. Another specifically Christian article explored the benefits of spirituality based on the teachings of St. Ignatius Loyola and Jesuit teachings, particularly prayer and reflection and contemplation, for social work students (Staral, 2002).

### Implications for Practice

Whether in relationship to clients, programs, or practitioners, in the definitions of faith explored above, faith is almost universally equated with a cognitive set of beliefs or an emotional and experiential relationship to a divine being. In contrast to these more popular definitions, this paper has focused on faith as a theological virtue, a paradigm shift that comes with its own implications for social work practice. There are many to explore, but this article will examine two as illustrations: global practice and burnout.

#### Global Practice

Social work is a global profession. International social work is on the rise, including all of the collaborations across continents that accompany it. While debates over terms will continue for years (Healy, 2008; Hugman, Moosa-Mitha, & Moyo, 2010; Midgley, 2001), it is clear that social work has spread outward from its roots in Europe and North America, especially in the last thirty years. Alongside the expansion of the profession, there is an increased awareness of the global nature of the social and environmental issues facing vulnerable populations around the world (Healy, 2008). Problems like HIV/AIDS, climate change, poverty, child trafficking and refugees are transnational (Caragata & Sanchez, 2002, p. 223; Midgley, 1997). A social worker in Grand Rapids may have a client who fled fighting in southern Sudan into Ethiopia, crossed the border once more to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, and was finally adopted by a family in West Michigan.

Faith as a virtue provides several possible resources for a global perspective on social work practice. From a broad perspective, faith provides resources for dialog between social workers globally. While faith and social work have had a somewhat contentious relationship in North America and Europe in recent decades, the language of faith is still readily embraced, and part of the every day functions of the profession, in the majority world. Far from eliminating faith from discourse, globalization has actually been associated with the spread of faith, particularly in Pentecostal and charismatic iterations, and especially among the poor (Robbins, 2004, p. 117). However, Pentecostal Christians have traditionally emphasized faith as the product of a voluntary choice, the opposite of the perspectives this paper has explored. In fact, the emphasis on a voluntary choice available to all has provided much of the drive behind the evangelistic efforts of Pentecostal denominations (Robbins, 2004). How might an understanding of faith as virtue compare in its ability to compel Christians into the global arena and shape their interactions with the world?

One possible answer is the way in which faith as a virtue is predicated on a sovereign God. The sort of living faith Aquinas refers to recognizes

the reality of Psalm 24's proclamation that "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it." Faith is assured that God is sovereign over all of the creation, and that, as Abraham Kuyper declared, "There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, 'This is mine! This belongs to me!'" (as cited in Mouw, 2010b, p. 168). Working across continents and between nations is way of prophetically declaring that such boundaries are human creations and witnessing to the truth we hold in faith that one day the prophecy of John will be realized:

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10).

Thus faith compels Christians to worldwide service, and to seek out and provide hospitality to the stranger at home.

Another way faith as a virtue shapes global action is that the gift of faith is accomplished through and accompanied by the Holy Spirit. As it is written in John 20: 21-22, after his resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples and says "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." My own denomination has a contemporary testimony that puts it this way:

The Spirit renews our hearts  
and moves us to faith...  
The Spirit gathers people  
from every tongue, tribe, and nation  
into the unity of the body of Christ.  
Anointed and sent by the Spirit,  
the church is thrust into the world,  
ambassadors of God's peace,  
announcing forgiveness and reconciliation,  
proclaiming the good news of grace. (Our World Belongs to God,  
2008)

The Spirit who animates our faith also compels us into the world as witnesses to the grace we have received.

After examining some positive potentialities, it is necessary to address one of the differences. An important contribution of a more traditional approach to faith as a virtue is to offer to the global community an alternative to some of the more extreme forms of Pentecostal or charismatic

Christianity, including the so-called “health and wealth” gospel and the more intense expressions of spiritual warfare that have been expressed in practices such as the “child witch” hunts in Nigeria, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other West African nations (Adinkrah, 2011; Federici, 2008). Both movements originated and continue in North America, but are most represented, and experiencing the majority of their growth, in the majority world (Robbins, 2004).

Contrary to the prosperity gospel, which emphasizes the material blessings God has in store for those who have faith, faith as a virtue emphasizes that the heart of faith is, as has been said, centered on what the Apostle Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 1:18-21 as the “foolishness” of the cross. Faith as a virtue means accepting that “The ultimate scandal of the cross is the all too frequent failure of self-donation to bear positive fruit” (Volf, 1996, p. 26). Faith is a virtue when it is centered on God and is self-donating rather than self-centered and self-serving. Paul Tillich (2001) writes, “In true faith the ultimate concern is a concern about the truly ultimate; while in idolatrous faith preliminary, finite realities are elevated to the rank of ultimacy” (p. 12).

Faith as a virtue is not an all access pass to the favor of a divine being whose ultimate concern is our earthly success. In the prosperity gospel, faith secures success, the stronger one’s faith the greater one’s blessings. In contrast,

Faith does not promise us length of days, riches and honors (the Lord not having been pleased that any of these should be appointed us); but is contented with the assurance, that however poor we may be in regard to present comforts, God will never fail us. (Calvin, 1989, p. 407)

When Calvin speaks of God never failing us, he seems to be primarily referring to the belief that the God who in sovereign power sustains the universe will not *forsake* the beloved. “For faith includes not merely the knowledge that God is, but also, nay chiefly, a perception of his will toward us,” for “our safety is treasured up in him; and we are confirmed in this when he declares that he studies and takes an interest in our welfare (Calvin, 1989, p. 391). In this way, faith as a virtue sees “precisely in the scandal... a promise” (Volf, 1996, p. 27).

The world is broken. Social workers know this, and at times it can be a crushing knowledge, an overwhelming sense of our own insignificance against powers and principalities that are far more influential than we are. Reflecting on the genocide committed by his own nation, Jurgen Moltmann (1974) writes, “How is faith in God, how is being human, possible after Auschwitz? I don’t know” (p. 9). While his reply may seem dismissive, or even heretical, it can also be seen as expressing the sense of mystery that at

times accompanies faith. From the virtue perspective, faith is not the sum of a series of logical steps that lead one to God. Faith does not always read easily off of the creation alone. On a fundamental level, faith in a good and sovereign God, given the reality and extent of evil, does not make sense. St. John of the Cross (2007), speaking about the theological virtues, states that,

These three virtues render empty all the powers of the soul; faith makes the understanding empty and blind... Faith teaches us what the understanding cannot reach by the light of nature and of reason, being, as the Apostle saith 'the substance of things to be hoped for.' And though the understanding firmly and certainly assents to them, yet it cannot discover them; for if the understanding discovered them, there would be no room for faith. And though the understanding derives certainty from faith, yet it does not derive clearness, but rather obscurity (p. 83).

It is important for Christians in social work to acknowledge this, and to resist easy answers that may only alienate those with whom we work around the world. As Moltmann (1974) states, "Faith that originates from the God-situation at the cross does not answer the question of suffering with a religious explanation of 'why everything must be exactly as it is,' so that one simply submits to it" (p. 17). Faith is mysterious, and faith is a gift.

For Moltmann, faith is also centered on the cross, where, as Karl Barth (2004) puts it, God "condescends" to us in Jesus Christ to "take to Himself and away from us our guilt and sickness" (p. 142). At the cross, Christ suffers with and for humanity, and in this suffering opens the door for faith and hope. As Moltmann (1974) concludes, "A theology after Auschwitz would be impossible... were not God himself in Auschwitz, suffering with the martyred and the murdered. Every other answer would be blasphemy" (p. 10).

Still, in a world filled with genocide, wars, and rumors of war, where the top 10% of the world's population controls 71% of the world's wealth (Davies, Sandström, Shorrocks, & Wolff, 2009), and where 21,000 children under five died every day (UN, 2011), there is much for Christians to lament. As Moltmann (1974) states:

For us who are white, rich, and dominant, it is the cry of the starving, oppressed, and racially victimized masses... At this point, too, our optimism collapses. What will take its place? Cynicism and apathy? (p. 9)

What resources does the virtue of faith have to address the cynicism and apathy that understandably creep into our lives?

## **Burnout**

Social workers are in a field with a higher than average risk for burnout (Himle, Jayaratne, & Thyness, 1991; Kim & Stoner, 2008; M. Soderfeldt, Soderfeldt, & Warg, 1995, p. 638). The social work literature on burnout focuses a lot of attention on workers in child welfare, in particular (Anderson, 2000; Beck, 1987; Conrad & Kellar, 2006; Daley, 1979; Van & Rothenberg, 2009; Zosky, 2010). Most troubling for Christians, “The literature on burnout suggests those most vulnerable are young or inexperienced workers who are strongly nurturant individuals likely to over-identify with certain clients, and who approach their work with high ideals and strong commitment” (Anderson, 2000, p. 841). As Christians we strive for “high ideals and strong commitment,” we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to always look for the image of God in every individual. Karvinen-Niinikoski (2009) states that practitioners must not get “caught in a self-made professional trap...of becoming exploited by their idealism but simultaneously feeling unable to act in the complexity of our era” (p. 346). By pursuing such ideals and seeking to live by such commitments are we exposing ourselves to an increased risk of burnout?

Although there are many definitions of burnout, three key elements are often identified: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and diminished personal accomplishment (Kim & Stoner, 2008, p. 7). I will limit my considerations here to how an understanding of faith as a theological virtue might mitigate, or at least interact with, these three elements of burnout.

### ***Emotional Exhaustion***

Emotional exhaustion is not a common term in religious literature, but it seems to correlate well with despair, and despair is something that people of faith have wrestled with since Christ cried out on the cross “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” As Jurgen Moltmann (1974) has put it, at the “core of Christianity” is Jesus Christ, someone who “entered into the way of suffering and was killed as a blasphemer, as a threat to national security, and, on the cross, as one abandoned by God” (p. 7). One of the primary resources faith offers to emotional exhaustion is the knowledge that Christ understands emotional exhaustion, that Christ is, in the words of Isaiah 53:3 “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” In this passage Christ also demonstrates one of the ways in which faith addresses despair, in that even in the midst of his suffering, the plea from the Psalm he is quoting is still addressed to “My God.” This is evidence of the firm and sure knowledge faith produces. As Calvin (1989) puts it,

Thus the pious mind, how much so ever it may be agitated and torn, at length rises superior to all difficulties,

and allows not its confidence in the divine mercy to be destroyed. Nay, rather, the disputes which exercise and disturb it tend to establish this confidence. A proof of this is, that the saints, when the hand of God lies heaviest upon them, still lodge their complaints with him, and continue to invoke him, when to all appearance he is least disposed to hear. (p. 402)

Perhaps the most famous example of such faith in the Bible is Job. Job's wife, far from offering social support in his time of emotional exhaustion, urges him to "Curse God and die!" but Job's faith is not shaken. Faith maintains the relationship with God even when we are angry with God and confused by the evil around us.

In Hebrews 11, the author provides an extensive list of individuals who lived by faith. At the beginning of the next chapter, the author gives the following advice for Christians seeking to combat emotional exhaustion:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (12:1-3)

The prescriptive element here is to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith," not necessarily to seek to avoid situations that might be emotionally exhausting. To fix our eyes on Jesus through practices of prayer and worship might be a form of what some have referred to as "proactive coping skills," defined as "efforts undertaken in advance of a potentially stressful event to prevent it or to modify its form before it occurs" (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997, p. 417). One of the practices of faith is to continually remind oneself of the source and sustenance of that faith. As Calvin (1989) states, "faith has all its stability in Christ" (p. 388).

### ***Cynicism***

In the social work literature on coping and burnout, recommendations to combat cynicism involve developing high self-esteem and a sense of optimism (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997). In this instance, faith would potentially provide very different answers. Faith is strongly related to humility, as will be discussed in the next section, and particularly in the Reformed expression is realistic, some would say pessimistic, about the capacities of

human beings to do good apart from God's grace. However, in response to cynicism, faith opens the door to the related virtue of hope.

For if faith is (as has been said) a firm persuasion of the truth of God—a persuasion that it can never be false, never deceive, never be in vain, those who have received this assurance must at the same time expect that God will perform his promises, which in their conviction are absolutely true; so that in one word hope is nothing more than the expectation of those things which faith previously believes to have been truly promised by God. (Calvin, 1989, p. 418)

In this way, "Faith believes that he is our Father; hope expects that he will always act the part of a [good] Father towards us" (p. 418). In my own experiences, as mentioned previously, cynicism was always at the door. The cynic in me saw little hope for the child in the backseat being driven home after failing out of yet another part of life. The cynic saw little but the cycle of violence, where perpetrators fashion victims in their own likeness (Volf, 1996). However, by faith I believe that God loves the world. I believe that God loves the children of the world, and loves them more and better than I ever possibly could, that Christ has died for them on the cross. As Moltmann (1974) observes, "there is no true theology of hope which is not first of all a theology of the cross" (p. 8).

Therefore, by faith, I believe that in some way I do not understand God holds the children I worked with in the palm of God's hands, and that gives me hope. Hope and faith are thus in a reciprocal relationship, "Faith is the foundation on which hope rests; hope nourishes and sustains faith" (p. 418). Hope gives the Christian the ability to, as in the words of Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God." This sort of a teleological perspective (i.e., focused on the ultimate end) provides resources for coping with cynicism that are not always available in other traditions.

For while hope silently waits for the Lord, it restrains faith from hastening on with too much precipitation, confirms it when it might waver in regard to the promises of God or begin to doubt of their truth, refreshes it when it might be fatigued, extends its view to the final goal, so as not to allow it to give up in the middle of the course, or at the very outset." (Calvin, 1989, p. 418).

### ***Diminished Personal Accomplishment***

The final aspect of burnout considered here is diminished personal

accomplishment. Here, a Reformed perspective on faith provides very different answers for the practitioner from the traditional secular literature. It is reported that before Calvin died, he uttered “All I have done is of no worth...I am a miserable creature” (as cited in George, 2009). Taken at face value, this is perhaps the ultimate statement of diminished personal accomplishment. Was Calvin burned out? Or was Calvin expressing the humility of faith? Karl Barth (2004) states,

Faith is not a self-chosen humility. It is not the humility of pessimism, skepticism, defeatism, misanthropy, a weariness with the world and oneself and life. These are possibilities which a man can choose for himself, and in fact often does choose. They cannot be substituted for the humility of faith.... Faith is the humility of obedience. (p. 619)

Calvin’s faith gave him a perspective that was far beyond himself. For Calvin, and for Reformed thinking broadly, the good that we are able to accomplish is only because of the grace of God. As Calvin (1989) states, “the proofs of our utter powerlessness must instantly beget despair of our own strength” (p. 264). Faith produces humility. There is a certain freedom in this perspective. It is not up to humanity to save the world, and in fact humanity is entirely incapable of doing so. This is not to say that we should retreat from doing good, or ignore the plight of others, it is to say that “when he bids us work out our salvation with fear and trembling, all he requires is, that we accustom ourselves to think very meanly of our own strength, and confide in the strength of the Lord” (Calvin, 1989, p. 404). In this view, social workers struggling with burnout as a result of a diminished sense of personal accomplishment embrace their finite nature, and subject themselves to the infinite God through faith. When social workers face feelings of diminished personal accomplishment, instead of seeking increased personal agency, they might work to meditatively reframe the situation, to be still and know.

The constant reminder of faith is that God reaches out to humanity though we do not and cannot deserve it, that as Romans 5:8 says, “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Such knowledge produces the humility of faith, but it also grounds us in the assurance of God’s unconditional love. In the Reformed perspective our accomplishments accomplish little for us. As it says in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.” What good works we do are manifestations of our gratitude for this unearned grace which faith reveals. As Calvin (1989) writes, “Faith, then, has no firm footing until it stands in the mercy of God” (p. 409).

### Limitations

As I mentioned, I am not a theologian, or a Biblical scholar. This article is written from a lay perspective within my own faith tradition, as an offering to the wider community of faith, and to those open to dialogue with communities of faith. The intention is to open a space for practitioners to explicitly explore the resources of their various traditions for the personal strengths that may support effective practice. Social work cannot continue to validate religion and spirituality, even in sectarian forms, within client populations while at the same time discouraging practitioners from exploring similar themes. Proselytizing is inappropriate in professional practice. That said, appropriate boundaries can be drawn between personal religious resources and professional practice.

There are potential limitations to a virtue perspective on faith. Some have taken the perspective that works cannot earn salvation and adopted a faith that the Apostle James would probably pronounce dead on arrival. In my own community, some have accused adherents of Reformed theology of being the “frozen chosen.” While I think such perspectives seriously misconstrue the theology, it is clear that any perspective that leads to inaction on the part of social workers would be inappropriate for the field. But for Christians in social work, Christian faith may have a quite different consequence: sustaining professional practice under the most difficult and discouraging conditions.

### Conclusion

Social work is a profession that emerged from faith communities, and that spiritual heritage includes a rich variety of theological concepts and virtues that could potentially benefit the profession today (Holland, 1989, p. 28). At the core of a Reformed understanding of the virtue of faith is a radical humility that explodes in gratitude and praise, rippling out into the global community, a community that God loves more than we can imagine. We have a firm and sure knowledge of that divine favor toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, who in suffering on the cross has embraced humanity and given us a model for a living faith that donates itself to the other.

The first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism address what many in the Reformed perspective would consider one of the great gifts of faith as a virtue, faith that is both comfort and calling. The question asks, “What is your only comfort in life and in death?” The answer replies, “That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.” This assurance “makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.” ❖

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# Gratitude: Duty, Virtue, and Practice

Charity Samantha Vo

*This paper constructs gratitude as a virtue from an unabashedly Christian perspective. It contends that a virtue construction supplements a duty construction by emphasizing joy and generosity. Gratitude as a virtue has implications for social work practice, such as responsible stewardship, resiliency, emphasis on the gift of giving, and engagement in growth-producing relationships. The paper argues, thus, that gratitude as a virtue can create an inspirational guide to practice.*

**O**N OCTOBER 13, 2010, THE WORLD WAS CAPTIVATED AS RESCUERS pulled each of 33 miners from a mine that had collapsed 69 days prior. For 17 days after the fateful mine collapse on August 5, the miners had survived one-half mile below the earth's surface on just two spoonsful of tuna, one cup of milk, and some peach topping every other day (McNeil, 2010). After a small shaft was drilled on August 24, they were able to receive what must have seemed like a godsend: medical supplies, food, and water. Several months later on October 13, a capsule lifted the men individually through a crooked tunnel. Within 24 hours, they were all safely out of the mine. As each reached the surface, they, along with family members, gave thanks to God. Many, in fact, wore T-shirts emblazoned on the front with ¡*Gracias Señor!* (Thank you, Lord!) and on the back with Psalms 95:4: In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him (Kwon, 2010). Said one family member of a miner, "I'm so overcome with emotion now, as if I've been touched by God" (Avalos as cited in Barrionuevo & Romero, 2010).

Against all odds, the miners had survived. Words, it seemed, could not capture the flood of thankfulness, thankfulness for the blessings of life and family. The photographs of tearful, hugging families and miners lifting their hands in praise to the Lord are poignant pictorial representations of gratitude. Their harrowing experience had helped them to see and express joy and thanks for the seemingly simple gifts we often take for granted on a daily basis.

My own story of gratitude is not nearly as dramatic as that of the miners (indeed, few are). During the initial months of my service in the Peace Corps, I found much about which to complain: buses that were stuck in mudslides, internet speeds circa 1992 in the nearest “city,” and no good café mochas (organic soy milk, dark chocolate, dually certified fair-trade and organic espresso, sprinkled with cinnamon and chocolate flakes). And as friends and family can attest, most of the time spent at the Internet café at the beginning of my service was devoted to delineating a list of complaints via email (and the rest of the time was spent tapping my finger impatiently in response to the sluggish dial-up internet connection).

Over the course of my service, my ungrateful outlook softened. The aforementioned nuisances seemed small in comparison with the compassion and generosity shown to me by my neighbors. They would invite me as a guest of honor, sometimes forgoing food themselves to give me a warm and hospitable welcome. Their generosity humbled me. I observed how community members wholeheartedly threw their support behind me, the young and naïve *gringa*, making personal and professional sacrifice to support my sometimes ill-conceived community development projects. Their trust humbled me. I witnessed families who faced great adversity maintain an unflagging faith in Christ Jesus and give thanks for *all* things as evidenced by the expression “*gracias a Dios*” that percolates common parlance. Their faithfulness humbled me.

By the end of my service, I realized that I had received much more than I had given, and I had thoroughly engaged in service “done right.” I had shared my gifts, and community members had shared theirs in a cross-cultural exchange worthy of a glossy promotional Peace Corps brochure. The reciprocal exchange left an indelible imprint on all of us. The exemplary manifestations of generosity, trust, and faithfulness had changed me at my core. My courage in journeying to a distant place and my creativity in promoting children’s rights left a mark on the community as well. My neighbors threw me a surprise party before I returned to the United States. As I attempted to croak out a farewell speech, I dissolved into sobs of thanksgiving. I am a volunteer, I explained amidst the tears. I am supposed to serve you, yet you have served me and loved me in ways I never expected. They threw their arms around me. They affirmed how much they valued the gifts I had shared with them. In spite of their professed appreciation of my gifts, I believed they had matched and even superseded my commitment of time, energy, and passion. They had planted something inside of me, and I was determined to keep paying it forward. I was teeming with gratitude that I needed to share with others.

Framed by Roman philosopher Cicero as the parent of all virtues, by German sociologist Georg Simmel as the moral memory of humankind, and by English writer G.K. Chesterton as happiness doubled by wonder, gratitude has captivated scholars across time and space. In spite of disparate

origins, the perspectives seem to converge on the relevance of gratitude to individual and social welfare.

This article focuses on gratitude as a construct that can contribute to robust social work practice. It is divided into two sections. The first fleshes out the construct of gratitude. It presents two perspectives on gratitude: one as a duty and the other as a virtue. This article contends that thinking of gratitude as a duty rather than a virtue is commonplace. In spite of its widespread acceptance, I espouse the view that gratitude as a narrowly conceived duty is a limiting construct since it sets a ceiling on appropriate behavior. Gratitude as a virtue can build upon the duty framework by striving for limitless excellence. This article unearths the virtuous construct of gratitude and argues that this construct can supplement the duty construct to provide for meaningful human interaction.

The second section of the paper examines how gratitude might specifically inform social work practice. It outlines four ways through which gratitude might be constitutive of good stewardship, resiliency, the social work mission, and a strengths-based approach. The second section also argues that gratitude as a virtue can supplement service as a value/principle/standard enshrined in the *Code of Ethics*.

### **Gratitude and Philosophical Discourse**

Gratitude is described both as being cognizant of having received a benefit and as being expressive of thanks. Gratitude derives from two Latin roots: *gratia*, meaning favor, and *gratus*, meaning pleasing (Emmons, 2004). Its contemporary usage reflects its roots; gratitude is evoked by a well-intentioned gift, whether in the form of a good or a deed. Specifically, the literature identifies three key components: the benefactor, the beneficiary, and the benefit (Roberts, 2007). The benefactor refers to the one bestowing a gift; the beneficiary, the one receiving the gift; and the benefit, the gift. Noteworthy is that the root of all three components (i.e., benefactor, beneficiary, and benefit) contains the Latin for *good*. The benefactor does a good deed by bestowing a gift; the beneficiary perceives the gift and the benefactor's intentions as being good; and the benefit works to the beneficiary's good. Thus, gratitude is traditionally associated with the good life.

Roberts (2004) presents an explanatory deconstruction of the causal process that evokes gratitude. He analyzes the statement, "I am grateful to X" according to the following scheme: (1) the beneficiary identifies the gift as being a benefit, (2) the beneficiary identifies the good behavior on the part of the benefactor, (3) the beneficiary acknowledges not just the good but the supererogatory behavior of benefactor, (4) the benefactor, indeed, is good and has acted benevolently, and (5) the beneficiary possesses a desire to express indebtedness to the benefactor. According to Roberts, these are the criteria necessary to trigger gratitude.

McCullough and Tsang (2004) discuss the effects of gratitude. First, gratitude functions as a moral barometer. That is, gratitude indicates to people what is good. A grateful response indicates both a benefactor's good intent as well as the perceived goodness of the benefit. Thus, it is a response to a specific type of interaction between people. Second, gratitude serves as a moral motive. People who feel grateful as beneficiaries are likely inspired to return the favor to the benefactor and/or to others. Finally, it serves as a moral reinforcement in that it encourages benevolent behavior in the future toward others. That is, benefactors who receive gratitude from beneficiaries are likely to persist in seeking opportunities to be benefactors.

On the components, the cause, and the effects of gratitude, thinkers from two schools, the duty perspective and the virtue perspective, can generally agree. Regarding how and why gratitude unfurls vis-à-vis social interactions, however, engenders slight distinctions between these two schools. This section explicates gratitude from a duty perspective and then from a virtue perspective. In common discourse, gratitude is often cast as a duty. However, the section concludes by arguing that gratitude as a virtue can extend gratitude as a duty.

### **Gratitude from a Duty Perspective**

Though not the first to write about gratitude, Immanuel Kant was perhaps the first to cast gratitude in a duty-bound frame, a frame which has become practically axiomatic. Kant, assuming his deontological view, viewed gratitude as a moral obligation. Gratitude, according to Kant, is an imperfect duty. Upholding the construct depends on one's adherence to a moral maxim rather than an enforceable law (Visser, 2008). Kant identified gratitude's motivation as deriving from respect rather than love (McConnell, 1993). Love, claimed Kant (2001), was shared among equals, and gratitude did not create a scenario among equals. Rather, gratitude created a scenario in which one was indebted to the other, and thus the beneficiary expressed gratitude on the basis of respect. Nevertheless, the respect involved with an expression of gratitude, wrote Kant, was incompatible with perceiving the benefit as an undue burden; gratitude opened up the possibility of love. Finally, important to Kant's view is that the debt of gratitude can never be repaid fully. For having initiated a kind action, the benefactor will always remain in a superior position to that of the beneficiary. The expression of indebtedness by the beneficiary is an acknowledgment of the kindness but cannot fully repay the kindness. Thus, gratitude is a lifelong obligation.

The economist Adam Smith also contributed to an understanding of gratitude in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759/1976) in terms of an imperfect social duty. In this text, Smith identified gratitude as the action of rewarding benefactors for the benefits they have bestowed. In another oft-cited text, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776/2009), Smith noted that self-

interest is a sounder foundation for social exchanges than beneficence. Self-interest, following Smith's logic, creates more ironclad cohesion than that engendered by gratitude. Nevertheless, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, he claimed that gratitude plays a key, supplemental role in promoting social cohesion and in making the world a pleasant place.

Georg Simmel, a German sociologist at the turn of the 20th century, also focused on gratitude as a conduit of social cohesion resulting from socially obligatory, though unenforceable, reciprocity. According to Simmel (1950), gratitude serves as the moral memory of humankind; it creates social webs of good will through the duty of reciprocity. Simmel noted that faithfulness coupled with gratitude enables societies to achieve stability even as they change. Faithfulness ensures that commitments are fulfilled, and gratitude promotes social interaction. Both faithfulness and gratitude, according to Simmel, supplement the legal order. Similar to Kant, Simmel cast gratitude as a moral, but not a legal, obligation. He claimed that it could be morally demanded and morally rendered, which creates micro fibers that bind society together across time and space.

The construction of gratitude from a duty perspective results in a system of social rules regarding why, when, and how a beneficiary is to express gratitude. Gratitude, in the duty framework, is the beneficiary's response to having received a benefit from a benefactor. The response takes into consideration both the gift and the donor. Not just any gift triggers a response. The benefit must embody both goodness and intentionality on the part of the benefactor. A benefit bestowed as part of one's regular routine does not elicit a grateful response unless the benefactor conducted his or her routine in a supererogatory manner. The beneficiary should respond first with an expression of thanks to the benefactor by, for example, saying "thanks." Next the beneficiary should use the benefit in a manner that is congruent with the sensibilities of the benefactor. Social norms in the duty framework dictate that the gift is not for use entirely at the discretion of the beneficiary. Rather, the beneficiary is to use the gift in a manner that would express appreciation for the benefactor's efforts. For example, the beneficiary should not use a rare Shakespearean folio, which was probably purchased at enormous cost and effort, as kindling paper. Finally, the beneficiary should respond with a benefit to the benefactor at some point in time but neither too soon nor too late. If one reciprocates too quickly, then the benefactor might sense the beneficiary's discomfort with indebtedness. If the beneficiary responds too tardily, then the benefactor might feel maligned.

Thus, the duty framework fits gratitude, which has evolved from the writings of Kant and others, into a prescriptive and proscriptive gift-giving cycle. The key theme that emerges is the social cohesion that results from reciprocation, which derives from socially desirable yet legally unenforceable customs. Construed as such, gratitude is definitely something that is

identifiable as good. It promotes peaceful and harmonious social relations. Missing from these literatures, however, is an identification of why there is an innate will and expectation of reciprocation. In short, from what does the social custom derive? And who was the first giver to overcome self-interest in order to bestow a gift? I argue that a virtue perspective can shed light on the mechanism behind the will to reciprocate and to give. Moreover, it clearly identifies a divine being as the first giver.

### **Gratitude from a Virtue Perspective**

Aristotle, perhaps credited as the father of virtue ethics, did not perceive gratitude to be a virtue. Rather, he believed that gratitude was a sign of weakness, to which he imputed negativity. He believed that one who is grateful is placed in an inferior, indebted position, and thus gratitude is antithetical to magnanimity (Roberts, 2004). Two centuries later, Cicero demurred by claiming that gratitude was not only the greatest but also the wellspring of all other virtues (McCullough & Tsang, 2004). This article concurs with Cicero's dissenting opinion that gratitude, indeed, is a virtue, and it draws from Christian thought to substantiate its claim. The virtue perspective of gratitude is perhaps less common than the duty perspective, yet I contend that the former can build upon the latter to open robust and enduring social interaction.

The crux of the Christian virtue perspective involves thinking of gratitude as more than a mere moral obligation; it is an expression of charity and an overflowing of generosity. Reciprocation evolves not from a social custom but from abundance and eagerness to share. Though Aristotle belittled the notion of gratitude as a virtue, the Bible redeemed it as such. The biblical notion of gratitude is intertwined with grace. The Christian God is perceived as being the ultimate gift giver through life on Earth and eternal life. As written in the Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer*, "We, thine unworthy servants, do give thee most humble and hearty thanks for all thy goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men; We bless thee for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory" (Marshall, 1989, p. 185).

The gifts of creation and grace create a debt that can never be repaid. The inability to repay the gift, however, does not engender inferiority on the part of the beneficiary in a Christian worldview. Rather, it inspires joy and an overwhelming generosity to be exemplified through interactions with other people. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 (NIV), Paul writes "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received

from God.” Hodge (1995) notes that the term *praise* represents the highest possible expression of thanks to God. In this verse, according to Hodge, Paul is expressing thanks to God for consolation. In times of suffering, God has comforted Paul, which enables Paul to comfort others. Later he writes in the same book, “All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God” (4:15; NIV). In this passage, again according to Hodge, Paul is acknowledging that the favor shown to him enabled him to share with others, and thus the thanksgiving to God multiplied exponentially. Thus, gratitude is framed not as an obligation but as an abundance of joy and generosity. Because God has given more than is needed or imagined, the abundance can be shared.

Gratitude in the Christian sense also reflects the previously described notions of reciprocity in terms of an ever-expanding, not merely self-reinforcing, cycle of charity. Paul writes again in 2 Corinthians 9:11-12, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God.” This verse reflects the broadening nature of gratitude in the Christian tradition. Gratitude, in this sense, is like a ripple of co-centric circles. It inspires acts of charity beyond the first one initiated. Of this passage, Garland (1999) noted, “Giving to others becomes a kind of thank-offering to God that multiplies itself” (p. 412).

Also implicit in the Christian construction of gratitude is the idea that people are stewards of God’s earth. People must not be stingy with the resources that they possess since all things belong to God. David reflects this in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13,

David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, ‘Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

Thus, thanks are given to God in all things. All things belong to God, and gratitude indicates the joy experienced by sharing in God’s creation.

Indeed, thanks are given to God even in distressing circumstances. Gratitude in the Christian sense entails giving thanks to God for both the good and the ostensibly bad because He is present in and works through all

things. At the end of the first letter to Thessalonica, Paul urges his readers to “give thanks in all circumstances” (5:18). Thus, gratitude entails more than a momentary response to a windfall. Rather, the Christian concept of gratitude involves a lifelong outlook, one of being joyful and patient whatever the case may be. Wiersbe (2007), in fact, identifies thanksgiving as a vital worship practice of the church.

Finally, the Bible offers a cautionary tale about what a lack of gratitude can effect. Romans 1:21 notes, “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Thus, gratitude is framed as a precondition to human flourishing, productivity, and happiness. Gratitude is both an attitude and an action. In sum, the Bible upholds gratitude as a crucial virtue, or what Koenig termed the “very axis of Christian life” (Koenig as cited in Vacek, 2000, p. 81). Gratitude towards God for His grace through Jesus Christ and all that He provides—both the good and the seemingly bad—prescribes a certain attitudinal orientation that is infectious and leads to an enlargement of the self.

Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1273/1964) made great strides in affirming that gratitude is a virtue based on its Biblical framing. Aquinas noted that gratitude is a virtue in its own right, albeit one subsidiary to justice. In his description of gratitude, Aquinas drew from Seneca (63/2008) who contended that gratitude is more about the hearts of the giver and the receiver than about the physical manifestation of the gift itself. For Seneca, the intent behind a gift is more important than the gift itself because it is the good will and the kindness of gift giving that endures. Aquinas echoed Seneca’s sentiment. Gratitude, noted Aquinas, has less to do with the benefit and more to do with the heart. It is the dispositions of the giver and the receiver that define gratitude. Aquinas distinguished gratitude from indebtedness. For Aquinas, gratitude is not a tit-for-tat duty. Rather, the manifestation of gratitude reflects charitable generosity. Martin Luther, too, emphasized that gratitude emanates not from a sense of duty but rather from a sense of love (Meilander, 1984). When people experience God’s graciousness, claimed Luther, they will be moved to share the generosity with others through using his gifts wisely and joyfully.

Religious scholar Paul Camenisch (1981) further explicated gratitude from a Christian perspective. Camenisch emphasized that a grateful response is not merely one that repays the donor but rather augments the circle of gift giving and strives to bring more gift givers and gift receivers into the mix. He identified three components of a grateful response: grateful conduct, grateful use, and an attitudinal element. Grateful conduct entails giving thanks for what has been given. Grateful use entails Christians being good stewards of what God has given. We are to use what God has given in a joyful and a wise manner, in a manner attempting to reflect His undeserved generosity. Use of the gifts that He has bestowed is not entirely

under the discretion of people but rather should be done in a way that is pleasing to Him. A grateful response also entails a shift in attitude, which slightly distinguishes the virtue perspective from the duty perspective. According to Camenisch, gratitude generates a thankful outlook towards all of the world and existence itself. With such a grateful outlook, one will see the interrelatedness of persons and of things whereby all life is enriched through an outpouring of generosity.

A grateful response that is attitudinal in nature also informs how Christians give to each other (Camenisch, 1981). Christians are to learn to receive from others as well as to give. Since the goal of Christian gratitude is to continually expand the gift-giving community, how one gives and how one receives is important. Being a grateful person entails accepting the gifts of grace and acceptance from God and also from other people because to refuse such gifts is to break the cycle of gratitude, since it would maintain the receiver in an indebted position and reinforce power imbalances. Nevertheless, always being the receiver can undermine a person's sense of self-worth and foster a negative sense of dependence as opposed to a mutually affirming sense of interdependence. Thus, gratitude entails malleable role-switching between being a giver and a receiver. The description of the gift-giving process does not entail elaborate rules and guidelines. It describes how people's hearts should be aligned as they approach the gift-giving process. Mother Teresa perhaps buttresses Camenisch's argument when she noted, "The best way to show our gratitude to God and the people is to accept everything with joy" (1996, p. 77)

Thus defined, gratitude is rightly classified as a virtue in spite of Aristotle's denigration. Devettere (2002) outlines key points associated with defining virtues. Virtues are deserving of praise; they are psychological states; they are based on shared humanity; and they play some role in the good life. These ideas associated with virtues, and others (e.g., the focus on the person rather than the action, the idea that pursuing others' interests is in one's best interest, the assertion that virtues provide gateways into thinking about the good life, and the implication of the will in resulting action) all reflect the Christian construction of gratitude. The paper next compares the construction of gratitude as a duty to gratitude as a virtue, arguing that the latter supplements the former.

### **Comparison of Gratitude as a Duty and Gratitude as a Virtue**

Gratitude as a duty and gratitude as a virtue share several characteristics. Both entail a response to a benefit bestowed. Both take into consideration the benefactor's intention regarding how the benefit should be used. Both acknowledge indebtedness that can never wholly be repaid. However, I contend that there are subtle, yet significant differences, between the two. In short, I concur with Visser's (2008) assertion that people can uphold the

social norms of gratitude from the duty perspective yet not be grateful from the virtue perspective. Gratitude as a duty describes an activity, yet gratitude as a virtue describes an activity emanating from and necessarily reinforcing a worldview. Thus, the virtue framework builds on the duty framework.

The duty framework lays the foundation for the practice of gratitude by drawing attention to the manifestation of gratitude. In the duty framework, the emphasis is on the benefit and the reciprocating counter-benefit. In the virtue framework, gratitude is extended as an outlook and as an inner state of being exhibited by both benefactor and beneficiary. Though the benefit is a part of the virtue framework, the main focus is on the disposition of the giver and the receiver. As Seneca articulated and Aquinas rearticulated, what is at stake is not the benefit *per se* but rather the intent behind the benefit and the heart with which the benefit was received. Gifts are not construed as being good because of their material composition but rather because of their moral signification.

Second, the frameworks have distinct normative constructions of the gratitude process. I argue that the virtue construction encompasses the duty construction. The duty framework outlines rules regarding how a gift is to be reciprocated. It is not to be returned too quickly otherwise it belies a sense of discomfort with indebtedness. Moreover, it is not to be overly compensated or else that undermines the original intentions of the giver. Thus, one is to demonstrate gratitude via an action that complies with certain prescriptions and proscriptions. Maintaining a mental record of gifts and return gifts is not the crux of the notion of gratitude as a Christian virtue. Rather, because of God's generosity, people are filled with gratitude, which enables them to give generously to others. The spirit of gratitude informs both what they give (i.e., they are to be good stewards of what God has given) and how they give (i.e., joyfully and lovingly, which do not correspond with any singular set of actions). Thus, in some sense, the virtue framework expands the duty framework in terms of the normative construction of gratitude.

Third, the scope of gratitude in the virtue framework is more extensive than the scope in the duty framework. In the duty framework, gratitude is cast as a zero-sum game, albeit one that is conducive to prosocial behaviors and opens up the possibility for love. The virtue framework casts gratitude as necessarily an ever-expanding community filled with love. One is to give to other people because God has created the world and redeemed it through the sacrifice of His son Jesus Christ. Thus, people can express their gratitude towards the divine being by acting generously towards each other. Moreover, the virtue perspective highlights the importance not just of giving but also of good giving. Good giving empowers receivers to become givers and vice versa. Good giving entails flexibility in roles, acknowledging each person's gifts. In the virtue framework, people are not self-sufficient. Rather, they are inherently social beings and cannot be reduced to the status of atom-

ized individuals. Giving, thus, is not a lifelong debt but a way of life that reflects the gifts of creation and grace first given by God.

Finally, the conception of a benefit from a virtue perspective builds on the conception of a benefit from the duty perspective. From a duty perspective, the benefit is constructed as something that is good, narrowly conceived to signify something that directly, explicitly, and immediately promotes well-being. From a Christian virtue perspective, the gift is constructed as all things given by God. Thus, even something that is typically imputed with negativity can assume gift status if it is given by God. As noted earlier, Paul urged his readers to give thanks *in* all circumstances, both in joy and in suffering because of the overwhelming gifts of life and grace despite one's immediate negative circumstances. The reconceptualization of a gift reflects the construction of gratitude not as an action but as an outlook, an attitude, and a way of being. Again, the gift itself is not as important as the dispositions of the giver and the receiver. Other essays have laid out similar arguments about the robustness of gratitude as a virtue as opposed to a duty (see, for example, Wellman, 1999). This article attempts to contribute to the literature in the subsequent sections by identifying how virtuous gratitude relates to social work practice.

### **Gratitude and Social Work Practice**

I next consider how gratitude framed as a virtue can inform social work practice. I strive not to be too Pollyannaish or naïve in my suggestions. Joel Shuman, a theologian well acquainted with medical settings, wrote, "To the ears of the desperately ill, admonitions to 'be thankful,' or to 'to count your blessings,' are sure to be heard as platitudes—saccharine or offensively pious" (2002, ¶ 1). He goes on to write that Christians are called to live in a broken world with hope and gratitude. Social workers are all too familiar with the brokenness of the world. The call to be grateful might seem "saccharine" or "offensively pious" to social workers dealing with sensitive social issues, yet the gifts of creation and salvation are so incomprehensibly great that, indeed, social workers can be grateful and practice gratitude in all circumstances.

As mentioned previously, a grateful response has three components from a virtue perspective: grateful conduct, grateful use, and, most distinctively, attitudinal reorientation. I consider four ways that grateful responses and a grateful outlook would influence the virtuous social worker's practice: responsible stewardship, resiliency, joy in the gift of giving, and engagement in mutually affirming and growth-promoting relationships with clients.

### **Responsible Stewardship**

A grateful social worker is one who uses resources with great care and appreciation. Everything that people enjoy emanates from God's grace and good will. Thus, social workers should use what God has given in a way that uplifts God's goodness and speaks to God's graciousness. Social workers are often asked to do a lot with very little. We should ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively. However, being grateful stewards entails more than careful cost-benefit analysis. Grateful use of the resources with which God has blessed humanity ensures that clients receive the resources that they need to thrive and to flourish. Thus, grateful use requires that social workers be mindful of waste yet also that we advocate on our clients' behalf to ensure an adequate and/or equitable allocation of resources. God has given us more than people could ask for or imagine, and as agents of social change social workers need to be aware of and modify structures that prohibit people from accessing God's abundance.

### **Resiliency**

The virtuous social worker is also one who draws from gratitude to hold burnout at bay. The grateful social worker gives thanks in all circumstances, which can be framed as gifts irrespective of their face value. As Paul noted in 2 Corinthians 1:3, times of distress provide clear moments of God's comfort, and experiencing God's comfort better situates social workers to comfort others. Social workers face many stresses: high caseloads, few resources, low financial compensation, and conflicting role demands, among others. Gratitude creates a well of resiliency from which to draw. In spite of challenging circumstances and numerous barriers, grateful social workers can learn to give thanks in all things. A grateful attitudinal orientation reframes a disheartening sense of scarcity into a perception of abundance and generosity. Though resources may be perceived as lacking, the ever-present gifts of creation and grace exceed what is needed and expected. Thus, though burnout is a pervasive syndrome in the workforce, gratitude couples an accepting attitude with heartfelt action to overcome barriers.

### **Joy in the Gift of Giving**

Given the pressures of social work, it can be difficult to remember that the profession is a blessed opportunity to work intimately with others who are vulnerable, oppressed, or marginalized. Those who are blessed to serve as social workers have the opportunity to intimately integrate faith and practice on a daily basis. Social work provides Christians the opportunity of giving. Rather than approaching social work from a deficiency orientation, a grateful approach to social work is a reminder that it is a joy to serve in

the profession and that the profession provides outright opportunities to engage in noble work: to work with the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, and the alien. Few other occupations are as overt in their ability to live out God's word through daily practices on the job.

### **Engagement in Growth-Promoting Relationships**

Finally, the grateful social worker is one who views clients in a genuinely affirming manner. It is often easy to pity or to grow frustrated with clients. A grateful orientation, however, eschews such emotions. Participating in the gift-giving cycle of gratitude frames clients not just as recipients of services but as potential givers and as contributors to social welfare themselves, and social workers can seek ways to bring this potential to fruition. Grateful givers are those who see the reciprocity and the interconnectedness between and among people. Grateful benefactors (i.e., grateful social workers) delight in seeing beneficiaries become benefactors themselves. Good giving requires affirming the capacities of others such that they are not relegated to a subordinate role but rather are assured of their self-worth. Beneficiaries, or clients, are not to feel the debilitating sense of dependence but rather the joy of interdependence. Gratitude evokes the image of the body of Christ, through which all people have gifts that are needed for the whole to function. Thus, gratitude frames interactions with clients as ones of affirmation. Beneficiaries can become benefactors, and when they do, reciprocity abounds bringing more and more people into the community of gift giving. Thus, a grateful orientation to social work practice necessarily entails debunking self-sufficiency as a myth and using a strengths-based approach by seeing the gifts that clients have the potential to offer. Thus, gratitude requires that virtuous social workers learn to think of clients as potential benefactors. The perception of oneself always in the role of the benefactor without recognizing the ways God can work through weaknesses to build up the community of Christ undermines the spirit of gratitude.

In these four ways, gratitude maps onto social work practice. Gratitude as a virtue does not prescribe any particular action or set of actions. Rather, it provides a framework and an approach to social work practice. Furthermore, as I argue next, focusing on gratitude as a virtue as opposed to service as a value/principle/standard might provide a more meaningful practice orientation.

### **Service as a Value Versus Gratitude as a Practice Virtue**

Here I suggest that the robust construct of gratitude from a virtue perspective can augment a narrowly conceived construct of service in the *Code of Ethics*. Gratitude is not delineated as a specific duty in the code. Nevertheless, service is, and it is a homologous construct to gratitude as

a virtue. The National Association of Social Workers upholds service as a concept intrinsic to the profession in its *Code of Ethics*. The concept of service is discussed in two distinct ways. First, it is discussed as a value that corresponds to the principle of helping those in need. It is secondly discussed as the concrete provision of aid and consultation to clients. When used in the latter sense, the code outlines relevant standards to be taken into consideration in social work practice, such as billing, informed consent, referral procedures, sexual misconduct with clients, and the maintenance of records. The precision with which the minutiae of social work practices are outlined suggests, and rightly so, that a few sentences defining the value of service and its corresponding principle do not suffice to guide social work practice. Nevertheless, outlining facets of social work practice might serve to lower the bar. Rather than aspiring to excellence, a checklist of guidelines might be perceived to set a ceiling of acceptable standards and disconnect service from any recognition of what one has been given.

In contrast, the virtue of gratitude rightly inculcated encourages social workers to aspire to excellence. A grateful social worker is one who perceives his or her interests as intertwined with those of clients. Additionally, instilling the virtue of gratitude goes beyond the principle of offering some portion of one's time pro bono since one will be inclined to share in God's generosity in whatever capacity possible. Additional standards outlined in the code, such as attention to client self-determination and appropriate sexual conduct, may also be redundant when gratitude is a part of the virtuous social worker's practice. The grateful social worker will strive to bring clients into the broadening gift-giving circle by safeguarding their well-being, affirming their gifts, and affording them the opportunity to be benefactors. In short, by focusing on virtues rightly fostered, many of the guidelines would be subsumed under the habituation of virtues. Focusing on virtues calls us "beyond basic obligations to each other to an endless quest toward the perfection of our being" (Meilander, 1984).

### **Concluding Remarks**

This article retrieves a virtue perspective of gratitude from Christian sources. It contends that a virtue perspective supplements a duty perspective by emphasizing joy and generosity, and that the virtue perspective has implications for social work practice, such as responsible stewardship and resiliency. The paper contrasts the practice implications of gratitude as a virtue with those of service as a value/principle/standard as explicated by the *Code of Ethics*. Rather than motivating excellent practice, service in the code seems to set a ceiling for acceptable practice. The paper argues, thus, that gratitude as a virtue might create a more inspirational guide to practice than service as described in the code.

In anticipation of Thanksgiving, a number of articles frequently appear in the popular media espousing the merits of gratitude by drawing from the recent proliferation of research on gratitude in the field of positive psychology (for examples of research on gratitude in positive psychology see Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010; Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006; Emmons & Stern, 2013; Sansone & Sansone, 2010; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). According to one such article that appeared in *The Huffington Post*, people who incorporate quotidian gratitude-promoting practices are more likely to be happy, healthy, rested, satisfied, and optimistic as compared to people who do not incorporate such activities into their daily lives (Robbins, 2011). The article then delineated a set of three practices that readers can incorporate into their lives to embody gratitude: (1) keep a daily journal of three things for which one is grateful, (2) tell partners, spouses, and friends something appreciated about them each day, (3) recognize something of which one is proud each day. These practices set the stage for grateful behaviors and attitudes.

As I reflect on my time in the Peace Corps, I think of the limitations of conceptualizing gratitude as “service,” and I wish that I had incorporated gratitude-promoting practices, such as those mentioned above, at the beginning of my tenure as a volunteer. My time abroad was not merely about helping those in need; it was about opening myself up to others and touching others’ lives. In this deeply moving exchange, gratitude served as the conduit. Community members were grateful for my presence, and I was grateful for their generosity. At first, it is perhaps true that I was merely going through the motions, or complying with a duty framework, in terms of expressing gratitude for the chicken feet and the marinated pig intestines that were served to me. Over time, my dutiful expression of gratitude evolved into the genuine sense of joyful thanksgiving as I realized the sacrifice and the intent behind the gifts.

There is a much beloved piece of wood that sits on my bookshelf on which the neighborhood children wrote, “*Por eso amistad como la de nuestra querida Samantha no se encuentra en el mundo*” (For a friendship like the friendship with our beloved Samantha is not one you can find just anywhere in the world) and signed their names in the now faded ink. In terms of monetary value, the wood is worth very little, but the intent of the children and the joy with which I received it still fills me with joy. Memories such as this one reflect a thick virtue perspective of gratitude, one that expands on a duty perspective and supersedes service. ❖

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# The Virtue of Generosity

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*Generosity is a complex and often misunderstood virtue. Its complete meaning is rarely fully explored in the literature which leaves one to make simple assumptions about its parameters and depth. This article offers a fuller description of the virtue, tracing its history and meaning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to today. It also explores differing views of the virtue and challenges with it. The article suggests three practices that flow from the virtue of generosity and discusses how these practices might change one's approach to his/her work as a Christian social worker. Ethical issues related to the virtue of generosity and the three suggested practices are also explored.*

**O**N CHRISTMAS EVE, 2011, A REMARKABLE STORY WAS FEATURED IN *Parade Magazine* (Braestrup, 2011). The story highlighted Deb Shearer, a mother who lost her son in an accident and wanted to donate a kidney as an act to help her family and herself heal from this terrible loss. What resulted from her gift was a chain of kidney donors all donating to other strangers, thereby called a living donor chain. The chain was named George's Chain of Life after Deb's son. What motivates someone to be part of a living donor chain? Many of these donors had loved ones who were in need of a kidney but they themselves were not a match. What caused these individuals to go a step further and donate to a complete stranger who was a match? Is this, as indicated in the story, an act of generosity?

Though the act of donating an organ to a stranger seems pretty remarkable, there may be countless examples of ways people engage in acts of generosity. For example, there is renewed interest in "suspended coffees," the idea of which centers around "paying it forward" by paying for a cup of coffee to be given to someone, sometime who needs it. On a small scale, it allows people to practice acts of generosity to those who are unknown and unseen. (See <https://www.facebook.com/SuspendedCoffees> for more information).

This article explores the virtue of generosity by tracing the history and conceptions of the word from the 16th century until today. We present specific actions which we believe are connected to early Christian understandings of the word and discuss how these actions are part of one's character. We also consider how these actions might contribute to professional social work practice.

## **Defining Generosity**

Collett and Morrissey (2007) state that generosity can be conceptualized as the “disposition of freely giving ones’ time, talents, and treasures to others” (p. 23). Generosity is more than just pro-social behavior, which is behavior that benefits others and has as its primary goal the well-being of others (p. 4). Generosity has connotations of “noble and magnanimous motivations... freely giving assistance to others” (p. 23). Generosity can be helpful to groups or individuals and may foster “reciprocity, cooperation, and benefit the common good” (p. 23). For our purposes, we want to keep as broad a definition of generosity as possible. This is due in part to what we believe today is a very narrow view of generosity, usually conceptualized as being solely about giving away money. Furthering this point, the theologian Martin E. Marty claims that generosity as a term is not in most theological dictionaries. Most dictionaries include the word stewardship, which is a “useful term” in Marty’s words, but mainly is used in an attempt to “pry ‘time, talents, and treasure’ from believers who are believed to be stingy” (p. 13). Marty is uneasy with what he claims is a narrow understanding of stewardship. The biblical story shows the generosity of God who “created the cosmos out of chaos—something God did not have to do but chose to do as a generous expression” (p. 13). Thus, we prefer Spencer’s (2010) broader definition of generosity as “the predisposition to love open-handedly” (p. 158).

## **The Story of Generosity**

Conceptualizing “generosity” and gift giving is not an easy task; though it might appear so on the surface. After all, isn’t it obvious what a gift is? Moreover, though generosity is usually seen as a good thing, has being generous always been perceived as positive? How have people thought about generosity over time? Is it something that we as human beings must do or is it an act to which only truly remarkable people can aspire, such as the ones mentioned in the opening story?

## **Philosophical and Theological Conceptions of Generosity**

The question of how to live faithfully and generously with one’s possessions is more ancient than Christianity, arising from what Wheeler (2010) calls the “origin of all religion, rooted in the human sense of dependency and awe” (p. 85). This sense of awe and gratefulness begs Christians to consider what God asks of us in terms of how to relate generously with God and others.

From the perspective of the Christian tradition, generosity is the crux of the Gospel message, as Christ freely gives His life so that others might be saved (Wheeler, 2010). Christians in turn must grapple with this gift and find a way to practice within their own lives what God’s generosity

means. But, that is also the paradox; this “free gift” does not obligate the receiver so much as draw us into goodness, “to fall in love with grace and thus to delight in sharing its work” (Wheeler, 2010, p. 88). Consequently, how can generosity be internalized and sustained without it becoming an obligation? Throughout history Christian scholars have tried to address this paradox of the gift. They have been aided by a rich scriptural tradition that suggests that giving is a central part of discipleship from the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) to the admonition in Acts that it is better to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). In addition, early Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Aquinas tried to illuminate how generosity is an integral part of human flourishing. The following paragraphs summarize some of their work while also tracing the origins of the word “generosity” and how we have come to understand it today.

According to the *Science of Generosity Project* at the University of Notre Dame, the modern English word “generosity” stems from the Old French word, *genereux*; this definition is part of the root genus meaning “kin” or “clan.” Most recorded English uses of the word generosity up until the 16th century reflect an aristocratic sense of being of noble birth or lineage (University of Notre Dame, 2009, “An Etymology of the Word”, para. 1).

During the 17th century, however, the word became more strongly associated with character traits assigned to the ideals of the noble class, such as “gallantry, courage, strength, richness, gentleness, and fairness” (University of Notre Dame, 2009, “An Etymology of the Word”, para. 2). Later, during the 18th century, the definition of generosity evolved to its common interpretation today, meaning “open-handedness and liberality in the giving of money and possessions to others” (University of Notre Dame, 2009, “An Etymology of the Word”, para. 3).

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle suggests that to lead fully human lives, human beings need opportunities to activate their generosity. Generosity frees one to be magnanimous. Aristotle emphasized the importance of having some sort of “external good” in order to be able to give through one’s own initiative. He described the “magnanimous man” as one who is happy to help others and takes risks for good causes. Aristotle concluded that a generous person does not give indiscriminately, but gives in a way that is “good and fine;” this requires giving to the right people, in the right amounts, at the right time with pleasure and without looking out for oneself (Irwin, 1987).

Aquinas furthers Aristotle’s work by focusing on how the freedom from attachment to money and possessions makes possible the good use of those external goods. Because Aquinas relates generosity to charity and magnanimity, his account of magnanimity in *Summa Theologica* is an important place to start in explicating his thoughts on generosity (Pegis, 1997). The heart of Aquinas’ account of generosity is found in his discussion of outward acts of charity and magnanimity. These acts are significant because they are a way of being conformed to God; human beings are called to respond in gratitude to God’s

love by loving God and one another. In acts of giving and charity, we seek to do good to others to emulate the good that God has done for us (Keys, 2006).

While he was influenced by Aristotle's work, Aquinas's work is differentiated slightly from Aristotle's characterization of magnanimity. In Aristotle's view, the magnanimous person's signature virtue is an "excellence that disposes a person to do good [to others] on a large scale" (Keys, 2006, p. 146). Yet Aristotle is preoccupied with nobility and honor that makes complex the motivations for being a magnanimous person. One's generosity thus flows from that magnanimity. Aquinas' account differs in that he judges that the magnanimous person's "whole attention is taken up with the goods of the community and with God" (Keys, 2006, p. 149) and less concerned with honor and nobility. While Aquinas' account gives us reason to believe that generosity is a virtue to which one should aspire in order to contribute to human flourishing, others find the concept of generosity complicated and perhaps impossible to internalize as a character trait.

Post-modern French philosopher Jacques Derrida provides another perspective on the notion of gifts and generosity. Derrida asserts that giving is *impossible* (Diprose, 2002). As soon as something is recognized as a gift, it obligates the receiver in some way and thus collapses and changes the act of generosity into a relationship of economy and exchange. According to Derrida, a gift is *aporia*—confusing and conflicting in nature. Derrida furthers this idea with the notion that the gift is only possible if it goes unrecognized by the donor and person doing the giving. He questions whether giving, in some ways, is even possible without entering into a circle of exchange that turns the gift into a debt to be returned (Freibach-Heifetz, 2008).

In contrast to Derrida, philosopher Emanuel Levinas offers a critique of dominant paradigms of generosity that suggest that generosity is impossible. He states that these paradigms are insufficiently unconditional and betray expectations of reciprocity. Levinas insists that true generosity does not differentiate between more or less deserving recipients nor does it give in the expectation of return. It is an "unconditional open-ness" to the other. In fact, Levinas's work on exile, hospitality, and welcoming the other touches implicitly on the act of generosity and its power to provide "the other" with a home. An encounter with the poor, destitute—or anyone constituting "the other"—can move a person out of their self-absorbed world and expel them from their "at-home-ness" in the world (Doukhan, 2010, p. 243). One sees their responsibility for their brother and their position vis-a-vis the other. This dislocation or "exile" can be an opportunity for courageously acting generously to welcome the other.

Finally, Spencer (2010) suggests that we can love well by keeping gifts in motion, a type of circular generosity (p. 165). We need compassionate imagination and empathy to be generous towards people we do not know. It is easy to love and give to our friends and family. However, practicing loving open-handedly with strangers or the other is different, a true test

of generosity. Spencer's conceptualization is similar to other paradigms that suggest that generosity is not necessarily based on reciprocity or an economy of exchange but based on an open-ness to others.

### **Generosity and Its Relationship to Other Virtues**

According to Spencer (2010), love is the parent virtue of generosity (p. 160). Generosity is also connected to other virtues such as charity, liberality, magnanimity, and hospitality (Frank, 2004; Comte-Sponville, 2002; Pegis, 1997). Comte-Sponville (2002) describes generosity as the "virtue of giving" and defines it as being at the "crossroads of two other Greek virtues, magnanimity and liberality" (p. 93). According to Konyndyk DeYoung (2009) "magnanimous people concern themselves with achieving great and hard-won acts of virtue as something which God has called them...magnanimous people radiate God's beauty and goodness in the world" (p. 65). Liberality is freedom and specifically "freedom from attachment to money and whatever money can buy" (Konyndyk DeYoung, 2009, p. 101). Therefore generous people are those who act freely according to God's call to pursue goodness.

In contrast to Aquinas, Machan (1998) argues that charity should be distinguished from generosity because it is something that is brought about from a sense of duty. He goes on to say that "a duty is an action that is morally prescribed, a matter of a rule of law that one must explicitly know before one can follow it" (p. 2). Generosity, on the other hand, is something that comes out of our character and is therefore spontaneous (p. 2). It is not "calculating" and does not expect a gift in return (p. 3).

### **Historical Institutionalization of Generosity**

A good place to start in examining the historical significance and understanding of generosity is Veyne's (1990) book, *Bread and Circuses*, which explores the role of generosity in Greek and Roman society and more narrowly the concept of Euergetism, or the giving of an individual to a community. Veyne (1990) asks why gifts to the community and acts of patronage towards the city have such a large life in the ancient world. For example, in Roman culture, every local notable was required in some way to show generosity to the people. The senators of Rome provided games to the people; their practice of gift giving to their supporters and their soldiers effectively became an open form of early political corruption. The emperor himself guaranteed cheap bread and gladiatorial games to the people. The extent of such gifts comprise a "confused mass of miscellaneous forms of behavior" (Veyne, 1990, p. 5) that included presents in the form of games, parties, community banquets, mentioning one's servants in one's will, or constructing buildings, many of which still stand today as records of the "importance" of public acts of generosity towards "the people."

The giving of gifts was popular and institutionalized in other ways in Roman society. Gift giving could also include pious and charitable works, redistribution through taxation, aid to the poor, and material goods, services, and forms of entertainment. Indeed, the Emperor gave circuses to the people partly to keep the people's loyalty. Thus, the motives for this "generosity" included careerism, paternalism, and corruption. It could also stem from a fear of hostile demonstrations, or in its purest form, of course, actual generosity.

The "free" born rich were naturally required to do more than the others, not only because they had the means but also because their "quality as men who were completely human" imposed on them a duty to be responsive most to human need (Veyne, 1990, p. 7). Thus, both the culture of the time and institutionalized policy deemed it necessary to share with others who were "less fortunate." Clearly, generosity as a virtue and accompanying actions had a place in the Roman and Athenian context, though the individual motivations for such actions might be in dispute.

To further this idea that within ancient cultures, generosity to the poor was a public endeavor, Ierley (1984) explores the beginnings of "welfare" in Athenian and Roman culture. As early as 400 BC there is documentation that Athenian society had a system in place for providing for those who were indigent through age or infirmity. Some of the institutionalized forms of aid included public pensions granted to veterans and publicly subsidized work programs. Under Themistocles, there came about an ancient version of work relief, which helped with rising unemployment rates and rates of poverty. Pericles, who succeeded Themistocles, also enlarged upon this process, institutionalizing various forms of supporting the poor. He used public works on a massive scale which thus secured his power and the loyalty of indigent groups. In spite of this care and generosity extended to the poor, Ierley writes that *who* was eligible for aid was also simultaneously contested, with the welfare rolls being "thinned" to include only citizens and others who were proven to be truly "indigent." Again, the critique of outdoor relief in the Athenian context was that it obligated the receivers to those in power, thus securing the power and authority of those making the laws.

Similarly, Ierley contends that up to the Middle Ages, England had some sort of procedure in place to deal with the poor. For example, the feudal system obligated landowners to care for those in their stead, providing help in times of need and caring for people who were ill or aging. However, with the loosening of feudal law, the beneficiaries also became victims because they lost any security against indigence, aging, or infirmity since there was no longer any obligation of the landowner to care for people working their land.

Moreover, after the plague, laborers became scarce and had a stronger bargaining position, thus changing relationships between workers and owners. However, as these relationships evolved, policy was passed to try to control labor's power. A group of 1351 ordinances was the first step

toward the English welfare system that attempted to deal with vagrants and the poor. Those who tried to scam the state were dealt with harshly.

During the Elizabethan era, some provision was made to put the poor to work in their homes as payment for their “welfare.” This era appointed the most comprehensive policies to date, appointing overseers of the poor, putting poor children to work as apprentices, making the adult poor work and providing care for the aged and infirm.

Modeled on English poor laws, local and some state governing bodies created early policies to deal with poor people living in their communities. One means was to push them west where land was cheap and plentiful. Some communities only took care of people from their jurisdictions; others paid people to care for the aged and infirm and poor no matter who they were. The United States also established outdoor relief (payment directly to) and indoor relief (almshouses, poorhouses, etc.). During the 19th century, there was a growth in indoor relief, with almshouses being established in various areas. However, most closed in the early part of 20th century, with the advent of the New Deal and development of the modern social welfare system. While this history might remind us of the virtue of charity, these examples speak to how systems of giving and sharing were in place throughout early western civilization.

As described in the above examples, generosity can shape the structure of social relationships, between senators and citizens, between owners and laborers. Contemporary philosophical discussions of generosity were sparked by Mauss (1967) in his examination of the giving customs of “ancient” societies and how these exchanges shape relationships. In his work, Mauss (1967) concluded that giving and gifts actually imposed a system of exchange on communities. Gifts are exchanged in a context where accepting gifts and reciprocity are conceived as commitments that clearly establish relationships and even hierarchies between actors. Mauss’s discussion of the nature of gifts and giving prompted interdisciplinary discussions of the gift’s nature, with anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, and economists weighing in on giving and the nature of generosity. As mentioned earlier, though the definition of a gift might seem self-evident, it has not always been that simple. Thus, it is helpful to understand how these conceptions have changed over time and influenced our current practices of giving and sharing.

### **Generosity in Social Work Practice**

As social work professionals we must consider whether and how the virtue of generosity and the actions we describe below could shape our work. According to Frank (2004), generosity is integral to the practice of medicine in the 21st century. He states that relationships between “people who are suffering bodily ills” and others who “have the skills to relieve this suffering and the grace to welcome those who suffer” are fundamental to

medicine, the latter being at the heart of “medical generosity: the grace to welcome those who suffer” (p. 1). The profession of social work is similar in its call to help those in need and this calls us to explore how we, too, demonstrate generosity in our work. Frank (2004) goes on to say that beyond new treatments and medical technology, “medicine is people in a room together, acting toward each other with varying degrees of generosity” (p. 2).

Frank’s framing of the practice of medicine as being fundamentally rooted in the virtue of generosity is similar to how we are framing our understanding of generosity as integral to the practice of social work. It is one rooted in welcome, forgiveness, and a giving of one’s self. Thus, in this section we explore three practices for social work that flow from the virtue of generosity: hospitality, forgiveness, and the giving of material aid. We have selected these practices based on our understanding of generosity through the broad definition in which we have chosen to frame this article.

### **Hospitality**

Scholars have begun the work of re-examining traditional Christian understandings of hospitality and how these understandings are different from how hospitality is often understood today (Koenig, 1985; Nouwen, 1975; Oden, 2001; Pohl, 1999; Russell, 2009; Sutherland, 2006). Oden (2001) defines hospitality as “the welcoming of the stranger” (p. 13). This definition mirrors biblical understandings of the practice (Deuteronomy 1:16-17, NIV). This “stranger” is key to our understanding of the practice and how it connects to the virtue of generosity as the people and situations in which we are called to practice hospitality involve sharing and connecting apart from the terms we usually set (Burwell & Huyser, 2013). This is also very similar to how Arber and Gallagher (2009) describe generosity, “(it) is not about the needs and interests of the host but rather it is about responding to the needs of the guest” (p. 778). It requires coping with individuals, “including guests who may disrupt and demand” (Frank, 2004, p. 2). This can be challenging but encourages us to rely on generosity as a practice of loving with “the extension of an open hand” (Spencer, 2010, p. 163).

The action of hospitality also clearly aligns with how we think about generosity as a spontaneous act flowing from one’s character. Oden (2001) states, “hospitality is not so much a singular act of welcome as it is a way, an orientation that attends to otherness, listening and learning, valuing and honoring” (p. 14). This “orientation” is part of who we are and how we act when we are generous people practicing hospitality.

### **Forgiveness**

Frank (2004) states that generosity at first is about “welcome: a hospitality that offers whatever the host has that would meet the need of the

guest” (p. 2). Yet, because what one offers is always inadequate and can never completely meet the person’s needs, the generous welcome always “contains a plea for forgiveness” (p.2). The basic concept of forgiveness, the sharing of love among those who have been forgiven themselves, not only marks how we as Christians are called to live through a life of gratitude but also how we are called to live generously because we have been given so much through the gift of Christ. Nouwen (1997) especially focuses on the connection we make between forgiveness and generosity in his meditations calling for us to accept forgiveness so we can in turn give it to others and grow together in love. Feenstra (2002) says, “just as persistent refusal to forgive others shows that we have not been forgiven by God, so too willingness to forgive—or at least to work toward forgiveness—is a good indication that God’s forgiveness has taken root in us” (p. 5). This notion of generosity taking root in one implies a strong connection to our earlier discussion on forming a person, as Aristotle states, to act from, not simply according to, virtue. As mentioned earlier generosity sits at the crossroads between magnanimity and liberality. Magnanimous people are those who “radiate God’s beauty and goodness in world” (Konyndyk DeYoung, 2009, p. 65). The same can be said for generous people in their expressions of forgiveness.

### **Giving**

While we suggest that generosity is not only about giving away money or time or assistance, the giving of material aid is still integral to the concept of generosity. Giving involves a sacrifice on the part of the giver. This means giving something away that one possesses; it also means as the giver, not setting the terms of the generous act. We might not want to give certain things away, but those might be things that the receiver needs and part of acting generously is allowing the recipient to determine part of the gift. We do not set the conditions for release or return of the gift; we give where we see a need.

As mentioned earlier, in the Christian context the word “stewardship” is often used to encourage Christians to share their resources. However, this practice is not as easy as it might seem. In a recent study on the giving trends of American Christians, researchers Christian Smith and Michael Emerson conclude that as a group, American Christians are less generous than some other groups and that they give away relatively little money to religious and/or other purposes (2008, p. 3). Yet, as a group, American Christians have a lot of money and many belong to churches that stress tithing (giving away 10% of one’s income) and express a desire to see the “hungry fed, the church strengthened, and the poor raised to enjoy lives of dignity and hope” (Smith & Emerson, 2008, p. 3).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus discusses the importance of generosity, and acting generously relative to the resources that one possesses. In the parable

of the poor widow who gives her last remaining coins as an offering, we see that Jesus prefers her gift, though it is a pittance, over that of the rich man who gives much, but not as much as the widow relative to her poverty. He uses this as an example of the true nature of generosity (Luke, 21:3-4).

Spencer's (2010) reflections on giving can provide some direction for putting giving into action. He suggests that true generosity is similar to the "gift economy," an economic cycle that sets gifts in motion without knowing if they'll be reciprocated. Spencer challenges the giver to let go and trust God to complete the circle once we give something away. An important element of giving is to allow the receiver to decide if the "generous gesture feels generous" (p. 165).

### **Implications for Christian Social Workers**

So what implications does generosity have for Christian social workers? How might generosity be evident in our practice and how might we be the recipients of this generosity? What ethical issues or dilemmas might generosity raise in our professional practice? This section will explore these questions and implications.

Christian social workers who show acts of generosity through the practices noted above—hospitality, forgiveness, giving—may be motivated to do so as a result of their faith. Just as Aquinas argues that human beings respond in gratitude to God's love by loving God and loving one another, Christian social workers may show love God and one another—clients, co-workers—in response to our gratitude for God's love. For the Christian social worker, this response of gratitude may fundamentally shift how we view our work. If we are responding, for example, out of gratitude to God's love it may undoubtedly impact how generously we interact with the client that frustrates us or takes up more hours in the day than we had planned. It may also impact how we communicate with our co-workers in times of stress or disagreement. Finally, it may impact the approach we take to navigating the systems and structures that we deal with each day, whether that is with more patience or more persistence to create change. If, as Aquinas argues, our "whole attention is taken up with the goods of the community and with God" (Keys, 2006, p. 149) it will quite likely impact examples like these and more in our professional work.

In addition to how Christian social workers might practice differently in response to our gratitude to God for God's generosity to us, we might also practice differently when we have a deep sense of receiving someone else's generosity. Perhaps we have received generosity in our personal lives, through our educational training, through the actions of a supervisor, or even a client. Christian social workers who themselves have been on the receiving end of an act of generosity and have reflected on this as such may also practice generosity differently. Christian social workers who have experienced the

power of forgiveness may practice forgiveness in their professional lives more readily. Or Christian social workers who have received deeply hospitable welcome may do more to create hospitable places in their practice settings.

As Christian social workers consider the ways we might be changed as a result of our response to God's generosity to us or as a result of receiving another's generosity, we may face ethical issues or dilemmas. As we consider the virtue of generosity in our professional practice it is necessary to consider how this virtue may conflict with our professional commitments to appropriate boundaries and use of power.

Machan (1998) states that generosity ceases to be a virtue when appropriate boundaries are not placed around it (p. 13). This concern may be especially important for social workers to consider in their practice. The challenge becomes how to set boundaries when something is truly part of your character. Think back to the actions we described above, hospitality, forgiveness, and giving. Social workers are taught how to set appropriate boundaries in service. Social workers would not, for example, invite a client into his/her home if he or she needed a place to stay. A hospitable person might, however. Can one turn on or turn off a generous character if it is truly part of who he or she is? This could pose some challenges for social workers if we intend to pursue the development of a generous character or seek to offer this as a gift to the profession.

In a similar way we need to explore the question of power and power dynamics with client groups. Again, as social workers we are placed in positions of power when we work with our clients. We take a number of steps in our practice to bridge this power differential but still need to recognize that it does exist. Even if we are practicing the virtue of generosity through our formed character the client systems we encounter may not be doing the same. This could result in a number of ethical issues, including, but not limited to, imposing generous behavior on our clients which results in an obligation to respond, acting generously toward our clients without actually offering them what they need, or having clients become dependent upon us or feel shamed by what we offer through what we consider to be generous actions. Christian social workers must consider and explore these complex ethical issues related to issues of power especially if we believe we are called to be generous people through our social work practice.

Finally, scholars have not ruled out that the giver could receive something from giving (Machan, 1998; Smith & Hill, 2009) and some, in fact, have linked tangible benefits to practices of generosity including increased prosperity and numerous psychological benefits (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2007; Brooks, 2007). Not only are these challenges present in the practice of giving, they are also present in the practice of forgiveness. Yancey (1997) points out that "we forgive not merely to fulfill some higher law of morality; we do it for ourselves" (p. 99). Social workers must be mindful of how these intrinsic rewards could impact the ethics of our practice.

The virtue of generosity is rich and complex. Evidence of it is found in profound acts of giving, as shown in the story of Deb Shearer and the living donor chain, with deep underlying meaning. These acts are significant yet carry implications when applied to our work as professional social workers—implications which must be weighed based on our commitment to ethical practice. ❖

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# Justice as a Core Virtue for Social Work Practice

*Linda Plitt Donaldson & Lynn Milgram Mayer*

*This article argues that justice should be considered as one of the core virtues to be cultivated in social work. After tracing the evolution of the term justice from ancient to contemporary times, the authors review social work conceptions of justice at both theory and practice levels, then offer ideas on how to cultivate justice as a virtue in social work students. The authors conclude with the challenges to cultivating justice and implications for research and practice.*

*‘What does the Lord require of you but to do justice,  
and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God’  
Micah 6:8*

**T**HE RESURGENCE OF INTEREST IN VIRTUE ETHICS HOLDS PROMISE FOR BOTH the social work profession and Christianity, given the focus of both traditions on doing right actions. Social workers are often considered moral agents of society due to the nature of the services they provide and the vulnerable conditions of the populations they serve (Joseph, 1983; Chris, 2005). Webb (2010) indicates that “doing the right thing in social work is not a matter of applying a moral rule..., but rather the worker—as-agent expressed in the range and subtlety of use of the virtues” (p. 116). Similarly, people actively engaged in a Christian faith hold themselves to high ethical and moral standards. Christians are called to emulate Christ, to cultivate gifts of the spirit, including the virtues of wisdom, knowledge, faith, hope, and love, and to give witness to their faith through service to others and action for justice.

With increased interest in virtues, it is critical to consider what virtues are most relevant for social work practice. We argue that justice should be one of the core virtues cultivated in emerging social work professionals, and that Christian social workers are dually bound by the profession and their Christian identity to do justice. To make this case, we first define justice and subsequently present the classical and contemporary understandings of justice and their influence on the social work perspectives of justice. Then

we discuss methods for cultivating justice in social workers. Finally, we conclude with a discussion on some of the challenges of developing justice as a virtue in social work and we identify the need for more research on the pedagogical and ethical aspects associated with cultivating the virtue of justice in social work.

### **Defining Justice as a Virtue**

Understanding the meaning of justice as a virtue is a complicated process. Banks and Gallagher (2009) posit that of all the virtues, justice is one of the more complex ones to understand. They attribute this difficulty to the fact that justice has several different meanings and interpretations resulting from different ideological and theoretical frameworks. Hursthouse (1999) goes so far as to say that the term, justice, has been “corrupted” (p. 5) by its vagueness. McCormick (2003) argues that confusion regarding the meaning of justice may reflect fundamental disagreements about its meaning.

Understanding justice as a virtue is further complicated by the fact that rarely is justice discussed as a personal virtue, i.e., a character trait that describes one’s internal state. Justice is typically conceptualized in one of three ways: 1) as an attribute of society, i.e., the arrangement of social institutions and their qualitative impact on human interactions; 2) as an attribute of a particular action, i.e., the extent to which the action conforms with societal norms as to what is *good* or *right* within a particular context; or 3) as an attribute of a social or legal contract, whether a contract represents a fair arrangement between parties.

In considering justice as a virtue, one must consider it as both personal virtue and a social virtue. It is personal in that it requires a disposition to the good; it is social in that it is manifest in one’s interactions with self and others, and in how one pursues the arrangements of social institutions and communities. Solomon (2001) speaks to the dualistic nature of the virtue of justice when he argues that it is exhibited by both interior thoughts and feelings and exterior behaviors and practices. Plato (2006) addresses justice as a personal virtue when he states that if an individual is just, it means that his or her soul is guided by a vision of the good. For Christians, God is the ultimate “good,” the infinite source of truth, light, and freedom. Therefore, for Christians, justice as a personal virtue might be defined as one having an interior state that is guided by the vision of God. But for the just Christian, an interior state of connectedness with God is insufficient without actions. “For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead” (James 2:26, New American Bible). So Christianity affirms justice as both a personal virtue and a social virtue. Interactions that reflect *justice* are relevant for social work practice at all levels, and these will be discussed at greater length, after presenting the classical and contemporary concepts of justice.

### **Classical Perspectives of Justice as a Virtue**

To help sort out the complex nature of justice as a virtue, it is useful to first examine the meaning of justice from three classical perspectives: Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. Plato's ideas on justice derived from his vision of reality. As a theoretical philosopher and rationalist, he believed that knowledge of reality came from knowledge of forms and reason: "any particular aspect of reality was [a manifestation] of an abstract and perfect or ideal form of reality" (Zucker & Borg, 2005, p. 144). To Plato, "all good things possess a common element or exemplify a common property or pattern" (Slote, 2010, p. 23). Plato saw virtue as excellence in the knowledge of the good. To Plato, "the highest good is some self-subsisting, eternal absolute that causes the goodness in all those lesser things" (Fitterer, 2008, p. 11). Through virtue, the person was disposed to the good life and to happiness (Banks & Gallagher, 2009; Martin, 2007). Virtue is evident when there is balance between passion and reason (Solomon, 2001). To evaluate an individual's actions, it was necessary to look to the individual's soul (Slote, 2003). In Plato's vision, "virtue is enough ... good men need no laws" (O'Neill, 1996, p. 9). If the individual's soul or the state is just, then no actions are prescribed for either entity because they cannot do something wrong (White, 2008).

Plato's ideas regarding virtue led to the development of the four Cardinal Virtues: bravery/courage, temperance/discipline, justice, and wisdom. Justice, in *The Republic*, was an overarching virtue of individuals. Plato expanded the meaning of justice by equating it with human well-being (Reisch, 2002). Plato's concept of justice was "all-embracing, in that he defines justice as harmony in the soul" (Banks & Gallagher, 2009, p. 162). Justice existed when the other three virtues (bravery/courage, temperance/discipline, and wisdom) were in harmony (Banks & Gallagher, 2009). For a society to be just, there needed to be harmony between reason, spirit, and appetite (Reisch, 2002). Plato's ideals did not, however, speak to a belief in equality; rather, he accepted that unequals should be treated unequally as class distinctions were necessary (Reisch, 2002).

In Aristotle's view, many important virtues were "excellences of the human soul" (Fitterer, 2008, p. 17). These virtues needed to be cultivated for individual happiness (Martin, 2007). He classified virtues into two categories: moral/character and intellectual (Russell, 2009; van Hooft, 2006; Webb, 2010). Of all these virtues, it has been argued that justice was first to Aristotle because it was the only virtue directed toward others and it is thought to include all the other virtues (Gardner, 1984; MacIntyre, 1988; McCormick, 2003; White, 2008). Aristotle's views on practical reasoning influence his thoughts on justice (MacIntyre, 1988). As such, an individual who had complete virtue related to justice would choose to act in a just manner knowing that the choice is made for its intrinsic good (Fitterer, 2008). The virtuous individual would see what was just and act accordingly

(Fitterer, 2008; Slote, 2010). Therefore, justice referred to the “moral state of the agent” (Gardner, 1984, p. 405).

Aristotle also conceptualized justice to go beyond the individual's internal state to encompass just social arrangements (Banks & Gallagher, 2009). The just individual would maintain focus on both social and individual justice: “the virtue with which the good man discharges his social roles carries him forward finally to the perfecting of his own soul in contemplative activity” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 108). Social arrangements were critical in Aristotle's view, as he put more emphasis on the good of the city-state than the good of the individual. Yet, at the same time, he saw that the city-state and the individual needed to be in a reciprocal relationship (McBeath & Webb, 2002; Webb, 2010). As such, to Aristotle, “justice was the first virtue of political life” (Gardner, 1984, p. 394). Justice as a virtue was then supported by laws, and divided into two different concepts: particular justice and universal justice (Banks & Gallagher, 2009; Gardner, 1984). Particular justice existed along with other virtues and universal justice was an overarching virtue (Banks & Gallagher, 2009).

Aquinas built on Aristotle's ideas and added in a concentration on Christian doctrine. His ideas included a focus on the principle of love of self and neighbor. His conceptualization of virtue expanded from the four Cardinal virtues to include the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (van Hooft, 2006). He attempted to organize the virtues as acquired (Cardinal virtues) and as infused (theological virtues) (Irwin, 2005). Justice, an acquired virtue, was achieved through habituation and practice, while infused virtues were derived from God. All other virtues were subordinate to these virtues. Aquinas believed that to act virtuously, it was necessary to act on the Cardinal virtues, including justice. Similar to Aristotle, Aquinas defined “justice as that virtue which is directed toward others” (Gardner, 1984, p. 402). Aquinas then proceeded to reinterpret Aristotle with the incorporation of the theological virtues into his configuration of justice as a moral relationship (Gardner, 1984). In Aquinas' definitions, justice included looking at others as individuals and as part of a community (Gardner, 1984). To Aquinas, justice “[ordered] human life toward the common good” (Gardner, 1984, p. 403). In his view, justice would have trumped the other virtues because concern for the common good was more important than concern for the individual good of one person.

Aquinas then broadened his ideas of justice further. Kaczor and Sherman (2009) describe his views of justice as incorporating three perspectives: justice as a general virtue, justice as a Cardinal virtue, and justice as a part of Christian life. Religion plays a central role in his conceptualization of the virtue of justice beyond the incorporation of the theological virtues. To Aquinas, “religion is a moral virtue, being that part of the cardinal virtue of justice concerned with what we owe to God in the way of honor, reverence, and worship” (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 188). Justice is then seen

as incorporating what is owed to God along with a corresponding duty to others, including the virtues of piety, observance, and giving of honor (MacIntyre, 1988).

### **Enlightenment Views of Justice**

The Enlightenment period focused on rational thought, rejected tradition and authority, and promoted emancipation on political and intellectual levels (Dupré, 2004; MacIntyre, 1988). This period began at the end of the Middle Ages and reflected a time of cultural synthesis and moral crisis; and yet, scholars have difficulty defining it due to conflicting opinions and divergent views of its legacy (Dupré, 2004; Edelstein, 2010; Frazer, 2010; MacIntyre, 1988). Some argue that the Enlightenment marks the founding of modernity (Edelstein, 2010). Dupre (2004) describes the period as a time of “self-consciousness” wherein people were more reflective and critical and, therefore, more likely to be suspect of tradition. Sen (2009) finds it to be a time of reasoning and public discussion. During this period, justice was seen as an issue of rights, and the idea that human rights were universal was prevalent (Bergman, 2011; Reisch, 2011). In this period, the virtue of justice focused on entitlements in society due “to the establishment of an arrangement where each has what is due” (Barden, 1999, p. 19). Honneth (1987) argues that this time period is different from others because of “its imminent relation to a criterion of rational validity which acts as a standard against which opinions and convictions can be upheld by rational examination” (p. 693).

Hobbes’ thoughts on justice were considered to focus on the identification of perfect justice rather than engaging in comparisons between just and unjust societies, and his views were thought to have given rise to the “‘contractarian’ mode of thinking” (Sen, 2009, p.6). Hobbes, in his discussion of the natural condition, argued that entitlements exist, but that they were created by a human decision, i.e., an agreement or contract. Through the first agreement, a context for entitlements arises in society (Barden, 1999). Hobbes differed from Aristotle: “in the Hobbesian image civil society is the state and is understood as a universal agreement to submit to authority whence derives laws and justice; in the Aristotelian image humans emerge within society and human society already is a web of entitlements” (Barden, 1999, p. 32). Here, one begins to see a shift away from rights and responsibilities of individuals within their communities to a focus on the rights of individuals as more important than the rights or well-being of the community.

Hume, an Enlightenment philosopher, continued with the period’s focus on practical rationality (MacIntyre, 1988). Frazer (2010) describes him as a sentimentalist who believed that moral actions are motivated by both reason and passion in a state of equilibrium. Hume divided virtues

into two categories based on their origins: natural and artificial (Dupré, 2004; Frazer, 2010; MacIntyre, 1988). While natural virtues are acquired through instinct, artificial virtues are socially constructed out of need. He characterizes justice as artificial in the *Treatise*, indicating that it is not acquired directly but rather through education and is dependent on society's structure (Dupré, 2004). Justice, as an artificial virtue, implies that the members of a community have a shared reasoning about justice; when a member of the community makes a judgment about justice, that person is not just reflecting his/her individual position, but that of the majority of the community members (MacIntyre, 1988). His further writings tie justice to an individual's feelings of sympathy and attitudes of benevolence (Dupré, 2004; Frazer, 2010). And yet, he moved the idea of justice from a focus on what is good for the community to what is good for the individual, moving from justice as "human allegiance...to individual self-interest" (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 307). Frazer (2010) states, "Hume's understanding of justice...[ties] the character trait he identifies as the justice of individuals to features of the social systems under which an individual lives" (p. 67). Justice then became a question of property and the enforcement of rules related to property (Frazer, 2010; MacIntyre, 1988).

In Germany, Kant contributed to Enlightenment ideas of justice with a move away from feelings to an emphasis on norms that were universal (Dupré, 2004). Frazer (2010) identifies Kant's phrase, "*Sapere aude!* Have the courage to make use of your *own* understanding," (p.4) to be illustrative of the Enlightenment period as a whole. Solomon (2001) describes Kant as "radically individualistic in his ethics" (p. 174). His ideas were in conflict with Rousseau's thoughts about morality; while Rousseau thought people are born good and that goodness should be nurtured through education, Kant believed that people are born with an inclination toward evil (Dupré, 2004). He saw "morality as obedience to the command of reason" (Dupré, 2004, p135). Barden (1999) asserts that "to discover what is just is to discover what belongs to whom" (p. 2).

### **Contemporary Understandings of Justice**

Over time, justice has moved from the classical ideals to more teleological or utilitarian foci. Part of this shift has been attributed to a shift from the community focus of the classical theories to "individualistic conceptions of human nature and emotivist conceptions of morality" (Gardner, 1984, p. 393). The shift to the focus on the individual in justice theories mirrors the focus of society; as Lawler (2008) argues, "modern society—or at least its more sophisticated parts—is distinguished by its concern for individual dignity. Individuals demand to exist for themselves" (p. 229). As such, contemporary visions of justice have moved from good as right to good as what benefits people regardless of whether it is right (Solas, 2008b). Some

argue that the teleological emphasis leads to a conceptualization “of the idea that the end (always) justifies the means” (Slote, 2010, p. 35).

Building on these ideas, some contemporary philosophers are exploring the contrast between justice as a personal virtue and justice as a characteristic of society. White (2008) points out the reciprocal nature of the two visions of justice, but also notes that a just society does not necessarily mean that all individuals in that society are just nor does it necessarily follow that just individuals live in a just society. Solomon (2001) argues that taking the viewpoint of justice as a personal virtue helps to move justice from the theoretical, abstract realm to the personal realm of practices and personalities. He characterizes “a just life” as including deliberation and reflection as well as feeling and habit. Solomon (2001) then broadens the discussion of justice as a virtue with an acknowledgement that a just life is evidenced by “our responses to and interaction with other people” (p. 174).

The notion of justice as a personal trait has been further developed in contemporary times by Seligman’s positive psychology, which refers to “the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues” (Sheldon & King, 2001). This discipline developed from a desire to understand the full human experience and to move away from a deficit, disease model to include a focus on strengths (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). Positive psychology involves examination “of positive experiences and positive individual traits, and the institutions that facilitate their development” (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005, p. 630). Specifically, positive psychology looks at virtues as individual character traits that lead to behavioral outcomes, personal fulfillment, and achievement of the good life (Dahlsgaard et al, 2005; Miller, 2003). In fact, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) state that “good character is essential for individuals and societies to thrive” (p.118). But, unlike the philosophers, the positive psychologists see virtues as somewhat subjective (morally-neutral) instead of objective (morally-laden); in other words, virtues are defined as “what-society-considers-virtues” instead of “morally desirable traits” (Martin, 2007, p. 96).

The positive psychology focus centers on the “ubiquitous virtues” or “core virtues” (Martin, 2007). The core virtues developed from the examination of which virtues demonstrated convergence across historical periods and cultures (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). There are six core virtues (wisdom/knowledge, courage, humanity/love, justice, temperance, and transcendence) and 24 strengths; unlike the classic perspective of Aristotle where virtues are seen as integrated, all virtues in positive psychology are treated as independent entities (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). People are encouraged to develop “signature” strengths (Seligman, 2002). Justice was explicitly named in all the traditions examined (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Athenian philosophy, Christianity, Judaism,

and Islam) and is defined as “civic strengths that underlie healthy community life” (Dahlsgaard et al, 2005, p. 205). Justice encompasses three strengths: citizenship/teamwork, fairness, and leadership (Martin, 2007; Park et al, 2006).

In addition to positive psychology, contemporary views of justice have developed out of adaptations of Aquinas’s ideas regarding justice and out of the Enlightenment’s perspectives on justice and the rights of the individual (Hughson, 2010; Sen, 2009). Three dominant contemporary justice perspectives are libertarian, utilitarian, and egalitarian (Van Soest, 1994). As Powers and Faden (2006) indicate, “inequalities come in many forms” (p. 3), which has led to discussions of justice focused on issues of inequality. According to Lucas (1972):

the principles which trouble modern thinkers most in their attempts to elucidate justice are those of equality and need. Justice is not equality, but often to treat people unequally is thought to be unjust. The criterion of need is different from that of desert, but not to meet the needs of those in need is held to be unfair as well as unkind” (p. 241).

Each of these perspectives is influential today as they attempt to answer the question of how to distribute scarce resources. However, while each focuses on the distribution of resources in society, each of these perspectives looks at justice from an individual rights framework.

Libertarian views of justice, historically associated first with Spencer and Locke, are predicated on the idea that a person could have as much freedom as possible so long as the rights of others were not violated (McCormick, 2003). Three basic rights ground this perspective: the right to life, the right to liberty, and the right to property (Van Soest, 1994). Nozick supported the idea of minimal state responsibility for the protection of individuals, but this state responsibility did not extend to the need to redistribute wealth or opportunities for those in need (McCormick, 2003). Some argue that libertarian views reject the idea of social justice; instead, in this view, the allocation of resources is just if the individual is free, the state is neutral, and individual rights take precedence above the common good (Caputo, 2002).

Associated with Bentham and Mill, the utilitarian perspective of justice is thought to have been the most popular in the 20th century (Reisch, 2002). The goal of the utilitarian perspective is “to maximize the welfare of persons and society” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1024). In this perspective, “an action is right if it promotes the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Chappell, 2009, p. 98). Through the process of measurement and aggregation, it can provide systematic justification for what one ought to do (Upton, 2003). Justice, in the utilitarian perspective, involves “weighing the relative benefits and harms and ascertaining what maximizes the

greatest good for the greatest number of people” (Van Soest, 1994, p. 714). As such, this perspective does have a focus on the common good (Caputo, 2002). Moreover, by definition, efforts to maximize the good for the greatest number often leave out the populations on the margins of society, i.e., the very people about which the social work profession cares most. There is also the problem of valuing goods. MacIntyre (1997) critiques the idea of “summing goods” (p. 136); how can you place a value on happiness, fulfillment, sense of belonging, and other goods that are difficult to measure?

Egalitarian views of justice seek to address the critiques of utilitarianism by focusing on the idea of providing a minimal level of equality for all with minimal protection for the poor and marginalized (Banks & Gallagher, 2009; Caputo, 2002; McCormick, 2003). This perspective “directly challenges the assumption that society can be rightly ordered if it is based on social and economic inequalities” (Van Soest, 1994, p. 714). These views draw on the work of Rawls, who had an “intuitive idea of justice as fairness” (O’Neill, 1996, p. 47). In Rawls’ view, “in a social union participants share ends and value their common institutions and activities as good for their own sake, and such a union exists in a society when its members have a common aim of realizing their own and one another’s good according to a shared sense of justice” (Russell, 2009, p. 42). From this shared sense of justice, Rawls felt people could come together under a “veil of ignorance” to make decisions about the fair distribution of social goods. Under this veil of ignorance, people would be blind to their own social position, and therefore, in their own interest, agree to a fair distribution of social goods to ensure that all people had the social minimum. Furthermore, Rawls added, “although the distribution of income and wealth [i.e., social goods] need not be equal, it must be to everyone’s advantage” (Van Soest, 1994, p. 714).

### **Social Work Conceptions of Justice**

Because of its emphasis on equal distribution of goods and consideration of the least advantaged in society, Rawls’ notion of distributive justice has been an overwhelming influence in social work conceptions of social justice (Banerjee, 2005). Wakefield (1988) was among the first to draw on Rawls to argue for social justice as an organizing principle for the profession at all levels of practice:

Social work can be conceived as a profession engaged in alleviating deprivation in all its varieties, from economic to psychological; social workers identify with people who fall below the social minimum in any justice-related good and intervene in order to help them rise above that minimally acceptable level. (p. 205)

More recently, social workers have been incorporating notions of restorative justice (Gumz & Grant, 2009; van Wormer, 2006), human rights (Hodge, 2007; Reichert, 2006; Wronka, 2008), and explicit attention to the role of white privilege in the creation of our current unjust social arrangements (McIntosh, 2007; Van Soest & Garcia, 2003).

Scholars have begun to raise questions about whether Rawls' theory of justice is the appropriate framework for the social work profession after all. While his concept of a veil of ignorance may be a useful exercise for considering fair arrangements in society, it provides little guidance in dealing with the issues of power, politics, ideology, and irrationality that characterize many of the environments associated with structural change. In addition, critics find that the basic needs approach that characterizes distributive justice will not go far enough to promoting human flourishing to its fullest potential (Nussbaum, 2003; Sen, 1985). Banerjee (2005) argues that Rawls' revised notion of justice leaves out non-working poor adults and does not allow for the provision of remedial supports to enhance their capacities. In her application of Rawls' theory of justice to the 1996 welfare reform law, Banerjee argues that Rawls would consider "non-working poor citizens who rely on welfare [as] unworthy poor" (p. 48).

The capabilities perspective (Morris, 2002) is emerging as an alternative framework that views the fair distribution of social goods as insufficient to achieving a just society. According to the capabilities perspective, a just society would ensure that all of its members had the means and conditions necessary to fully flourish and reach their greatest potential. In this viewpoint, the social minimum of goods is a means to an end, but not the end itself. The end has only been achieved when people have access to the goods, the opportunities, and the conditions where they can fully flourish. Nussbaum (2003) identifies ten essential capabilities for human flourishing: life; health; play; control over one's body; control over one's environment; using one's senses, imagination, and thought; emotional attachment; use of practical reasoning; ability to live with concern for nature; and freedom to form relationships. Nussbaum describes these capabilities as being irreducible, and therefore, impossible to prioritize one over the other. The irreducible nature of the capabilities leads it closer to a conception of justice that implicitly recognizes the importance of community and mutual responsibility in human development that better aligns itself with a Christian conception of the reciprocal nature of a just society, where rights come with social responsibilities.

Although a great deal of complementarity exists between social work and Christian conceptions of justice, profound differences remain, a few of which will be described below. First of all, both share the belief that actions for justice are derived from the view that all people have inherent dignity and worth. For the profession, this view is rooted in a secular humanist perspective, as the profession is comprised of members from

secular and non-secular traditions. For Christians, this view is rooted in the belief that people were created by God, in God's likeness and image, and therefore, are sacred.

The profession and Christian traditions also share the value of the importance of relationships. For social work, this value is grounded in human behavior theory that speaks to the social nature of humanity and the importance of relationships to enhance human well-being. Attachment theory is a good example of a theoretical explanation for the importance of human relationships.

Christians deepen their understanding of the importance of human relationships in the theology of the Trinity, which speaks to an inter-relational God, i.e., the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Catholic theologian Todd Whitmore (2005) traces the evolution of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) over 60 years, and its growing emphasis on the social nature of human beings and their interdependence with the application of Trinitarian theology. He sums up their relationship by stating "there is no human dignity apart from the dignity we all have in relation to each other" (p.60). Catholic social teaching extends this relational notion of humanity to societal structures, and defines justice as "right relationship" whether it be in interpersonal relationships, families, communities, political spheres, economic spheres, or any dimension in which human beings should participate with others to give meaning to their lives. Whitmore argues that understanding human dignity in the context of right relationship helps to distinguish Christian thought from classical liberal social thought that tends toward a more individualistic notion of human dignity. The social work perspectives of justice that emphasize human rights and human capabilities could benefit from a relational understanding of human dignity as it deepens arguments for public policies and community change initiatives that foster interdependence and build solidarity among people.

Another example of the complementarity between social work and Christianity is the special commitment both have to people who are poor and vulnerable. The NASW Code of Ethics speaks to this in its Preamble, and the Judeo-Christian tradition has spoken about the importance of helping the poor and the oppressed for millennia. Christians look to the teachings of Jesus and his life example to understand the special responsibility we have to bring justice to people who are poor and vulnerable. Many Christians point to the story of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25: 31-46) as evidence for this special responsibility. Wolterstorff (2006) argues that the story of the last judgment has been misinterpreted by Christians as a call to charity, but that a proper reading would show that it is a call to justice. After a close analysis of the Old Testament texts on justice and New Testament texts of Jesus' teachings, Wolterstorff states "And there can be no doubt that the Old Testament writers and Jesus regarded the lifting up of the downtrodden and the incorporation of the excluded as the first

priority in the undoing of injustice and the bringing of justice” (p. 129). He says that for social workers, this includes not only alleviating suffering among people, but also loosening “the bonds that” oppress them and cause their suffering (p. 137).

The aforementioned conceptions of justice in social work focus primarily on justice as a social virtue, i.e., the characteristics of society that maximize human well-being. In fact, much of the social work literature on *justice* refers to the external manifestation of justice seen in the social, political, and economic spheres of life, with particular attention to the experiences of vulnerable and oppressed populations. There is virtually nothing in the social work literature that discusses *justice* as a personal virtue. In the Social Work Dictionary, Barker (2003) defines justice as “the principal of fairness and equity, especially in accordance with moral and ethical rightness, social standards, and law” (p. 234). Following this definition is a note to see also *social justice* and *economic justice*.

Social justice is a core value of the social work profession. The NASW Code of Ethics (1999) directs social workers to “promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients.” The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) Code of Ethics (2004) states that “social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice” (p. 1) by challenging negative discrimination, recognizing diversity, distributing resources equitably, challenging unjust policies and practices, and working in solidarity. Bisman (2004) contends that “without this emphasis on social justice, there is little if any need for social work or social workers” (p. 115). Solas (2008a) argues that justice should be “the first of the profession’s cardinal values because injustice invariably devalues all the others” (p. 133). Lundy and van Wormer (2007) assert that “the social work profession can be proud of its heritage as the only helping profession imbued with social justice as its fundamental value and concern” (p. 728).

Despite its centrality to the profession, the meaning of social justice is elusive and broadly conceived. However, social workers generally understand social justice to include addressing the inequities in the distribution of goods, services, and access to opportunities in society. The profession generally holds the view that these inequities are caused by a legacy of racism and other forms of discrimination that are embedded in the structures, institutions, and policies of society. The foundation for the profession’s understanding of social justice is grounded in the value that all people have inherent dignity and worth, and therefore social workers work for a society where this dignity and worth is recognized.

### **Social Justice at all Levels of Social Work Practice**

The social work profession has generally viewed its actions for justice in the context of macro social change. In Barker’s definition of social justice

(2003), he prescribes advocacy as the method by which social workers pursue social justice: "A key social work value, social justice entails advocacy to confront discrimination, oppression, and institutional inequities" (p. 405). In addressing the historical tension within the profession between micro and macro practice, scholars have written about the dual focus of social work, i.e., service and justice. In so doing, they have generally referred to macro practice (e.g., policy advocacy, community organizing, social action) as the profession's expression of justice (Donaldson, 2007; Figueira-McDonough, 1993; Jacobson, 2001; Schneider & Netting, 1999), whereas clinical or micro practice represented the service domain of social work. However, there is growing recognition that social justice is a relevant concept for all levels of practice, including micro-level practice.

Swenson (1998) builds on Wakefield's (1998) notion that social justice includes alleviating all forms of deprivation, including emotional deprivation. Included among the characteristics of justice-oriented clinical practice are:

1. "profound appreciation for a client's strengths, contexts, and resources" (p. 534).
2. recognition that race, gender, class, ability, sexual orientation, and other dimensions of difference are central to how clients define and give meaning to their life experience; and
3. conscious effort to redress power imbalances between clients and social workers in the helping relationship and in organizational contexts.

She identifies a number of clinical methods that are exemplars of justice-oriented clinical practice including: strengths-based practice; narrative therapy, empowerment practice, feminist practice, and ethnic-sensitive practice.

Finn and Jacobson (2008) offer a Just Practice Framework to guide action for change at all levels of practice. This framework suggests critical analyses related to the meaning, context, power, history, and possibility are necessary requirements for just practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, communities, or societies. Even macro practice methods designed to address the structural causes of injustice (e.g., policy advocacy, community organizing and development, international social development) may not reflect just processes if they do not take these concepts into consideration in their implementation.

So there is a growing awareness within the profession that *doing justice* in social work occurs on the continuum of practice methods from micro to macro. At the clinical level, social justice is primarily evidenced in the interaction of the helping relationship. For example, citing Staples in his article on anti-oppressive practice in mental health, Larson (2008) characterizes a just helping relationship as one that is "based on trust, power

sharing, informality, and collaboration, and committed to minimizing the power associated with the formal expert helping roles” (pp. 47-48). Justice-oriented macro-level practice includes the justice-oriented dimensions of the human relationship, and applies those in partnership with others to address the structural causes of poverty, racism, and other forms of injustice in our society. Some might consider macro social work as seeking a higher order of justice since it reduces the underlying causes of a vast majority of human needs.

### **Gardeners in the Vineyard: Cultivating Justice as a Virtue in Social Work**

Developing justice as a virtue is complicated for students, and teaching justice as a personal and social virtue is a challenge for social work educators. Adams (2009) notes that questions related to whether or not we can teach virtues and how to do it “are questions at least as old as Plato” (p. 99). As faculty in institutes for higher education, we could be considered gardeners in the vineyard of our institutions. Just as we are pruned by God, our mentors, and our life experiences, we prune our students for professional social work practice. (It is important to note that our students also prune us, and together we are co-learners and co-producers of knowledge in the classroom.)

If we agree with Aquinas, that justice is an acquired, not infused virtue, we believe that our students need to be taught or trained to be just. Cultivating justice as a virtue through education is a process of “deliberate molding of human character” (Blomberg, 2006, p. 92). This process must address the individual’s intellect and affect; it must strive to educate the soul’s component parts, both rational and nonrational (Homik, 1997). Aristotle claims that a virtuous life is characterized by an excellence of character evidenced by 1) a disposition toward virtue, and 2) the capacity for moral reasoning. Aristotle argues that virtue is cultivated through 1) practicing virtuous acts, i.e., developing habits of virtue, and 2) developing the intellectual and moral reasoning skills to discern the right action in a given circumstance. Radden and Sadler (2010) summarize Aristotle’s process of cultivation as being “incremental and un-heroic. It calls for attention, repetition, conscientiousness, and practice” (p. 63). For cultivating justice as a virtue there needs to be a synthesis of moral exemplars, personal experience or practice, self-reflection, and moral reasoning (Begley, 2005, p. 630).

#### **Moral Exemplars**

To learn virtues, in Aristotle’s viewpoint, involves interaction with moral exemplars. Moral exemplars are people with virtuous character traits that are consistent with human flourishing (Peterson, Spezio, Van Slyke,

Reimer, & Brown, 2010). They reason well and keep the good of the society in mind; “all moral exemplars do their job with such extraordinary integrity and moral clarity that their strength of character is readily recognized” (Rugeley & Van Wart, 2006, p.383). Individuals need the opportunity to view examples of people living virtuously to become virtuous; the need for examples is particularly relevant for those virtues that fall into the category of moral virtues (McBeath & Webb, 2002).

To learn justice as a virtue, our students need to have the opportunity to observe and imitate exemplars who embody justice as both a personal and social virtue. But the students are called on to do more than just watch. The students need to 1) be motivated, 2) pay attention to the exemplar, 3) retain what is observed, and 4) reproduce the behavior (Moberg, 2000). Walker and Hennig’s (2004) study found that the profile of the just exemplar was more complex than that of the one for the caring exemplar or brave exemplar; it blended dominance and nurturance, with an emphasis on conscientiousness and openness to experience. Key attributes of the just exemplar included: honesty, fairness, and principled.

Noddings (2007) describes the importance of teachers serving as models, and describes the process of learning to include four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The moral exemplars that our students rely on do not need to come from highly valued positions in society; everyone can be an exemplar (Rugeley & Van Wart, 2006). As social work faculty, we are in a unique position to serve as moral exemplars and to act as models as a means of teaching the virtue of justice. We then need to be able to facilitate dialogue about what is justice and provide confirmation to our students when they get it right; for that to happen, we need to make sure that they also have the opportunity to practice.

### **Practicing in the Field: Learning by Doing**

van Hoof (2006) differentiates between learning moral and intellectual virtues, arguing that in Aristotle’s framework, moral virtues would be developed by training and intellectual virtues by education. As such, to learn to do justice, it would be imperative to provide appropriate training in justice—learning in the classroom is important, but not sufficient. Nor was classroom learning sufficient to Aristotle; Fitterer (2008) notes that “this is the kind of knowing not teachable in a classroom, but the kind acquired by personally experiencing the choice-worthiness of virtuous actions, by actually doing them and finding them pleasurable to perform” (p. 18). While Aristotle differentiated virtues from skills, he did find a similarity in that “the virtues, like skills, are learned through practice” (Russell, 2009, p. 1). Habituation of virtue, for Aristotle, included the need for repetition of actions; or, in other words, experience and time (Stichter, 2007). Adams (2009) furthers the argument for learning through practice: “the social work

student learns these virtues and develops her character and ethical use of self through the practice of her profession, in which she cannot achieve excellence without them” (p. 100). Therefore, teaching justice must also involve the field education component of social work education for students to develop true competency in this area.

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) notes that field education is the signature pedagogy of social work education. All students can be encouraged to engage in social justice projects related to their field experiences, including, but not limited to, education about a social justice topic, advocacy on a social justice issue, fundraising for populations, and service learning related to the topic (Birkenmaier, 2003). Specific to learning to do justice, field placements can allow students to learn in organizations committed to justice issues. Also, placement experiences can allow students to learn from field instructors who can serve as role models or moral exemplars. Banks and Gallagher (2009) argue that role models also serve as inspiration to students.

### **Self-Reflection as a Tool to Cultivate Justice as a Personal Virtue**

Webb (2010) argues that for social workers to become “more fully virtuous” (p. 119), it is necessary for them to critically examine themselves, the moral concepts that relate to practice, and the moral concepts that relate to the agency’s context of practice. As such, to cultivate justice as a personal virtue, it is necessary to help social workers to engage in a process of self-reflection. One way to do this might be to facilitate engagement in contemplative practice, a method familiar to most Christian traditions. Aristotle identified the fourth part of the soul to be the contemplative part, and thought that it “is fulfilled by thinking about eternal and changeless things” (van Hooft, 2006, p. 55). In his vision, “human kind is therefore primarily active and practical, and secondarily contemplative” (McBeath & Webb, 2002, p. 1021). Further support for the benefits of contemplative practice related to the cultivation of justice is offered by Lee and Barrett’s (2007) finding that there is a connection between spirituality and social justice in their study of how a social worker’s personal spirituality affects practice and commitment to social justice issues.

Contemplation is a method used to engage oneself with the ultimate source of truth and goodness. For Christians, the ultimate source of truth and goodness is God. Using the metaphor of the vine and the branches (John 15: 1-17), Jesus describes God as the vine grower, Himself as the vine, and the people as the branches. Throughout this biblical passage, Jesus implores us to “remain in [him],” “remain in [his] love,” so that we “may bear fruit that will remain.” Christian mystics have written about the transformative effects of contemplative practice in being in union with God or being fully conscious of His presence. Thomas Merton (1996) writes

that through contemplative prayer we are seeking a “purity of heart” (p. 68) where we long for “the simple presence of God, for a personal understanding of his word, for knowledge of his will and for capacity to hear and obey him” (p. 67).

Merton (1996) describes each human being as “a spoken word of God” (p. 68), and thus our lives have meaning in this world because God’s words have meaning. It is through contemplation where we tap into the ultimate truth of our lives and find the full understanding of God’s hopes for us, i.e., discover the purpose of our lives. Teresa of Avila, a 16th century Carmelite nun and Christian mystic, uses a castle with many rooms as a metaphor for the human soul (Starr, 2003). God dwells in the center of the castle; one enters the castle and journeys to the center through contemplative prayer and meditation. It is through contemplation that one can find the Divine Presence and discern what actions are graced by God, i.e., are just. Araujo (2000) writes, “at the heart of seeking, teaching, and doing justice, is the realization that all is dependent on the transcendent truth that is God” (p. 592).

### **Developing Moral Reasoning to Cultivating Justice as a Social Virtue**

In *Summa Theologica* (1941), Aquinas argues that in order to direct one’s will to the good, one needs to apply reason. To engage in reason, one must develop critical thinking skills. Critical thinking skills are one of the ten core competencies required in social work education (CSWE, 2008) and are deemed essential for the social work profession (Gibbons & Gray, 2004).

The Catholic intellectual tradition has several models of social analysis that are useful for developing critical thinking and moral reasoning skills to cultivate the virtue of justice in students. The “See–Judge–Act” model was made popular in the early 20th century by Belgian priest, Cardinal Joseph Cardign. Cardinal Cardign developed this method of social analysis to address the social and economic conditions of workers in the Young Christian Worker Movement (Zotti, 1990). This method of analysis is similar to that of Paulo Freire’s (1998) philosophy of education where people who are experiencing oppression reflect on their problem (see), analyze the underlying historical and structural causes of the problem (judge), and plan for action to remedy the situation (act). This model serves to cultivate moral citizenship within our students, by helping them to develop all of the key components of a moral citizen: awareness, thinking, feeling, and action for justice (Manning, 1997). The model can be applied as follows:

- **See:** Describe what is happening in the situation. Where is it taking place? Why is it taking place? Who is involved? Why are they involved? Who is affected? How are they affected? Why did people react the way they did? What are the causes and consequences of the situation?

- **Judge:** What is the context in which this event took place (history, social, geographic, political, economic, cultural)? What are the effects of age, race, gender, ethnicity, class, ability, religion, sexual orientation, or other dimensions of difference in this situation? Who wins from the situation? Who loses from the situation? What do our social work values tell us about the situation? What does Catholic Social Teaching or our own faith tradition tell us about the situation?
- **Act:** How would you approach a resolution to the situation to bring about justice?

This element of social analysis has the potential to advance students in their capacity for moral reasoning, or if done in the light of Divine truth (e.g., through contemplation), contribute to their personal transformation as agents of justice.

### Discussion

This article begins with a definition of justice as both a personal and social virtue. The social work profession has gone a long way toward embracing justice as a social virtue. For example, social justice is already a core value of the social work profession. Scholars have noted its historical importance to the profession, and the NASW Code of Ethics claims that attention to the underlying causes of injustice are a “fundamental” component to our work. The Council on Social Work Education (2008) requires that accredited programs develop student competencies in “advancing human rights and justice.” The commitment to justice within the profession has resulted in countless social work graduates with knowledge and skills to pursue justice with and for vulnerable and marginalized communities.

In terms of justice as a personal virtue, the social work literature has little to nothing to say, except for the growing interest in virtue ethics in general. In this article, we identify contemplative practice and social analysis as two methods to address the cultivation justice as a personal virtue. The application of these methods in the classroom provides an opportunity for students to begin developing practices that are important to the development of one’s character, contemplative practice and moral reasoning. For Christians, the idea of contemplative practice may correspond to the Christian practice of *discernment*, the process of understanding God’s purpose for us and help us make choices that align with God’s purpose. However, neither contemplative practice nor social analysis nor their integrated use has been studied in terms of their effect on cultivating virtue or in creating a greater disposition toward justice.

Despite a general consensus about the importance of justice in social work, ambiguity and confusion about the meaning of justice remain, and

the practice dimensions of justice have largely been associated with macro practice. We argue that justice-oriented practice happens on a continuum, to include the process dimensions of clinical and macro practice as well as the particular practice methods to address the structural causes of poverty, discrimination, and other forms of injustice such as policy advocacy, community organizing, community development, and social action. Given the historic tension regarding the service/justice bifurcation in the profession, it is not clear how readily this broad conception would be accepted within the profession. Some social workers may not agree with the notion that justice begins in the interpersonal relationship and may only recognize its manifestation in macro-level change methods. Others may not be comfortable with a justice-oriented vision of clinical practice that embraces a primary focus on strengths-based practice, and intentional consideration of power and privilege in the helping relationship. Furthermore, the macro-oriented dimensions of justice continue to be marginalized, hidden, or at best misunderstood as legitimate methods of social work practice. So, some may feel that broadening an understanding of just practice to include clinical processes may further marginalize macro practice.

Regardless of one's practice area, the infusion of justice content remains an important area for continued integration across all levels of practice in the social work curricula in order to cultivate justice as a virtue in social work students. Birkenmaier (2003) argues that social work educators should advocate for the integration of this content area across the curriculum as well as incorporating social justice issues into teaching. van Wormer (2006) provides examples of how to incorporate justice into research, policy, practice, and elective courses. In addition, Pelton (2001) argues that we need to openly confront the contradictions inherent in what is taught in social work education and what contexts the students experience in practice. He points out, specifically, contradictions between what is taught and working in "social work contexts that are coercive, punitive, paternalistic, and discriminatory in their approaches to clients and social problems" (p. 438). These concerns relate to practice methods with micro, mezzo, and macro systems.

Finally, because cultivating justice as a virtue is not one of the competencies identified as one of the CSWE competencies for accreditation, social work educators can legitimately claim that cultivating justice as a virtue is beyond their capacity. With all of the competencies social work educators are called to address, many educators might be resistant to adding another one that is not mandated. In addition, since cultivating virtue is a lifelong endeavor, its development over time is difficult to measure during the course of an academic program. However, social work programs located in faith-based institutions might be the logical place to initiate a social work program that gives attention to cultivating virtue in its students. Many of those institutions already view "formation of students" as intrinsic to the

function of the university, and have access to the rich resources of their faith tradition to use in that process. Faith-based institutions might have more freedom to talk about the role of moral exemplars in the classroom and in field, self-reflection and contemplative practice, and social analysis as a tool to cultivate virtue, particularly the virtue of doing justice.

In addition, since the 1980s, interest in spirituality and social work has grown as evidenced by the hundreds of articles yielded in Social Work Abstracts by using the terms “religion,” “spirituality,” and/or “faith” (Sheridan, 2009). Most of the literature focuses on social work practice or conceptual issues. Very few discuss religious or faith-based practices as pedagogical tools. The articles that do address the integration of faith tradition and pedagogy are typically anecdotal, conceptual, and descriptive in nature. While they are useful for their insights and to spark ideas, they offer no empirical evidence for such methods. Therefore, the link between social work pedagogy and spirituality is ripe for research. Given the renewed interest in virtue ethics, the link between pedagogy and spirituality and cultivation of virtue would be of interest, particularly for faith-based institutions of higher education. Faith-based institutions offer a good environment to develop research agendas that examine such questions. ❖

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# Adding Virtue to Faith: Strategies for Developing Character in Christian Social Work Students

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*This article explores the relationship between a sense of calling, connectedness to God, and engagement in practices that nurture the virtues required to act upon that calling. It proposes that preparing Christians to effectively integrate faith with social work practice requires intentional pedagogical strategies to facilitate students' exploration of individual callings, the espousal of spiritual disciplines that foster virtue, and the cultivation of a community that supports spiritually integrated practice.*

*...His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue... for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue... For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (II Pet. 1: 5-8, NKJV)*

**I**N A POSTMODERN WORLD, VIRTUE IS AN IDEAL THAT SEEMS ELUSIVE, EVEN among those of us who identify ourselves as followers of Christ. Like underwater divers who have lost the sense of what is up and what is down, we are in a world cut loose from its moorings, adrift in an ocean of siren voices. Alasdair MacIntyre relates our moral malaise to a past “catastrophe so great that moral inquiry was nearly obliterated from our culture” (as cited in Kallenberg, 2003, p. 7). He claims that by emphasizing individual autonomy and ignoring the formative role of community, modern ethical discourse has been pillaged of any sense of context within which to make sense of what is “good” or what Greek, Jewish, and Christian traditions

refer to as “virtue.” How then do we begin a discourse regarding what it means to be virtuous in a profession characterized by complexity and challenging ethical conundrums? Furthermore, how can Christian educators be intentional in the pedagogical strategies utilized to prepare future social work practitioners to develop virtues consistent with professional ethical guidelines as well as the call of God on their lives to service?

In this article, I will argue that the Judeo-Christian concept of “calling” provides an anchor for the intentional cultivation of virtues necessary for the faithful performance of the responsibilities relevant to one’s vocation. I propose that preparing Christians to effectively integrate faith with social work practice must go beyond a preoccupation with the avoidance of doing harm to a model of practice that cultivates a sense of collaboration with God. While some of these ideas can be applied in secular settings where religious and spiritual diversity is a given, my prime directive is to address the opportunities and responsibilities to foster virtue that are accessible, but underutilized, in social work programs within faith-based universities.

### **Calling to Social Work Practice**

The concept of calling is one that resonates deeply with many social work practitioners, as evidenced by various publications, both faith-based and secular, with allusions to the “call” to social work (Freeman, 2007; Graham, 2008; Huguen, 2012; LeCroy, 2002). Recently popularized in secular literature, the calling model often frames an altruistic pull toward service rather than self-interest, or an inner sense of “good fit” between one’s work and passion. However, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the common Hebrew term most frequently translated “called” means “accosting a person met,” addressing by name, and “causing to come” (Strong, 2007, 7121). This definition implies an interruption in a person’s trajectory by someone *other* than the self, who directs the called one by name toward a predetermined purpose. For example, God calls Abram to leave his country and come to a foreign land in order that God might make of him a great nation (Gen.12). In another account, while Moses tends sheep, God calls to him from a burning bush, “Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people...out of Egypt” (Ex 3:10, NKJV). The biblical narrative is replete with such stories, and lest we think this is an Old Testament pattern, Paul is *literally* accosted on the road to Damascus, blinded, and thrown from his horse with instructions to “Go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9: 6, NKJV).

Although not all believers would describe their vocational calling in terms of a dramatic personal experience, a common theme is that the call is perceived as something that originates beyond the self and occurs as a matter of discovery (Freeman, 2007; Huguen, 2002; Johnson, 2002). Whether the call is experienced as a defining moment or a process, subtle

or sublime, in solitude or community, what makes the call compelling is its “otherness.” Johnson (2002) explains, “We don’t possess the call, the call possesses us” (p. 115).

A poignant depiction of this phenomenon occurs in Tolkien’s *The Two Towers*, the second book of the trilogy, *Lord of the Rings* (1994). Overwhelmed by the challenges ahead of them, and yet compelled to go on, Sam muses to Frodo:

I used to think that they [adventures] were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folks seem to have been just landed in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t...I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into? (p. 362).

How we “land” in the tale is not nearly as important as the ability to recognize that we have become a part of a story that is bigger than our own. According to Stanley Hauerwas (1981), it is the embeddedness of our own stories within the “bigger story” that provides the rationale for virtue and sustains our faith traditions.

McIntosh (2004) beautifully describes calling as a lifelong dialogue in which God calls and we respond, moving us “toward a listening, responding, choosing, delighting personhood” (p. 150). This dialogue, however, does not exist in a vacuum. Growth in discernment and confidence to follow occurs in the context of a community that mediates, nurtures, confirms, and strengthens the individual believer in pursuing the call (Johnson, 2002; McIntosh, 2004). Although this process traditionally occurs in the context of the church, Christian educators also have an important role to play in helping Christian social work students explore their callings, understand their roles as co-laborers with God, and make sense of what it means to “be salt” in a secular profession. A significant challenge, however, is the uneasy relationship that has existed between professional social work practice, spirituality, and religion.

### **Spirituality and Social Work Practice**

Over the last two decades the social work profession has embraced the need to expand the role of spirituality and religion in social work practice and education; however, the primary focus of existing literature is on developing culturally competent strategies for assessing and working with religiously affiliated clients and preparing students for ethical and culturally

sensitive practice. In contrast, publications addressing the spirituality of the social worker are rare. For the most part those that do address spirituality suggest eastern religious practices such as meditation and mindfulness to support the practitioner's reflectiveness, connectedness with their own spirituality, and as a strategy for self-care (Birnbaum, 2008; Derezotes, 2006; Hick, 2009; Hick, 2008; Lynn, 2010; Turner, 2009; Weaver, 2005). In comparison, I could locate only two articles from a Christian perspective that encouraged engaging in spiritual practices to foster the connectedness of the social worker with God (Collins, 2005; Staral, 2002).

Although there are notable exceptions (see Scales & Kelly, 2012), discussions regarding spiritually integrated practice from a Christian perspective are dominated by a focus on tensions between Christian and secular worldviews, and concerns regarding the violation of clients' rights to self-determination (Clark, 1994; Hodge, 2002; Hodge & Wolfer, 2008; Ressler, 2002; Sanger, 2010; Sherr, Singletary, & Rogers, 2009; Sherwood, 2012; Stewart, 2009; Unruh & Sider, 2002). While these are valid concerns which must be addressed, the frequent emphasis on "avoiding harm" rather than "doing good" when practicing from a faith perspective leads many social work educators to focus primarily on students' self-awareness and commitment to professional values. But is this all there is to faith integration? If faith-based social work programs only prepare students to adhere to professional values, competently use the skills and knowledge of practice, and to avoid giving offense, will we not be guilty of "having a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Tim 3:5)? Paul's admonition to the Galatians as translated in the Message is even more emphatic: "only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts what was begun by God. If you weren't smart enough or strong enough to begin it, how do you suppose you could perfect it?" (Gal. 3:3, The Message)

In my current role as a social work educator, I often see students struggling to understand the relationship between their calling and their perception that serving clients well requires a bifurcation of their professional and spiritual selves. While most understand the need to avoid imposing their personal beliefs and values on clients, they express confusion regarding how to follow a spiritual calling while adhering to professional mandates. Some end by concluding that we must somehow compartmentalize our spirituality in much the same way we appropriately compartmentalize our sexuality—it has no business in the work world. Recently, I was troubled when a graduate who I had invited to speak to the Intro to Social Work students regarding her work at a local hospital, declared that as compared to her previous work in a faith-based setting she had only her social work knowledge and skills to rely on. Because she could not directly share her faith with her clients, she had come to believe that she was on her own in facing daily challenges and grappling with clients' issues. While our graduates consistently report that they feel well-prepared when they enter

the work force or graduate school, this and similar experiences led me to question whether we were doing enough to prepare them to carry out their work in response to their calling and in dependence on the God who is the author and finisher of their faith.

Students choose to attend Christian colleges and universities with the expectation that they will provide a distinctively Christian education as well as a “safe haven” in which to nurture and develop the calling of God on their lives (Holmes, 1987; Sherr, Huff, & Curran, 2007). If “callings” may be likened to seed in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13: 3-9), then what responsibility do faith-based programs have to nurture that seed so that it bears fruit to God rather than meeting the fate of seed that remains barren because it is planted in hostile environments? Social work programs within Christian colleges and universities must seriously consider their responsibility not only to prepare students for competent and ethical practice but also to carry their faith and sense of calling as a sacred trust that empowers their work with clients, and informs their practice.

### **Social Work Programs as Communities of Practice**

Recent literature that explores the formative nature of social practices suggests that educational programs can become powerful shapers of desirable habits and dispositions. According to Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) the key to transformative learning is cultivating “communities of practice” which are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on a regular basis” (p. 4). Rather than simply sharing information, these communities of practice powerfully shape behavior through informal learning that takes place as people tell stories, coach, model, and provide opportunities for apprenticeship. The emphasis of social work education on the development of competencies and practice behaviors helps to facilitate the three elements identified by Wenger as essential to the development of a community of practice:

1. Students and professors have identified a shared domain of interest, i.e., social work practice from a Christian perspective.
2. To that end, they build community by “engage[ing] in joint activities and discussions, helping each other and sharing vital information” (Wenger, 2006, p. 2).
3. Finally, the social work program provides members opportunities to practice. Through active and collaborative learning in the classroom, service learning, practicum experience and field seminar, students and their professors become a community of practitioners who develop a “shared repertoire of resources” (p. 3) which facilitate professional and spiritual growth.

Although few would disagree that a well-functioning social work program provides a community of practice that fosters professional development, spirituality is typically thought to be the domain of the church or, within academia, of those who provide religious instruction. The New Testament provides clear support for the notion that churches have the primary responsibility to nourish the spiritual life of the believer; however, social work programs in faith-based schools can serve as extensions of the church and are uniquely poised to prepare students for the distinctive niche that they will fill in the world.

Because the local church may not be sensitive to the issues that confront believers who are enjoined to a professional set of ethics in addition to moral obligations as disciples of Christ, fellow believers who share a similar call can help one another understand what it means to “work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2: 12). Consequently, in addition to its academic objectives to prepare competent social work practitioners, the social work program in a Christian setting has a responsibility to stimulate the discovery of students’ individual callings and to facilitate their preparation by functioning as a community of believers, i.e., as an extension of the church. Within a Christian education, academic preparedness should be paired with the development of habits, rituals, and liturgies that facilitate spiritually integrated practice, authenticity, and connectedness with God (Holmes, 1987; Smith, 2009).

### **Spiritually Integrated Social Work Practice**

Recently, the profession has provided some models for spiritually integrated social work practice that make room for a program of education that fosters the spirituality of the social worker and acknowledges the centrality of spirituality to human experience. Dezerotes (2006) provides a broad-based model for spiritually integrated social work practice, with spirituality as the foundation for change. According to Dezerotes, “in spiritually oriented social work, the practitioner sees herself as a healer, but understands that the deepest healing happens on a spiritual level, and that she is most effective as she partners with Creative Spirit in the helping process” (p. 9). While many practitioners would not claim to see themselves as “healers,” the idea of partnership with the numinous in the process of bringing healing to the hurting is certainly consistent with a biblical worldview (Ps. 34:18; Ps. 147:3; Is. 40:1; Lk. 4:18). Assuming that this is a valid practice model, how do we prepare students to collaborate with what Dezerotes calls “Creative Spirit?” (p. 9).

Secondly, how do we cultivate the moral character necessary for graduates not only to use spirituality with what Roeder (2002) calls an “honorable spirit” as they discriminate between the appropriate and inappropriate use of spirituality but also to act ethically on behalf of clients, colleagues, and

society? Although the majority of teaching on ethics is focused on rational decision making models, there is little support for the idea that social workers rely on decision making models when faced with ethical dilemmas. Over the last three decades, numerous studies have concluded that social work practitioners rarely support their clinical decisions with empirical evidence or theory (Gambrell, 1990; Hudson, 1990; Osmond & O'Connor, 2006; Rosen, Proctor, Morrow-Howell and Staudt, 1995). Instead, social workers tend to make decisions intuitively. Osmo and Landau (2006) found that 30% of participants did not justify their ethical choices at all. This is not unique to social workers. According to Wells (2004), "The vast majority of the things people do in life they do, not because they decide to do them, but because of the kinds of people they are. They do them by habit rather than by choice" (p. 17). This is supported by recent studies that suggest that the majority of human behavior is determined by habituation (Duhigg, 2012). Habits enable us to deal with the complexity of human existence without having to engage in continuous decision making regarding our courses of action. How then do we cultivate the types of "habits of being" that prepare graduates to add virtue to faith as they follow their callings to social work practice?

In *Desiring the Kingdom*, Smith (2009) provides an articulate argument for moving from a view of education as primarily the dissemination of knowledge and skills, toward a perspective that supports the inclusion of formative practices. Smith, who describes human beings as desiring animals and "embodied actors," rather than "thinking things," contends that it is what we *love* rather than what we *think* that ultimately defines who we become (*italics added*). Our vision of human flourishing is formed by practices and habits that are grounded in affect, as they aim at actualizing our image of ultimate good. Based on research on automaticity, he suggests that practices and rituals, regardless of our intentionality, pair internal responses with external events, and eventually become part of unconscious dispositions that guide behavior. Smith identifies those rituals which are formative and instill a particular view of human flourishing as liturgies. He argues that a distinctly Christian education constitutes a "counter pedagogy" as it intentionally encourages practices of Christian worship to undermine the secular liturgies that pull our desires away from the God and towards alternate views of the ultimate good.

### **Christian Disciplines as Preparation for Co-Laboring**

Cultivating Christian disciplines in the context of a community of practice can provide students with the tools they will need on the life-long journey to effectively integrate their faith with social work practice. While alternately called disciplines, practices, habits, rituals, or liturgies, Christian activities that seek to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit and bring us into more effective cooperation with Christ have been recognized as a staple in the

life of the believer from antiquity (Greenman & Kalantzis, 2010; McIntosh, 2004; Willard, 1988). Christian disciplines work through the principle of indirection: by creating simple habits that are accessible we create space for the inaccessible. For example, while we cannot through direct efforts make ourselves more attuned to God's purposes in our work with clients, we can create space for that to happen by engaging in "reflection." Similarly, developing a habit of volunteering to serve at a homeless shelter is likely to make us better servants. Although by no means exhaustive, I will explore a few of the Christian practices that can readily be encouraged in academic settings to encourage both vertical and horizontal relationships. Contemplative practices such as silence, solitude, and meditation in addition to Sabbath-keeping and charitable reading can be instrumental in beginning and sustaining a collaborative partnership with God as we seek to fulfill His call on our lives. Secondly, based on their fit with an educational model, service or volunteerism, and participation in Christian community are commended as practices that will foster the connectedness of Christian students with others.

### **Identification with the Calling**

A pivotal starting place for developing students' commitment to practices that nurture moral excellence and the ability to co-labor with God is the exploration of students' individual callings and their goodness of fit with a career in social work practice. Because a career in social work will be demanding, stressful, and offer limited external rewards, identification with a calling is crucial to students' ability to persist in the face of frustration and to maintain a focus on "being" rather than "doing" (Trulear, 2007). Using the calling model of social work practice, students can be encouraged to explore the ways in which they have experienced God's call to service (Hugen, 2012). While some students may be able to pinpoint a moment in time in which they experienced a clear sense that God was directing their future, others will need guidance to recognize the signposts along the way. Many experience calling as a sense of "burden" for a vulnerable population or social problem. Trulear (2007) describes the call as "a pristine prodding—an unspoiled urge" which "disturbed our spirit and drove our attention to situations that required divinely led human interventions, and humanly requested divine intervention" (p. 319).

Engaging in reading assignments that explain the concept of calling, followed by reflection on personal experiences, values, and passions can initiate this process. For example, the fourth edition of *Christianity and Social Work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice* (Scales and Kelly, 2012) includes two chapters which explore the concept of calling—one describes the model and how it fits with social work practice (Hugen, 2012), while the other explores the experience from the

perspective of Christian students in both secular and Christian educational settings (Scales, Harris, Myers, & Singletary, 2012). Small group discussions with other students to reflect on these readings often generate a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement as they discern the voice of God in their own lives and that of their colleagues, and imagine a future in which He will use their unique life experiences to touch others.

Early in the social work curriculum, I require students to write a personal mission statement that integrates their personal, family, church, vocational, and community commitments. Using Franklin Covey's material (1989), I encourage them to develop a summary statement that captures the essence of their call or life's purpose and the legacy they would like to leave behind. Once completed, I urge them to consult the mission statement on a weekly basis as they make decisions regarding how they will spend time and make commitments. The mission statement becomes a guide for the sort of persons they want to "be" rather than a task list for what they hope to accomplish. I encourage the periodic revision of mission statements as students gain new insights regarding God's call on their lives. By revisiting this concept periodically, students learn to frame their service in terms of calling rather than personal satisfaction or fulfillment.

### **Nurturing Connectedness with God through Spiritual Practices**

*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:28).*

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of the learned that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens me morning by morning. He awakens my ear to hear as the learned (Isaiah 50:4).*

A critical aspect of spiritually integrated practice is preparing students to be attuned to God's direction in the details of their day-to-day practice and in their work with clients. While learning to hear God's voice is a pervasive theme throughout the bible, deep-seated misgivings within academia of that which is not empirically grounded makes this an unlikely topic for professional preparedness in most programs. Nevertheless, within the profession, constructivists have long argued that "knowing" goes beyond that which is clearly measurable or tangible. Recent publications in the professional literature are indicative of an epistemological shift from post-positivism to the acknowledgement of a meta-physical reality (Birnbau, 2008; Graham & Shier, 2009; Hick, 2009; Horton-Parker & Fawcett, 2010; Sherman & Siporin, 2008). In a recent textbook, *Spiritually Oriented Social Work Practice*, Derezotes (2006) encourages practitioners to be attuned with the Spirit in the here and now in order to increase their professional effectiveness. He suggests that this work begins "when the individual learns

how to listen to 'Creative Spirit' through the language of the heart..." (p. 71). While finding a common language to describe spiritual experience is daunting, the model of partnership he suggests is congruent with the Christian model for co-laboring with God.

How do practitioners learn to listen to that inner voice of the Spirit and begin to grow in confidence that they accurately perceive the voice and will of God? According to McIntosh (2004), the practice of discernment provides a centering point for Christian thinking about what we know as truth and how we come to know it. Rogers (1997) defines discernment as the "intentional practice by which a community or an individual seeks, recognizes and intentionally takes part in the activity of God in concrete situations" (p. 107). Consequently, those practices that facilitate the development of the gift of discernment are at the heart of learning to co-labor with God.

McIntosh proposes a model for discernment in which the discerning life springs from a contemplative mode, extends in a practical mode, and returns to the contemplative. McIntosh describes movement toward contemplation as an apprenticeship of the mind to the divine teaching. In light of this, the disciplines related to contemplative practice are vital for nurturing attunement with God. These include silence, solitude, and meditation. It may also include the prayerful reading of scripture and in eastern traditions, the practice of "mindfulness."

### **Contemplative Practice and Charitable Reading**

Recently, a number of social work publications have encouraged the use of "mindfulness" and meditation in social work practice, and the training of social work students in these practices, providing an avenue for introducing these ideas to students in secular settings (Birnbaum, 2008; Derezotes, 2006; Hick, 2009; Lynn, 2010; Sherman & Siporin, 2008; Turner, 2009; Weaver, 2005). Although "mindfulness" has its origin in Buddhism and Confucianism, it has been likened to the Christian practice of contemplation advocated by Thomas Merton and others (Sherman & Siporin, 2008). While mindfulness requires participants to focus on their breathing in order to become aware of their consciousness and learn the art of simply "being," contemplative practice within the Christian tradition has as its focus the realization of our connection to God. Merton (1971a) claimed that it was the "highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life" (p. 1).

Based on recent research showing positive outcomes using mindfulness-based treatment strategies, Sherman and Siporin (2008) suggest including mindfulness meditation training in the social work curriculum using lecture, demonstration, student role play, and case discussion. Birnbaum (2008) initiated a mindfulness group with social work students in order to help them deal with stress by increasing students' self-awareness and experience of emotional support. Findings indicated that students experienced

greater self-awareness, self-regulation, and gained insights regarding their professional self-concept. Given openness to these strategies, Christian educators in secular settings can encourage students to engage in various forms of contemplative practice such as meditation and mindfulness.

Students in faith-based programs can be introduced to meditation and contemplative practice through a slim Christian classic by Brother Lawrence (1982), *The Practice of the Presence of God*. In the same way that proponents of mindfulness advocate its practice throughout the day, Brother Lawrence suggested maintaining continuous awareness of the presence of God while completing mundane tasks. According to Brother Lawrence,

All we have to do is recognize God as being intimately present within us. Then we may speak directly to Him every time we need to ask for help, to know His will in moments of uncertainty, and to do whatever He wants us to do in a way that pleases Him (p. 19).

Simple and direct, this text could serve as a reference for reading, discussion, and reflection on initiating the process of “practicing God’s presence.” Readings from Thomas Merton’s various works (Merton, 1971a, b, 1998; Merton & Shannon, 2003) could also be incorporated into such an exercise. I recently used Laubach’s (2007) *Letters by a Modern Mystic* as a weekly devotional to encourage students to consider what attunement with God in the midst of service might look like. Laubach recounts his personal spiritual journey in experimenting with living in moment by moment conscious contact with God.

Because some of Laubach’s accounts stretch the imagination of the modern reader, Smith and Shortt’s (2007) insights regarding reading for spiritual growth, as well as Alan Jacob’s (2001) work on charitable reading, provide direction for preparing students to read the materials with humility, and an openness to engaging in the practice rather than simply reading for information. In his unique work, Jacobs suggests that reading as a Christian should be characterized by the law of love. Incorporating the principles of charitable reading into the social work curriculum prepares students not only to be prepared to engage readings on a deeper level, but also creates the habit of greater openness to the perspectives of others. This may be key to preparing students to work charitably with clients whose spiritual experiences do not fit with their own.

### **Scripture Reading as “Pedagogy of Desire”**

Dallas Willard (1997) contends that contemporary Christians’ tendency to dismiss obedience to the teachings of Christ as impractical and irrelevant to daily living, is the single most telling cause for the weakened impact of Christianity in the modern world. Reading scriptures as

a formative rather than informative practice, may serve as an antidote to this modern reality. While bible study and reading is a common staple of Christian living, reading scriptures meditatively is intended to school the heart rather than the mind. Christopher Hall (2010) uses the metaphor of percolation to describe how reading or listening to scriptures slowly, while pondering and reflecting on them allows the words to seep into our souls in a way that begets living into them. This metaphor dovetails with Smith's (2009) description of pedagogies of desire, or practices that shape our desires, dispositions, and identities.

Introducing students to the art of *Lectio Divina*, the ancient Benedictine practice of praying the Scriptures with an ear to hear God's voice in the here and now, can be a starting place for scripture reading as a means of union with God. According to Hall (2010), this process immerses us in the story, reorienting and reforming us. The goal of *Lectio Divina* is the "reshaping of our thoughts and actions through an imitation of Christ grounded in an intense, responsive, receptive reading" (Hall, p.147).

While *Lectio Divina* can be practiced in solitude, it can also be practiced in community, and therefore can be adapted for practice in the classroom. While one student reads a scripture passage slowly and meditatively through twice, other students listen carefully for any phrase or segment that speaks especially to them and then meditate on the phrases for one or two minutes. A second participant then reads the same passage, followed by two or three minutes of silence, during which all are encouraged to reflect on how the content touches their life that day. Students can then share simply without elaboration what they are hearing. A third and final reading of the passage by a new reader is followed by two or three minutes of silence for further reflection and application. Those who are comfortable with sharing what they have "heard" then reflect aloud on what they believe God is calling them to do that day or week. Allowing a few minutes for each person to pray for the person to their right in light of what they have shared completes the process.

### **Solitude and Silence**

Of particular import in developing the ability to "hear" the Spirit are the twin disciplines of solitude and of silence. Throughout the gospels, Jesus sought solitude for seasons of prayer and communion with His Father. Jesus taught, "A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Therefore, if He who was given the Spirit without measure (John 3:34) did not take his connectedness with God for granted, how much more do we with feet of clay require time alone with God to challenge our self-reliance, recharge our batteries, and connect with our source of Life and Light? While seasons of solitude may be brief or extended, contemporary students, who rarely find

occasion to be alone or to disconnect from the constant barrage of social media, can be encouraged to intentionally incorporate times of solitude into their life of worship. This can range from setting small increments of time for solitude on a daily basis to engaging in weekend retreats, for the more practiced.

A closely related discipline is that of silence. Willard describes this discipline as closing “off our souls from ‘sounds’ whether those sounds be noise, music, or words” (1988, p. 163). In an age characterized by continuous distraction, constant connections via technology, and unremitting information overload, silence has the power to upend our sense of balance and control as few things can. Millennials, in particular, are noted for their voracious appetite for electronically mediated connections, having at their disposal a constant flow of information and virtual interaction via cell phones, PDAs, the internet, and social networking programs. Maggie Jackson (2008), in a penetrating expose of our attention deficit oriented society, foresees the coming of a dark age predicated on the loss of attention and the attendant relational deficits characteristic of the current generation. Nicholas Carr (2010) corroborates Jackson’s account by addressing the way the use of technology is literally changing the structure of our brains and inhibiting our ability to sustain attention and reflection. This is especially concerning for future “helpers” whose prime directive is “attending.”

Intentionally retreating from the noise of contemporary life provides a rare occasion for restoring connection with the self and with God. Students can be asked to enter into brief voluntary periods of solitude and silence—disconnecting cell phones, MP3s, computers, and the like. Connecting this challenge with reflective writing can help students explore the unanticipated hurdles and surprises that such an exercise is likely to present.

Christian educators in secular settings can encourage students to engage in the various forms of contemplative practice most in keeping with their own traditions. Those in faith-based settings can provide instruction in the use of spiritual disciplines related to opening oneself to conscious contact with God through the disciplines of solitude, silence, and meditation.

In recent years, as part of the requirements for an Integrating Faith in Social Work Practice class, I have begun to require students to adopt a spiritual discipline for the semester that is new to them and journal regarding their experience. This semester a student who had previously been on mission trips where she experienced increased sensitivity to God and others while disconnected from her American addiction to incessant activity and technology-mediated connections chose to disconnect and engage in silence and solitude. She reflected on her experience:

My mind. Always racing. Always running ahead of the pace of life that is necessary for me to live in the moment. When is lunch? What am I doing tonight? What could I be doing

right now? In the coolness of the wind I hear those words again. Stop. Just be. Is it possible to live a life of schedule and routine and to stop and just be? Or do I have to go to another continent to have a minute of solitude? Stillness. Simplicity. Silence. Peace. How God? I ask. How do I live a life of stillness and peace in a society of noise and busyness?

### **Sabbath Keeping**

*Be still and know that I am God (Ps. 46:10).*

*Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest (Mt. 11:28).*

A major biblical ritual that modern Christians have largely abandoned is that of Sabbath keeping; however, the observance of Sabbath has important ramifications as a self-care strategy to deal with social workers' job-related stress, fatigue, and burnout (Collins, 2005). The high emotional cost of caring paid by those in the helping professions, has led to the coining of the term "compassion fatigue" to describe the burnout that is often experienced by those who work in environments characterized by crises and emotionally troubling situations (Adams, Figley, & Boscarino, 2008; Bride & Figley, 2007; Fahy, 2007; Radey & Figley, 2007).

In *The Rest of God*, Buchanan (2006) provides an excellent rationale for the keeping of Sabbath as an antidote to the overwhelming busyness, anxiety, and compulsive activity of contemporary society. Using Sabbath metaphorically as an attitude more than a given day, he speaks persuasively of our urgent need for rest in order have a proper perspective on our humanity, our work, and our relationship to self, to God, and to others. Keeping Sabbath, i.e., a period of cessation of work, if framed as a gift rather than a duty, can do much to nourish a grateful connection to God and to restore connections with critical relationships that are often neglected because of our obsession with work. From a calling perspective, encouraging students to incorporate Sabbath as a spiritual practice puts the responsibility for the fulfillment of the call back on God, allowing social workers to rest in his sovereignty and ability to fill in the gaps. Presenting Sabbath keeping to students as a challenge and strategy for self-care and spiritual development will prepare them to develop a right perspective regarding work and worship.

A student who chose to adopt Sabbath keeping for the semester reflected

I have realized that it is more selfless to take time and rest than it is to try to fill it with completing a list of tasks....I know things will continue to be busy, but I better under-

stand the importance of stepping back and taking a break. I know the world will continue on with or without my work for one day so I might as well take the time I need to rest and rejuvenate in order to give the world my best the other six days of the week.

### **Nurturing Connections with Others**

While the previously discussed practices are focused on nurturing our connections with God, other Christian disciplines strengthen the believers' commitment to and responsibility for serving and edifying others. Old and New Testament Scripture directs God's people to engage in practices such as hospitality, almsgiving, visiting the sick, and maintaining fellowship with other believers. For examples, see Matthew 25: 34-43; Rom. 12:13; Heb. 13: 16; Matt. 6: 2-4; and Heb. 10:25. For the purposes of this article, I will focus on two important disciplines, which encompass our responsibility to the world around us and to the community of faith.

### **Service**

A vital aspect of developing a community of practice is working together outside the classroom. Volunteerism and service learning opportunities, which allow students to serve others and to practice the Christian virtues of compassion, humility, and service, are excellent pedagogical tools to help prepare students to co-labor with God. Preparing students for the experience by encouraging them to pray together for God's presence and for their availability to His Spirit can foster an attitude of expectancy and wonder. Likewise, encouraging an attitude of practicing God's presence while they play with children, paint walls, gather trash, or serve meals may change their perspective and transform otherwise mundane activities into acts of worship.

Key scriptures for meditation prior to service are those in which Jesus indicated that to serve the least esteemed person, was in fact, to give service to Him. In Matthew 18: 5, he says, "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me." Again, in Matthew 25:31-46, He claimed that those who fed, clothed, or visited the "least of these" had actually served Him. Reframing service learning opportunities in terms of service to Christ can transform the experience of seemingly insignificant tasks to opportunities for grace to flow.

Based on theories of symbolic interaction, Forte (1997) argues that engaging in volunteerism promotes altruism and communal bonding. In order to achieve these outcomes, however, Forte contends that the volunteer experience should meet certain criteria. Based on Mead's theory that communities develop humane democratic values as they work together

to address common problems (1964, as cited by Forte, 1997), the activity must create norms or expectations for pro-social behavior. Secondly, it must encourage role-taking or “sympathetic identification with the other.” Finally, the experience must lead to psychosocial transformations that encourage a change in their view of themselves and an ongoing commitment to engage in volunteerism or other community building activities. This occurs as students develop a sense of the importance of volunteerism as members of a community and of the congruence between their general self-image and the volunteer role.

To test this theory, Forte (1997) intentionally fostered these conditions in a service learning project that involved social work students in serving the homeless. At the end of the semester, he found students had higher levels of altruism, higher perceived community expectations, higher network expectations, greater role-taking range, greater empathic concern, higher personal expectations, higher image/role identity correspondence, higher role-person merger, more planned volunteer hours, and greater probability of volunteering in the future. These promising results indicate that providing structured opportunities for community service can do a great deal to foster virtue and spiritual growth in students. The same results may not be possible from internship opportunities, which although unpaid, are required for graduation, and perceived as preparation for professional practice, rather than the voluntary giving of one’s time to benefit the community.

### **Participation in Community**

According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954), “Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ” (p. 21), meaning that our relationships to each other are mediated through the person of Christ. Rather than placing demands and expectations on other believers to fulfill one’s needs, we relate to one another as if we were relating to Christ. Bonhoeffer separates the individual’s wish dream for ideal community from the divine *reality* of community. Assigning the small book, *Life Together* (1954a), as a basis for understanding the believers’ role in the church can prepare students to deal with the inevitable disillusionment that will come in their dealings with other believers. Often, those who have experienced a call on their lives are offended when other believers are not as enthusiastic about the specific burden they feel for a particular people group or do not recognize the call on their lives. Initial idealism can be tempered by submitting their call to a local body of believers in reverence to Christ. This text can also provide a Christian context for promoting individual self-determination, as he discourages assuming that we must influence others to meet our ideal.

In the spirit of the Christian disciplines, I have begun to frame small group activities in the context of participation in community. In a society characterized by rampant individualism and consumerism, students tend

to see their participation in education as a solo enterprise with little tolerance for the needs of others. Encouraging students “to serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13, NIV) proves to be both a test and an opportunity for spiritual growth. In the practice course that focuses on groups, I assign groups for the semester and frame the experience in terms of their Christian responsibility to “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2, NKJV) and “look out not only for your own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:4, NKJV). While I encounter a great deal of resistance at the beginning of the semester as students worry about the impact on grades, by the end of the term, the vast majority of students are grateful for the opportunities they have had to interact with others they would not otherwise have interacted with and to make room for each other’s strengths and idiosyncrasies. Many of them say that in spite of the fact that they are in a Christian university, they had never considered that their participation in group activities had anything to do with their Christian service. Promoting group activities which encourage accountability for one another and discourage a “Survival” mentality becomes a formative experience that encourages the development of “communities of practice” in which students learn from one another.

### **Conclusion**

Christians who enter social work programs in response to a “call” to serve God and humanity through professional social work practice can understand themselves as co-laborers with God to accomplish His redemptive purposes. Learning to grow into that role requires the intentional fostering of requisite virtues such as discernment, humility, compassion, and brotherly love. Such spiritual formation is a life-long journey involving an ongoing commitment to reflection, self-awareness, and efforts to connect with the source of our faith to find strength, wisdom, and joy for the work of serving others. Equally important is a commitment to character development through service and the development of community, which I have only briefly addressed. My primary focus was on those practices that may serve to increase students’ preparedness for collaboration with the God who called them to accomplish His purposes on earth. Although these suggestions are by no means exhaustive, they present a basic structure for what may reasonably be incorporated into the curriculum of a social work program within a faith-based setting. Because the majority of social work programs in Christian settings are baccalaureate programs, these suggestions are best adapted to the undergraduate level, where they can be integrated throughout the curriculum and culminated in a discrete course on the integration of faith and practice. Ethical decision making with a focus on negotiating the tensions inherent in faith-based practice in secular settings or professional practice in ministry settings should be

addressed in an upper division course based on the foundation of spiritual growth and development. Creating a community of practice based on mutual support and encouragement in the Christian disciplines will foster students' connectedness with God, thus growing in virtue (2 Pet. 1:5-8), bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) and performing His will as they learn to co-labor with God. ❖

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# Recommended Resources: Virtue and Character

*For readers wishing to explore the topic of virtue further, we offer recommended resources organized in several categories: key sources on virtue, pedagogy for developing virtue, recommended sources on particular virtues, spiritual formation, and relevant professional sources (both social work and related professions).*

## **Key Sources on Virtue**

- Hauerwas, S., Berkman, J., & Cartwright, M. G. (2001). *The Hauerwas Reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
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## **Key Sources on Virtue and Pedagogy**

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- Wineberg, T. W. (2008). *Professional care and vocation: Cultivating ethical sensibilities in teaching*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

### **Virtue Theory: Foundations**

- Aquinas, T. (1984). *Treatise on the virtues*, trans. John A. Oesterle. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
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- Gilman, J. (2001). *Fidelity of heart: An ethic of Christian virtue*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
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## Particular Virtues

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### **Spiritual Formation**

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## REVIEWS

### ***Ethics in Professional Life: Virtues for Health and Social Care***

*Banks, S. & Gallagher, A. (2009). New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.*

*ETHICS IN PROFESSIONAL LIFE* BEGINS BY REVIEWING DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES on virtue ethics. Virtue ethics focuses on the ethical character of the moral agent. In this book, that would be nurses and social workers. The authors suggest that virtues can be developed and expressed through professional practices that support “human flourishing” as a service ideal. The practitioner’s flourishing is considered to be as important as the flourishing of a client. This is in contrast to the traditional view of professional standards, obligations, and duties that have only focused on the experience of clients.

The authors recommend that virtue ethics be applied in combination with deontological ethics, consequentialist ethics, and the ethic of care and proximity. A deontological, principles-based approach means a professional is obligated to fulfill particular duties based on, for example, a professional code of ethics. A consequentialist, utilitarian approach involves ethical actions that are based on the belief that the outcome should provide the most good for the most people. The ethic of care considers the dynamic, emotional nature of relationships focused on the recipient of care. A combined approach is believed to enable practitioner flexibility for broad application.

Although the authors suggest the need to balance emotions and reason, environmental factors may also shape what is considered virtuous. For example, a practitioner might experience moral distress in response to an unethical situation. This would require moral imagining and deliberation as well as emotional labor to direct an ethical response. The doctrine of the mean (i.e., middle) is described as a way to identify the ethical ideal and thus avoid the vices of extreme positions (e.g., courage is the mean between recklessness or too much courage and cowardice or too little courage). Hence, the expression of virtues relies heavily on the practitioner’s use of professional wisdom.

The majority of this book addresses virtues believed to be characteristic of a well-rounded, ethical professional. The authors describe these virtues as falling under two categories: self-regarding (or resistance) virtues and other-regarding (or relational) virtues. Self-regarding virtues offset forces that threaten to undermine ethical behavior. These virtues include justice, courage, and integrity. Other-regarding virtues center on meeting the needs of others. They include respectfulness, care, and trustworthiness. The authors describe each virtue from different perspectives largely based on philosophical literature.

When virtue ethics are applied with other ethical approaches, practitioners can operate as active moral agents who build moral communities and organizations that value the care of people. This is identified as being

particularly important for inter-professional work. Virtue ethics can be a starting point for professional discourse about ethical concerns and means of responding in a way that defines what it means to be a good professional. A shared mission to promote the flourishing of both practitioners and recipients may build mutual respect.

As I read this book, it was clear that the authors are experts on virtue ethics, but the material can be difficult to comprehend. It would help the reader to have some familiarity with virtue ethics and other ethical approaches before reading this book. The authors do attempt to provide some background for review, but their abbreviated style makes the material more difficult to work through and, ultimately, risks distracting from the main points of the book. Therefore, the breadth and depth of the material might be too ambitious for a novice reader without additional resources to help contextualize what the authors propose.

The delivery of the content also seems forced at times. For example, the authors use the same template for each chapter. This structure provides a continuous framework for the overall narrative, but limits the rhythm of a more animated discussion. Some of the most interesting parts of the book are actually the case scenarios at the beginning of each chapter and strategies for the reader to develop this virtue at the end of each chapter. The vitality of these sections is limited by an emphasis on weighty discussion of philosophical theories and other materials that are used to define each virtue.

What is unique about this book is that it describes how virtue ethics can be used to inform social work practice. Although virtue ethics do not prescribe ethical behaviors, in combination with other perspectives, practitioners can discern an ethical expression of emotions tempered by reason and circumstance. Despite the authors' call for ethical pluralism, the emphasis of this book is less on demonstrating an integrated approach and more about articulating each virtue. The book could use specific examples of how practitioners might apply virtue ethics in combination with other ethical perspectives so the reader can see how this looks in practice.

The case scenarios of virtue ethics do an excellent job in demonstrating the expression of virtues in direct practice. It would be interesting to explore how virtue ethics might be expressed through indirect practice by, for example, social work administrators in the organizational context. The authors did talk about the influence of the organizational context, but, as it was perhaps beyond the scope of this book, did not fully explore these mechanisms. Again, this exploration would be important given the author's emphasis on the environmental context that shapes ethical behavior and the role of resistance virtues in elevating systemic functioning.

Overall, this book is well researched, comprehensive, and informative. However, the presentation style results in material that may be too difficult to use in full, especially for readers unfamiliar with virtue ethics or other ethical philosophies. The book is probably best suited for doctoral

students or professional educators. The book may be used with master's level students with supplementary materials. The strategies for developing virtues could also serve as class exercises. This book ultimately provides an important starting point for conversations needed to advance ethical social work education, research, and practice. ❖

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***Spiritual formation as if the church mattered: Growing in Christ through community***

Wilhoit, J. C. (2008). *Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.*

IN AN AGE WHEN “SPIRITUAL BUT NOT RELIGIOUS” HAS BECOME THE MANTRA of a growing number of people of faith who disavow affiliation with religious organizations, Wilhoit provides a compelling argument for the vital role that communities of faith play in fostering spiritual formation. His definition of spiritual formation as the “intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 23) makes it clear that apart from community, intentionality, and the work of the Holy Spirit, little spiritual growth can be expected to occur in the life of the believer. Writing from an evangelical perspective, Wilhoit laments that relatively few Christians today are actually changed by the gospel. He contends that spiritual formation cannot truly take root except through intentional and deliberate efforts to apply the gospel in the context of Christian community.

According to the author, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* emerged from interviews with college students, church members, and leaders whose lives reflected the hallmarks of discipleship and spiritual maturity. The author's prime directive was to identify the common experiences and patterns of nurture that were evident in the congregations that were genuinely encouraging Christian formation in the lives of their members.

While the author's work appears to primarily target church leadership, it is accessible and important reading for all who are (or should be) a part of a community of faith. Firmly rooted in the accomplished work of the cross, this book is an excellent response to those who resist a focus on spiritual formation as a rules-oriented, religious perspective that is to blame for the “holier than thou” mindset contemporary culture loathes. A persistent theme throughout the book is that a diminished view of the ongoing work of the gospel throughout the life of the believer is responsible for the lack

of spiritual maturity evident in many Christian communities. Wilhoit skillfully navigates the tensions between grace and works, individual faith and the basic necessity of walking out that faith in the context of community.

Peppered generously throughout with scriptural references, the book provides a blueprint for cultivating a culture that is intentional about spiritual growth. Using the language of “invitations” of Christ, rather than “commands,” he identifies the basic elements of Christian discipleship. He frames his “curriculum for Christlikeness” (p. 38) in terms of four primary dimensions. These include receiving, remembering, responding, and relating. For each, one chapter explains the doctrinal and spiritual foundations of the essential element, followed by a chapter applying these concepts in the context of a community of faith and describing specific community practices and disciplines that promote spiritual formation.

My primary criticism of Wilhoit’s book is that although the book emerged out of interviews with real believers, Wilhoit does not provide readers with any examples of what these patterns of community living look like in actual practice. What is lacking in this book is *story*. In what ways did intentional practices in the life of a community of believers result in changed lives through the “persistent rediscovery of the gospel” (p. 32)? What might that look like?

On the other hand, as a social worker who must continually face the complexities of human existence, what I appreciated the most about this work is that Wilhoit acknowledges that although Christian formation must be intentional, it is also a complex and messy process that defies formulaic definition. He establishes the foundation of a program for spiritual formation in what he calls “optimistic brokenness” (p.63), which acknowledges our humanity, but has hope for change through the ongoing application of the gospel to our lives as a community of believers.

In his seminal work on Christians living in community, *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer warns that the greatest threat to true community is the “wish dream” of Christian brotherhood. According to Bonhoeffer, “He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial” (p. 27).

Wilhoit avoids this critical error. His tone is gracious and his recommendations appear to be based in the reality of community living rather than idealism. Congregational social workers as well as pastors and spiritual leaders will find much here to encourage, support, and provide practical guidelines for creating a culture that sustains spiritual growth.

Additionally, in light of recent discussions in professional literature regarding virtue ethics as a paradigm for encouraging ethical social work practice, this book provides much food for thought regarding the distinguishing characteristics of faith communities that have the potential for undergirding the virtue that “does no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10). ❖

Reviewed by **Marleen Milner**, Chair, Social Work Program, Southeastern University, 1000 Longfellow Boulevard, Lakeland, FL 33801. E-mail: mmilner@seu.edu.

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**Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning**  
Smith, D. I., & Smith J. K. A. (Eds.). (2011). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

IN *TEACHING AND CHRISTIAN PRACTICES*, SMITH AND SMITH COMPILE THE first-hand accounts of ten educators who take the challenge to develop strategies to apply recent theoretical discussions on the integration of faith and learning and the formative nature of social practices to their specific courses. They represent a broad range of academic disciplines and a variety of American Christian colleges and universities. The book is significantly informed by J. K. A. Smith's recent book, *Desiring the Kingdom*, as well as the work of the Kuyers Institute for Christian Teaching and Learning at Calvin College that seeks to promote pedagogical practices that enhance teaching and learning from a uniquely Christian perspective.

Smith (2009), who describes human beings as "desiring creatures" and "liturgical animals," as opposed to "thinking things," contends that it is what we love rather than what we think that ultimately defines who we become (p. 40). He argues that the almost singular focus of Christian academia on worldview is misdirected. Instead, a distinctly Christian education should constitute a "counter pedagogy" as it intentionally encourages practices of Christian worship to undermine the secular liturgies that pull our desires away from God and towards alternate views of the ultimate good. In the introduction to the current book, Smith and Smith provide an excellent summary of key works that support this view regarding the significance of social interaction in learning and formation as well as recent theological discussions regarding the centrality of Christian practices in the context of community for the development of virtue. This literature provides the foundation for the chapters that follow.

The contributors apply this philosophy of education to specific courses, making connections between numerous Christian practices and teaching across a variety of disciplines and educational settings. The selected Christian practices reflect tremendous creativity, resourcefulness, and innovation as they run the gamut from hospitality, to testimony, fellowship, meditation, prayer, and the use of labyrinths, to name only a few. In the spirit of reflective practice, the contributors recount the challenges and victories experienced with a refreshing blend of authenticity, humility, and celebration.

Although as an educator I was excited to find real-world ideas regarding how to incorporate Christian practices into my teaching, I found that rather than providing a one-size-fits-all template for incorporating Christian

practices into my class, the book provides encouragement and inspiration to explore the goals I am seeking to achieve and the Christian practices that might facilitate those outcomes. The contributors' candid reflections facilitate a realistic approach to incorporating changes and provide readers with the guidance to avoid particular pitfalls. There is something for almost everyone as the ten contributors come from backgrounds in philosophy, theology, nutrition, psychology, physics, language, history, and economics.

Although the book is written specifically for Christian educators, given the undergirding philosophy of the formative nature of social practices, I believe that educators in non-Christian settings could also find helpful material related to current discussions on encouraging civility and virtue based ethical practice. The book can be read in its entirety or used as a resource to focus on specific chapters that apply most closely to one's discipline.

For example, social work educators might find Carolyne Call's narrative regarding how she integrated testimony, fellowship, and hospitality into an adolescent psychology course particularly compelling. Not only is she teaching in a related discipline, but her transparency in sharing the personal challenges she faced highlight the fact that engaging Christian practices in the context of a community of learners are transformative for the instructor as well as the learners. I also found David Smith's discussion regarding incorporating "spiritually engaged reading practices" in his German literature class to be immediately accessible and relevant to the teaching of social work courses.

Although there is great variety in the ways that the contributors approach incorporating Christian practices in their courses, the introduction and the final chapter, "recruiting students imaginations," tie the disparate ideas into a unified whole. The final chapter, by David Smith, also discusses the challenges inherent in any pedagogical innovation, addresses instructor's anxieties, and reiterates the basic purpose of strengthening deep learning and encouraging Christian character in students and instructors alike. Each of the voices included in this book reflect a passionate commitment to students, to teaching as a Christian calling, and to the potential for transformative teaching and learning that might be realized by incorporating the spirit of ancient Christian practices in the classroom. ❖

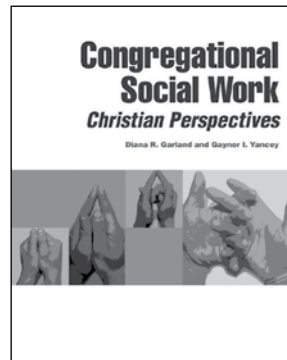
#### REFERENCE

Smith, J. K. A. (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic

*Reviewed by Marleen Milner, MSW, PhD, Chair, Social Work Program, Southeastern University, 1000 Longfellow Boulevard, Lakeland, FL 33801. E-mail: mmilner@seu.edu*

**PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE FROM NACSW**

**NACSW Announces  
the Publication of  
*Congregational Social Work:  
Christian Perspectives***



NACSW is delighted to announce the publication of *Congregational Social Work: Christian Perspectives* (2014) by Drs. Diana Garland and Gaynor Yancey from the Baylor School of Social Work. *Congregational Social Work* offers a compelling account of the many ways social workers serve the church as leaders of congregational life, of ministry to neighborhoods locally and globally, and of advocacy for social justice. Based on the most comprehensive study to date on social work with congregations, *Congregational Social Work* shares illuminating stories and experiences from social workers engaged in powerful and effective work within and in support of congregations throughout the US.

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**CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL WORK: READINGS ON THE INTEGRATION OF CHRISTIAN FAITH & SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE (FOURTH EDITION)**

T. Laine Scales and Michael S. Kelly (Editors). (2012). Botsford, CT: NACSW \$52.00 U.S., \$41.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more copies. For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

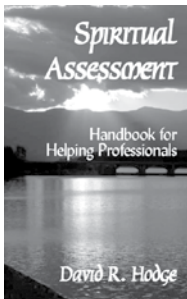


At over 400 pages and with 20 chapters, this revised fourth edition of *Christianity and Social Work* includes six new chapters in response to requests by readers of previous editions. We have included new chapters on issues of sexual orientation, Evidence-based Practice (EBP) as well as an enhanced section on the role of Christianity in social welfare history. It is written for social workers whose motivations to enter the profession are informed by their Christian faith, and who desire to develop faithfully Christian approaches to

helping. The book is organized so that it can be used as a textbook or supplemental text in a social work class, or as a training or reference materials for practitioners. Readings address a breadth of curriculum areas such as social welfare history, human behavior and the social environment, social policy, and practice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.

**SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT: HELPING HANDBOOK FOR HELPING PROFESSIONALS**

David Hodge. (2003). Botsford CT: NACSW \$20.00 U.S. (\$16.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

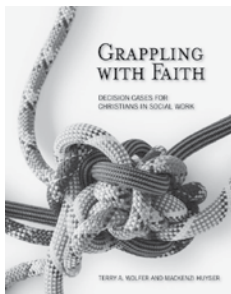


A growing consensus exists among helping professionals, accrediting organizations and clients regarding the importance of spiritual assessment. David Hodge's *Spiritual Assessment: Helping Handbook for Helping Professionals*, describes five complementary spiritual assessment instruments, along with an analysis of their strengths and limitations. The aim of this book is to familiarize readers with a repertoire of spiritual assessment tools to enable practitioners to select the most appropriate assessment instrument in given client/practitioner settings.

By developing an assessment "toolbox" containing a variety of spiritual assessment tools, practitioners will become better equipped to provide services that address the individual needs of each of their clients.

**GRAPPLING WITH FAITH: DECISION CASES FOR CHRISTIANS IN SOCIAL WORK**

Terry A. Wolfer and Mackenzi Huyser (2010) \$23.00 (\$18.00 for NACSW members or for orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

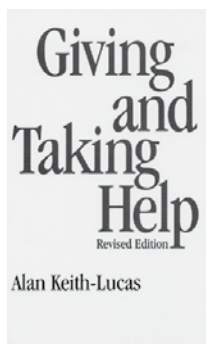


*Grappling with Faith: Decision Cases for Christians in Social Work* presents fifteen cases specifically designed to challenge and stretch Christian social work students and practitioners. Using the case method of teaching and learning, *Grappling with Faith* highlights the ambiguities and dilemmas found in a wide variety of areas of social work practice, provoking active decision making and helping develop readers' critical thinking skills. Each case provides a clear focal point for initiating

stimulating, in-depth discussions for use in social work classroom or training settings. These discussions require that students use their knowledge of social work theory and research, their skills of analysis and problem solving, and their common sense and collective wisdom to identify and analyze problems, evaluate possible solutions, and decide what to do in these complex and difficult situations.

**GIVING AND TAKING HELP (REVISED EDITION)**

Alan Keith-Lucas. (1994). Botsford CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work. \$20.00 U.S. (\$16.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

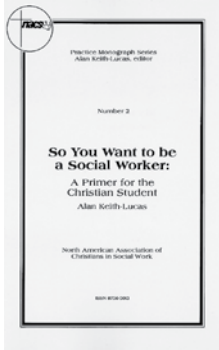


Alan Keith-Lucas' *Giving and Taking Help*, first published in 1972, has become a classic in the social work literature on the helping relationship. *Giving and taking help* is a uniquely clear, straightforward, sensible, and wise examination of what is involved in the helping process—the giving and taking of help. It reflects on perennial issues and themes yet is grounded in highly practice-based and pragmatic realities. It respects both the potential and limitations of social science in understanding the nature of persons and the helping process. It does not shy away from confronting issues of values,

ethics, and world views. It is at the same time profoundly personal yet reaching the theoretical and generalizable. It has a point of view.

**SO YOU WANT TO BE A SOCIAL WORKER: A PRIMER FOR THE CHRISTIAN STUDENT**

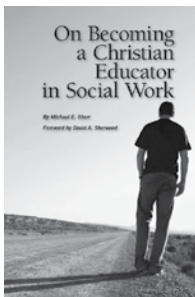
Alan Keith-Lucas. (1985). Botsford, CT: NACSW. *Social Work Practice Monograph Series*. \$11.00 U.S. (\$9.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.



*So You Want to Be a Social Worker* has proven itself to be an invaluable resource for both students and practitioners who are concerned about the responsible integration of their Christian faith and competent, ethical professional practice. It is a thoughtful, clear, and brief distillation of practice wisdom and responsible guidelines regarding perennial questions that arise, such as the nature of our roles, our ethical and spiritual responsibilities, the fallacy of “imposition of values,” the problem of sin, and the need for both courage and humility.

**ON BECOMING A CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR IN SOCIAL WORK**

Michael Sherr (2010) \$21.00 (\$17.00 for NACSW members or for orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.



*On Becoming a Christian Educator* is a compelling invitation for social workers of faith in higher education to explore what it means to be a Christian in social work education. By highlighting seven core commitments of Christian social work educators, it offers strategies for social work educators to connect their personal faith journeys to effective teaching practices with their students. Frank B. Raymond, Dean Emeritus at the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina suggests that “Professor Sherr’s

book should be on the bookshelf of every social work educator who wants to integrate the Christian faith with classroom teaching. Christian social work educators can learn much from Professor Sherr’s spiritual and vocational journey as they continue their own journeys and seek to integrate faith, learning and practice in their classrooms.”

**CHURCH SOCIAL WORK: HELPING THE WHOLE PERSON IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH**

Diana R. Garland (Editor). (1992). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work. \$20.00 U.S. (\$16.00 for NACSW members). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

**HEARTS STRANGELY WARMED: REFLECTIONS ON BIBLICAL PASSAGES**

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Lawrence E. Ressler (Editor). (1994). Botsford, CT: North American Association of Christians in Social Work. \$13.00 U.S. (\$11.00 for NACSW members or orders of 10 or more). For price in Canadian dollars, use current exchange rate.

*Hearts Strangely Warmed: Reflections on Biblical Passages Relevant to Social Work* is a collection of devotional readings or reflective essays on 42 scriptures pertinent to social work. The passages demonstrate the ways the Bible can be a source of hope, inspiration, and conviction to social workers.

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**THE POOR YOU HAVE WITH YOU ALWAYS: CONCEPTS OF AID TO THE POOR IN THE WESTERN WORLD FROM BIBLICAL TIMES TO THE PRESENT**

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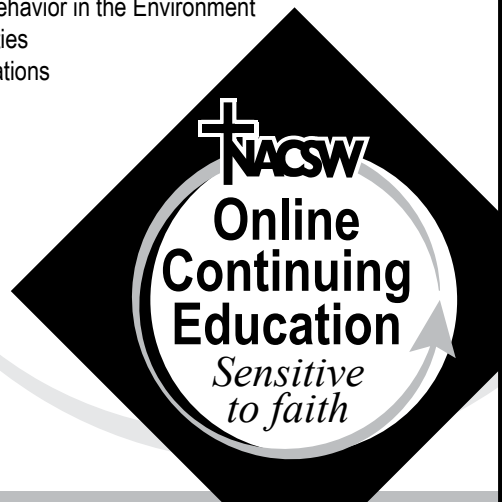
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At least three members of the editorial board will anonymously review manuscripts and recommend an acceptance decision based on the following criteria: relevance of content to major issues concerning the relationship of social work and Christianity, literary merit, conciseness, clarity, and freedom from language that conveys devaluation or stereotypes of persons or groups. The editor-in-chief will make final decisions.

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- Articulating an informed Christian voice on social welfare practice and policies to the social work profession.
- Providing professional understanding and help for the social ministry of the church.
- Promoting social welfare services and policies in society which bring about greater justice and meet basic human needs.

