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VIRTUE AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

A New Generation in an Ongoing Dialogue toward Greater Realization of Social Justice and the Common Good

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What is the relationship between virtue and the vision of Catholic social teaching (CST)? This very broad question has been answered in different ways over the past several decades, and a new generation of scholars is moving the question forward. In this paper I will seek to show that there has been an evolution from the important, but insufficient, insertion of virtue into the discussion of CST to more nuanced and specific efforts of relating virtue to the vision in CST of social justice and the common good. In short, I hope to show that both the older and the newer approaches rightly insist that the vision of CST should be seen as calling for individual reform or ongoing conversion and that fostering virtues in individuals is an important part in realizing that vision. A new generation, however, has come to see the importance of fostering specific virtues and recognizes that the call to virtue and conversion does not replace the need for structural change (structural change cannot wait for a virtuous population). What is needed in this view is a balanced emphasis on

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both changing structures and fostering specific virtues, with the former importantly influencing the latter.

I will begin with an evaluation of the view of J. Brian Benestad, who made an early and innovative effort at relating virtue to CST by arguing that virtue should be the primary focus of CST. Here I will focus on the importance of the insight that individual persons and their character are an important consideration that has been underemphasized in the teaching. I will then explore several promising suggestions from a new generation on the role of virtues in the Catholic social vision, one from Maureen O'Connell dealing with the single virtue of compassion and the other from Christopher Vogt dealing with a constellation of overlapping virtues. In order to gain an adequate understanding of how the virtues relate to social concern, significant attention will be paid to the dimensions of these virtues and the difference between the two approaches; however, a determination of the superiority of one over the other will not be made. By looking at the re-appropriation and application of the virtue of justice in the works of M.J. Iozzio and Katherine Getek Soltis, I will then briefly discuss how the recovery of justice as a virtue might also be applied to CST. Subsequently, I will turn to the differences between the older and newer approaches, first in the virtues they are proposing and the way they understand conversion and second in how they relate virtue to structures. I will argue that while both conversion and formation in virtues are imperative, such conversion and formation must be understood to include the changing of structures. Finally, I will discuss the interconnection of virtue and structures utilizing the work of Daniel J. Daly.

Virtue and CST: Virtue *over* Structures?

To begin, like many authors in the late 1980s and early 1990s, J. Brian Benestad wanted to put virtue back on the ethical agenda. In a book dedicated to responding to the 1986 U.S. Bishops' pastoral letter, *Economic Justice for All,* Benestad laid out his case for "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching."[1] Relying heavily on the thought of then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Benestad makes a case that "the *first thing*

[1]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," in *Private Virtue and Public Policy*, ed. James Finn, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1990, 29-48. Other contributors to the volume include Michael Novak and William Simon. I will focus primarily on this article when treating Benestad, as later expositions of his thought do not reveal any significant changes.

is not to look to the market, or the government, or even some combination thereof in order to achieve social justice, but to virtue."[2] Because "looking to virtue" is paramount, Benestad argues against "too much emphasis on structures" and disparages that "from the 1960's on, the understanding of a just social order grounded in virtue has been obscured in the minds of many, including bishops, priests, and theologians."[3] He particularly objects to the pastoral letter's "emphasis on structural change at the expense of virtue"[4] and claims that the "central affirmation of Catholic social teaching is the permanent need for conversion, without which the attempt to establish a just social order or the common good of society is in vain."[5] In short, then, "unless many individuals practice virtue the modern state cannot secure the public interest," and in order to understand and practice virtue, "people need healthy families, religious training, and sound education."[6]

We will return below to Benestad's understanding of virtue and the necessity to stress it over structures, but first we can notice that this long-sighted view gets much right on the surface, and was an important addition to the conversation about CST. Basically, virtues should be a focus of CST. There is a need to appeal to the "spiritual and moral capacities of the individual" and to recognize the "permanent need for inner conversion," as insisted by Cardinal Ratzinger's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.[7] Indeed, CST is not rightly understood as merely a tool for evaluating societies, nor should it be seen as solely concerned with the reform of structures and institutions. It also properly deals with conversion and individuals — both because the vision concerns individuals within societies and because such conversion is necessary for the realization of the vision for societies. This can be spelled out a bit further.

First, CST rightly understood offers a vision for society but also a vision for individual people who promote the common good and seek social justice within that society. It is ultimately a vision of cooperating in building the kingdom of God. Thus the

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[2]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 30.
[3]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 33.
[4]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 42
[5]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 33.
[6]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 30.
[7]J. Brian Benestad, "Virtue in Catholic Social Teaching," 30

comprehensive vision of social justice is not one in which hopelessly sinful (or even mediocre) individuals live constrained by just structures, but rather, to use the words of the American Catholic bishops, a society marked by the "fullness of love, compassion, holiness, and peace."[8] It is therefore not aimed only at the reform of institutions through public policy initiatives or the establishment of minimally just societies. It entails a vision of society in which members are oriented to the common good, respecting the rights of others, exercising responsibility in contributing to society, and working to see that the benefits of life in community are enjoyed by all. It can also be said that centering on the formation of virtues that orient to the common good is also congruent with the fact that the church should be primarily engaged in forming persons — helping people become better disciples of Christ — and CST is part of this larger objective.

Second, it may be argued that just structures are not likely to come about in any large way without virtuous individuals. Making a point somewhat similar to Benestad, Charles Curran posits that CST places emphasis on changing institutions and structures without giving sufficient emphasis to the need for conversion: "Without a change of heart, there will never be a change of structure. Yet the documents of CST do not give central importance to the change of heart."[9] This statement, like Benestad's argument, highlights that individual persons (and their character) are central to the realization of CST, and that this has been lacking in the teaching.

But what is involved in conversion of individuals, in "changing hearts" of people to pursue the common good? The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* makes clear that that CST is "neither taught nor known sufficiently"[10] and that therefore "making this doctrine known" constitutes a "genuine pastoral priority."[11] But will more information and better understanding lead to a change of heart

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[8]U.S Catholic Bishops, *Economic Justice For All*. In *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage,* ed. David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, New York: Maryknoll, 1992, no 68.

[9]Charles Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis*, Washington: Georgetown, 2002, 46.

[10]Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Washington: USCCB, 2005, no. 528

[11]Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium*, no. 7

and a changed way of acting, or is something more needed? Virtue ethicists respond: much more.

Primarily concerned with persons and individual formation (as opposed to individual acts),virtue ethics involves both a description of what constitutes a good human life and a delineation of how a person's dispositions, practices and ways of living should be formed in order to lead to that goal. As Mennonite pastor and virtue ethicist Joseph Kotva has explained, virtues ethics begins with a look at human nature as it is, develops a vision of that nature as it could be, and describes the habits, capacities and inclinations that lead from the starting point to the goal.[12] These habits, capacities and inclinations are virtues. In short, then, virtue ethics is concerned with shaping the whole person toward a defined goal; the virtues are both the means to the goal and are constitutive of it — they constitute the end. For our purposes, CST can be understood as providing the goal, namely, a vision of a just society and persons who pursue the common good. This end can then be filled in with virtues that are both constitutive (at least partially) of that vision and necessary means to achieve it.[13] We turn now to explore two promising proposals that have been put forth on specific virtues and how their cultivation can concretely express the vision of CST.[14]

A New Approach: Specific Virtues and Structural Change

Christopher Vogt insists that in order to gain an understanding of what it would mean to be virtuous from the point of view of Catholic social teaching, it is necessary to look at a constellation of interrelated virtues: compassion, solidarity, and hospitality. Assessing the state of 'who we are' he posits that most Americans "as well as many persons in other countries" hold a "radically individualistic" and "isolationist" view of the world, which poses a "deadly obstacle" to the goal of 'who we want to become,' namely, people concerned with

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[12]Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, Washington: Georgetown, 1996, 17.

[13]Of course, it could be argued that virtues were necessary for the formation of the vision of society; in other words, virtues come before the principles of CST, and indeed were essential in the formation of that vision. Such an argument seems to me very reasonable, however it is not my intention here to sort out the question of "whence principles?"

[14]Of course, the particular end provided by the vision of CST will not constitute the whole of the *telos* of the human person, nor will the virtues deemed necessary be exhaustive of the virtues necessary for human flourishing.

"social justice" and engaged in "a politics of the common good."[15] The use of these three similar yet separate virtues "brings into relief the complexity of what it means to actively promote justice and the common good" and emphasizes that "to be formed in the tradition of Catholic social thought, entails the conversion of the whole person."[16] It is important to look a bit deeper at the distinctiveness and interrelation of these three virtues.

Vogt argues that the three virtues of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality are similar to each other in many ways. They all "lead people to be attentive to the suffering of others and to regard that suffering as morally relevant to their own lives." They are also all "directed toward the common good, which is most properly the object of the virtue of justice," and so they are all "heavily influenced by justice operating as a general virtue."[17] Further, they each specify a particular and enduring manner of thinking, feeling and acting. But, they also each stand apart from each other in terms of which of these forms of habituation is most central to it as well as in the degree of their being either more interpersonal (compassion and hospitality) or more directed toward the transformation of society (solidarity).

Drawing on Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, David Hollenbach, Joe Holland and Jon Sobrino, Vogt claims that the form of habituation most central to solidarity is thinking or knowing. He explains that solidarity entails first a "coming to awareness" of the actual, often sinful state of the world, and how humans relate to one another, socially, politically, and economically. This knowledge is not achieved from a neutral vantage point, but rather entails forging dialogical, mutually beneficial relationships with the oppressed. Nor is the knowledge of solidarity solely an awareness and understanding of the current state of things, it also involves a sense of "moral concern" about that state and some understanding of "what moral patterns of relationship should replace existent structures that are marked by sin."[18] And for a globalized world in which human beings are unavoidably connected, solidarity demands that the structures of society be reformed so that the situation of interdependence "is

[15]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment to the Common Good: An Approach Rooted in Virtue Ethics," in *Theological Studies* 68 (2007) 394-417, at 396-7.

[16]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 401.

[17]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 400.

[18]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 403.

transformed in to a morally positive relationship that respects the human dignity of all."[19]

While knowledge is central, solidarity also includes a way of feeling. The intensity of this way of feeling, Vogt explains, has been variously understood. Isasi-Diaz has linked solidarity ultimately to a feeling of love: the knowing aspect is achieved not only at the level of abstraction and social organization, but also "by coming to know the actual, specific concrete injustices and oppression suffered by people in the world." Through this process of coming to know the oppressed, one establishes both a feeling of mutuality of interest and a feeling of "connection or sympathy for one another."[20] Similarly, from a liberationist perspective, the process of coming to know how human beings should be interdependent cannot occur "independently of acting alongside the vulnerable and developing feelings of concern for them."[21] Thus we do not first come to know the truth of solidarity and then act on it, but rather we come to know the meaning of solidarity only by first acting.[22]

While the precise actions and practices that solidarity demands may often remain unspecified, it certainly goes beyond individuals and must be "expressed in the economic, cultural, political and religious institutions that shape society."[23] In sum, then, solidarity is rooted both in "discovering the fact of human interdependence" and in nurturing "mutual relationships," and both of these "seem to be ultimately in service of transforming the structures of society."[24]

Compassion for Vogt is the more affective and "particularist" virtue which is needed to create "the emotional preconditions for the pursuit of solidarity."[25] In short, being compassionate entails developing the capacity to "be moved by another's suffering in such

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[19]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."

[20]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 404

[21]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."

[22] Here Vogt is relying on Jon Sobrino, "Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Cncepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria and Jon Sobrino, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993, 440-61, at 448-52.

[23]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 404-5. To make this point Vogt quotes at length from David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2002), 189.

[24]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 405.

[25]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."

a way that one shares in the other's pain and is moved to relieve it."[26] The first step in this process of development is intentionally developing the habit of noticing people who are suffering — both through becoming more attuned to the reality of those we already notice and relate to and by expanding the range of persons we notice.[27] Beyond developing this particular way of seeing, compassion also involves learning to respond to what is seen, first through listening carefully to the voice of the suffering and being open to the "otherness of the suffering, a recognition that the other's suffering is not mine but must come to be known through my empathetic listening."[28] This coming to know is similar to the process involved in solidarity, but it is also distinctive because of its focus on the suffering of particular persons.

In order to really know means experiencing that suffering emotionally. In other words, it involves developing a particular way of feeling, which as Vogt notes, a substantial body of recent work in ethics tells us is "a key dimension of knowing."[29] Having noticed and been moved, compassion involves "acting in concert with and on behalf of the suffering person in order to relieve that suffering."[30] This action is a "dialectical process" where the compassionate person seeks to bring about what is, in fact, good for the sufferer/s and at the same time to benefit them in "a way that they want to be benefitted, for it is ultimately their own unique good that one is seeking."[31]

Promoting the practice of compassion and dialogue on the good of particular persons, might, according to Vogt, establish "the emotional connection between persons that is a prerequisite for conversation about the shape of the good human life" and the social infrastructure required to support such a life.[32] Further, the empathetic way of feeling involved in compassion is that which primarily "provides the motivation for a person to act to dismantle injustice and relieve the suffering of the other," and thus it is that practicing compassion is a prerequisite for the pursuit of solidarity and social justice.[33] In short,

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[26]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 406.
[27]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."
[28]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."
[29]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 407.
[30]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."
[31]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment..."
[32]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 410.
[33]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 408.

then, only by "relationships of compassion with specific others can we become emotionally and morally invested in the issue of social justice and the common good."[34]

Finally, Vogt proposes the virtue of hospitality as a particular expression of compassion and solidarity that is meant to shape the overall practice and development of these virtues. In practice, it must avoid a situation of "one way dependence" and instead seek a "dialogical relationship with those offered welcome."[35] Further, it requires care-givers to see care-receivers as their equals. Successfully practising hospitality can "integrate a preferential option for the poor" by constantly challenging the community "to expand the circle of those toward whom it shows concern." Its successful practice would also increase the opportunity to practice compassion and solidarity by "providing a concrete, institutionalized setting in which members of the church encounter people who suffer from real injustice."[36] Noticing that the practice of hospitality in the early Christian community often took the form of providing food, shelter and welcome to strangers or foreigners, Vogt insists, drawing on Christine Pohl, that today a stranger could be anyone who finds herself "disconnected from the vital relationships that provide security and a sense of place in the world" and that thus "this virtue can find wide applicability in contemporary American society."[37] Vogt cites the possibilities of such specific practices as working in food kitchens in parishes, and in a more extended section, he discusses the very specific example of the interaction of hospitality and compassion in the welcoming of illegal immigrants who settle on Long Island to find work as day labourers.

As with compassion, hospitality can lead to the intellectual reflection proper to solidarity; it can raise questions about the economic, social, and political structures that cause individuals to be in need of hospitality in the first place. And so it is that the three virtues are distinct yet also intimately related. While compassion may have a central importance in "moving us toward social justice and a politics of the common good" it must be paired with "hospitality, and its preferential option for strangers of all kinds" and with solidarity,

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[34]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 410.
[35]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 413.
[36]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 410.
[37]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 412.

"which manifests itself in a global concern for the other and in a demand that society and international affairs be organized in ways that promote universal respect for human dignity."[38]

Vogt's vision, then, is ultimately about formation: the cultivation of these three virtues should be central to individual faith formation. And this implies something very important, formation in these three virtues should be central to Catholic communities, parishes, grade schools, high schools, universities, etc. Thus while he acknowledges that others outside the Catholic or Christian community can certainly embrace these virtues, he is making distinctive claim for the Church to engage in faith formation in them. Ultimately, he believes that turning to these virtues will allow the Church to "give expression to the vision of social justice it has long proclaimed" and that this might "lead American society as a whole toward a politics of the common good that might be embraced by all."[39]

Rather than focusing on a constellation, it is also possible to ground a virtue based approach to social concern in a single virtue; Maureen O'Connell offers a fine example of such an approach. In *Compassion: Loving our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*, O'Connell offers an "alternative approach" to compassion that responds to the reality of massive unjust suffering, the phenomenon of globalization, and the social disasters fuelled by radical social inequality.[40] Whereas Vogt highlights one form of habituation in each virtue and then extols their interrelation, O'Connell emphasizes the perfection of thinking, feeling and action entailed in compassion itself. Drawing on myriad sources in both philosophical and theological ethics, O'Connell arrives at what she calls "political compassion," as opposed to a privatized response to suffering. So understood, compassion requires an honest assessment of what might be required to restore persons and groups to flourishing, including an awareness of how both oneself and the institutions one is a part of are directly or indirectly in collusion with the causes of suffering. This self and institutional awareness is made possible by a "disruptive conversion to the reality of those who suffer."[41] Having been disruptively converted and made

[38]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 416.

[39]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 417.

[40]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion: Loving our Neighbor in an Age of Globalization*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009.

[41]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*, 91.

critically aware, the person engages in compassion as a political response, which entails "an active commitment to human flourishing rooted in empowerment and resistance to the causes of suffering that brings about a substantial change for the subject and object of compassion."[42] In short, according to O'Connell, genuine and effective compassion is "less concerned with emergency relief or philanthropic charity and more closely connected with development aid and social justice."[43]

Regarding compassion's relation specifically to CST, O'Connell argues that compassion both complements and challenges three central principles on CST. First, compassion bolsters the communal effort to create a truly vibrant common good by perfecting our ability to truly see the many persons excluded from such. It also reminds us that relationality is the greatest of social goods and allows us to perceive gaps in our "fist-world notions of the common good-whether our consumerist preoccupation with material goods, our obsession with productivity that rejects recreation and undermines the dignity of work, or our preference for autonomous individualism that undercuts the value of life in community."[44] Second, compassion "works in concert" with solidarity to resist our tendency to limit our responsibility to those with whom we share some similarity (e.g. race, class, ethnicity, neighbourhood, etc.). The two in concert also lead to a questioning of social constructs, unearned privileges and causal relationships, especially between our own "over- or super-development and the under-development of others."[45] Finally, she argues that compassion thickens the principle of subsidiarity, by enabling us to perceive more accurately the complexities of particular circumstances of suffering and thereby fostering a "bottom-up approach to social change." Further, by prizing relationships among people, and not material goods, as the "optimal facets of any response to injustice," compassion complements subsidiarity in encouraging those faced with obstacles to their flourishing "to work together — in a variety of relationships — to address those obstacles."[46]

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[42]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion.*
[43]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*, 5.
[44]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion,* 84-6.
[45]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*, 87.
[46]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*, 88.

Overall, O'Connell thinks that compassion has the potential to correct three "liabilities" in the tradition of CST. First, compassionate perception attends to the overlooked particularities of the human condition, such as gender, age, physical and mental capabilities, and social and geographic location, and its "emphasis on relational goods" also fosters "an organic response to social injustices" as opposed to a top-down approach.[47] Second, while CST provides principles and directive norms for action it lacks "specific methods or concrete practices that attend to the particular realities of suffering communities"; compassion provides a way to move from "scrutinizing the signs of the times toward actually engaging them alongside those who suffer."[48] Finally, as an "emotive approach to reasoning that engages both the intellectual and rational as well as the intuitive and affective components of the moral agent" compassion can add to CST's intellectually-known abstract concepts, and thereby both enable an accurate calculation of "what might be required to create a more just world" and provide the motivation "to take the risks this kind of justice will require."[49]

Now, as both Vogt and O'Connell surely recognize, other virtues might well be central to social concern, and more specifically, constitutive and leading to the realization of CST. For instance, exploring specifically how justice considered as a virtue (as differentiated from the more prevalent contemporary understanding of justice as a principle) could yield much fruit in relation to CST. As noted above, Vogt recognizes that his constellation of virtues are heavily influenced by justice operating as a "general virtue" as they are directed toward the common good, which is most properly the object of the virtue of justice. But much more could be done with an understanding of the virtue of justice itself. Indeed, a revival of the understanding of justice as virtue has been applied to other ethical considerations, which suggests ready applicability to fostering greater realization of CST. It is worth briefly looking at two such applications.

First, the American Catholic ethicist M.J. Iozzio has looked at how the virtue of justice applies to health care. She notes that many in contemporary discourse fail to recognize that justice is a virtue, but

[47]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*, 89.
[48]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*.
[49]Maureen H. O'Connell, *Compassion*.

argues that a retrieval of the Thomistic-Aristotelian understanding of justice as a virtue is necessary for adequately arriving at a "just health care ethic."[50] In brief, she posits that, as a virtue, justice is concerned with relationships and holds an end for the agent, for the patient, and for the action. An ethic of "just care", then, "like virtue theory in general, is concerned with the affect of the action upon the agent as well as the act's affect on the other and the community."[51] Applying justice as a virtue thus necessarily considers the individuals involved as well as the common good. While Iozzio restricts the just care ethic to the health care arena, she nonetheless provides a helpful reminder that looking to justice as a virtue can help shape individuals and their actions as well as whole systems, and that it by definition does so in reference to the common good.

Also drawing on the Thomistic understanding of the virtue of justice as wells as the scriptural tradition of justice, Kathryn Getek Soltis applies the virtue to prisons and punishment. Getek Soltis looks especially to an appropriation of general or legal justice, which "regards a special object which is the common good" and so "concerns virtues directed to civic life" and is also "closely related to the theological virtue of charity."[52] Similarly to Iozzio, she looks to justice as "the perfection of the way a person is related to others" and so engages in a modification of Aquinas which "builds upon and develops his original presentation of justice as an orientation concerned with our relatedness to others and the community at large."[53] She further insists that this conception of virtue as the perfection of relationships "allows for the application of justice to social bodies as well as systems."[54] With this foundation, she then goes on to spell out how justice as a virtue offers distinctive resources for prison reform. Thus, Getek Soltis also reinforces the need for the virtue of justice to shape both individuals and systems.

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[50]Mary Jo Iozzio, "Justice Is a Virtue Both in and out of Healthcare," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1998) 151-166.

[51]Mary Jo Iozzio, "Justice Is a Virtue...,"159.

[52]Kathryn Getek Soltis, *Just Punishment? A Virtue Ethics Approach to Prison Reform in the United States* (PhD diss., Boston College, 2010). See also, Kathryn Getek Soltis. "The Christian Virtue of Justice and the US Prison," *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 8, no. 1 (2011) 37-56.

[53]Getek Soltis, *Just Punishment,* 113-114.

[54]Getek Soltis, *Just Punishment*, 114.

Basically, then, both Getek Soltis and Iozzio reveal the importance of retrieving the idea of justice as a virtue, and the possibility of the virtue of justice being applied to concrete contemporary needs. Fostering the virtue of justice among Catholics, and so by definition fostering a perfection of relationships and an orientation to the common good, would surely go a long way toward realizing the vision of CST. The consideration of how to do so is therefore a promising avenue for further investigation.

Of course, much more could also be said about how other particular virtues relate to an overarching structure of cardinal and theological virtues, and certainly a part of this discussion would be the role of prudence in integrating the virtues. However, my aim in this paper is neither to determine which approach is better (focusing on compassion or a constellation) nor to definitively determine which virtues are necessary for, and partly constitutive of, the realization of CST.[55] I explore Vogt and O'Connell's approaches (and note the possibilities for further exploration of the virtue of justice) merely to highlight promising arguments for the importance of specific virtues in the realization of the vision Catholic social teaching. It is also helpful to clearly delineate these new approaches from the old, especially with regard to the understanding of conversion, the specificity of the necessary virtues, and the role of structures and institutions.

Old and New: An Evaluation

In some ways the approaches are quite similar. At base, all see virtue as a necessary means to social justice, and they all stress the importance of formation of individuals and of ongoing conversion. Indeed all see individuals as in need of conversion — away from individualism and toward a more robust commitment to the common good. For Benestad, this process is the "correction of morals in view of the common good," for Vogt, moving a person from "her current

[55]Of course, it is also surely the case that a great deal more could be and has been said about each of these virtues and their relation to social concern. For example, although not relating virtue to the vision of CST, Martha Nussbaum offers a single virtue approach in which she argues that compassion is a virtue that perfects one's thoughts, affections and actions toward others — see *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, esp. part 2, "Compassion." From a Christian perspective, see also James E. Gilman, "Compassion and Public Covenant: Christian Faith in Public Life," *Journal of Church and State* 36 (1994) 747-71.

state to the desired state envisioned by our social teaching," namely a "politics of social justice and the common good," and for O'Connell, being "transformed by the narratives of the victims in the ditch," accepting accountability and assuming an active commitment to change. They deem essential, in brief, ongoing conversion and individual formation in virtue and think that the traditional teaching and social thought tends not to emphasize this.

But much more pronounced are the differences. The key question is: conversion by what means and resulting in what? Or, more specifically, what is the vision and what all will be required to get there? As noted, in all cases virtues are a matter of ongoing conversion and individual formation, but Benestad is not focused on virtues in the same way, nor does he put forward the same understanding of formation. Further, to return to the problem posed by Charles Curran: "Without a change of heart, there will never be a change of structure." Thus another key question is whether social justice is a matter of both "correction of morals in view of the common good" and structural reform, with the former sometimes contributing to the latter, or whether it is primarily the former, largely replacing the need for the latter. In the case of Vogt and O'Connell the virtues are meant to contribute to structural reform (among other things). For Benestad, the long-term end of formation in virtue is emphasized in a way that both lends itself to eschewing the need for structural reform and that can imply that virtue is a solution primarily (or largely) in fostering individual responsibility. We can turn now to further clarifying these distinctions.

First, there is a difference in the virtues extolled and the way they are extolled. Benestad seems to aim somewhat in the same direction as Vogt and O'Connell, namely individual reform toward more concern for the common good. However, his idea of individual reform is "understanding and living the faith" by putting into practice "all that is taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on doctrine, morality, the sacraments and prayer."[56] He notes that Thomas Aquinas says that virtue 'makes a man good, and renders his work good,' and then concludes that "people achieve goodness by acting according to

[56]This statement comes from his most recent work, *Church, State and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine*, Washington, DC: CUA, 2011, 3. Though of greater length and treating a wider array of topics, his treatment of virtue and CST changes in no discernible way from his 1991 article.

reason and divine law" and that virtue enables people to so act while sin creates obstacles to doing so.[57] But he stops short and only vaguely extols the traditional cardinal and theological virtues, save for a treatment of prudence in which he notes that prudence is right reason applied to action and is directed both to the private good and the common good. Prudence directed to the latter, he explains, is "political prudence" which he says is "crucial for the well-being of all individuals" and depends on "native abilities, education, and experience."[58] But this quickly devolves into a discussion of what is lacking in contemporary liberal education and American families. In short, then, Benestad thinks that virtue is mainly to be understood as the cardinal and theological virtues, and that to understand and practice these, "people need healthy families, religious training, and sound education."[59]

Vogt and O'Connell, on the other hand, spell out how certain very particular virtues get one to the desired end of fostering social justice and promoting the common good. They are concerned with how a person's dispositions, practices and ways of living must be formed in order to lead to the goal of greater and more effective social concern. While they certainly do not want to eschew the traditional theological and cardinal virtues (and note how the virtues they pick are related to these, especially justice and love), they are also not content to leave what is needed and involved in conversion and formation to vague generalities of living virtuously. Further, the specific virtues they do extol are for everyone: though the faith community is very important in forming persons in them, others can embrace and embody these virtues. Benestad, conversely, stresses that being within the church, and "in a state of grace" is necessary to truly practice all of the virtues, and so to truly be directed toward the common good.[60]

Second, there is a difference on the role of structures. Vogt and O'Connell are certainly arguing that more virtue, or more of certain virtues in particular, is necessary to see change; however, the change they seek necessarily involves the changing of structures. Indeed, they make clear that formation in virtue (in compassion, solidarity, hospitality — and perhaps a host of others) is geared, at least in part,

[57]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 35.
[58]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 37-38
[59]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 30.
[60] See pages 35-37 in "Virtue in CST" or page 3 in *Church, State and Society.*

toward the changing of structures: the more people embody these virtues, the more unjust structures will change. But while they deem necessary a greater realization of these virtues, and so an increased focus on moral formation in them, at no point do they imply that there should be less of a focus on changing structures. They do not, in short, see an emphasis on structures and an emphasis on virtue as in competition, but rather see them as necessarily interrelated.

Benestad, on the other hand, believes that a stress on structures can distract from extolling virtue. Indeed, he decries giving focus to structures at the expense of virtue. However, the reverse complaint could be made about his view: he extols virtue in such a way as to make it seem that the two are either in competition or are unrelated. Several points in his argument against overemphasis on structures reveal his distorted emphasis on virtue, the potentially problematic nature of the way he extols virtue, and his lack of appreciation for structures. Exploring these weaknesses can help reveal the importance of maintaining a strong emphasis on structures when extolling virtue.

First, Benestad suggests that virtue is the more "effective" way to achieve social justice. He casts the view of the economic pastoral (and other understandings "from the 1960's on") as one in which "establishing and modifying structures…seems to be much more effective than attempting to establish a public morality or educating people to virtue."[61] He also casts this stress on structures as "an attempt to circumvent human imperfection" and as seeking to "overcome the limits of relying on conversion and virtue."[62] Clearly, then, he thinks focusing on the long-term of conversion would be more effective; but one can ask: more effective at what?

If one is trying to be more efficient achieving minimums of justice, then establishing and reforming structures is indeed more efficient. Now, these minimums of justice should not be then end of the matter. Indeed, the goal will always be the extolling of virtue, and so as Benestad insists, "individual moral efforts remain indispensable under every form of government," and it would certainly be bad to stress structures in an attempt to "circumvent human imperfection."[63]

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[61]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 32.
[62]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 33.
[63]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 33.

But this is not what the changing of structures is meant to do. As the U.S. bishops explain, while we are aiming at the great vision of God's Kingdom, part of this is the realization of basic or minimal justice, which "demands that social institutions be ordered in a way that guarantees all persons the ability to participate actively in the economic, political, and cultural life of society."[64] In short, then, changing structures should not obviate the need for virtue, but neither should a stress on virtue be used to obviate the need for establishing and modifying structures.

But Benestad does not believe social institutions are central to social injustice. Indeed, he objects to the U.S. bishops' contention that the concentration of privilege "results more from institutional relationships that distribute power and wealth inequitably than from differences in talent or lack of desire to work." Instead, he suggests that what is truly decisive in causing inequitable distribution of material goods is "talent, hard work, personal desire, education, and family stability."[65] He also objects to the bishops' contention that the obstacles to participation in the life of the community include primarily "restrictions on free speech, state repression, and economic forces that generate poverty," and instead posits that the bishops "surely know that sound education, good family life, and virtues such as fortitude are as important to political participation as employment programs."[66]

This particular stress on "virtue" and individual and familial responsibility over institutions suggests something significant about the people meant to be changed by virtue in Benestad's schema. For Vogt and O'Connell, the change that needs to occur is primarily on the part of the privileged — understood in various ways — both globally and locally. The virtues they put forth are geared toward bringing about such a change. Benestad's emphasis, conversely, can lead easily into extolling virtue as a change that needs to come about *in* the poor and marginalized rather than *for* them. While he does aim at conversion toward concern for the common good, he also places heavy emphasis on the need for individual responsibility. This is not bad in itself, but can lead to a dangerous brand of moralizing. As noted, he suggests that talent, hard work, etc. are the decisive factors

[64]*Economic Justice for All,* no. 78.
[65]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 42.
[66]Benestad, "Virtue in CST," 43.

in inequality. But the fact is that the poor and marginalized face systems that are not just — from access to education, to enduring racism, to massively inadequate government and unjust trade policies facing the global poor. Vaguely extolling virtue and portraying social justice as conversion to contributing to common good — even if this is for both rich and poor — is unhelpful when unjust structures exist that impede such contributions and when the conversion of the rich is not meant to undo these structures. Thus whereas Vogt and O'Connell are showing how virtue attunes and shapes people to act to change injustices, Benestad is more concerned to underplay unjust institutions and structures and to extol virtue as a vague ideal, including that more virtue (and virtue understood as fostering hard work, responsibility, etc.) would mean less poverty and injustice.

The importance of looking to basic justice by the reform of institutions and structures is especially true given the fact that the formation of virtuous character is necessarily an ongoing process. As Joseph Kotva points out generally about virtue, "the *telos*, as an ideal of human excellence and perfection, can never fully be actualized" but is instead "always calling us forward to a fuller realization of the human good."[67] This is also true of realizing the ideal of individuals who promote social justice and the common good. Each person, and all people, will never be fully "converted," and while this process remains necessary, and should always be extolled, marginalized individuals can't wait on it to achieve its end. Thus, overall, though it is right to point out that CST is part of a larger moral vision of creating disciples and that virtuous persons are necessary to reach the vision of society in CST, this does not mean that the immediate needs of protecting rights and ensuring certain minimums of justice can wait on virtuous people. In brief, virtuous individuals are a goal, but to achieve especially minimums of justice in society it is imperative not to wait for a society of virtuous individuals.

A pronounced de-emphasis on structures also misses the complex interplay between structures and personal morality, especially the formative nature of social structures. As Daniel J. Daly has shown, the Catholic tradition contains, in both liberation theology and recent magisterial social teaching, an emphasis on the dialectical

[67]Kotva, *Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*, 38.

relationship between social structures and personal moral character, particularly in the concept of "structural sin."[68] Drawing on and seeking to improve this concept, Daly proposes a renewal to speak of structures of virtue and vice. This renewal will involve, at root, a more rigorous sociological analysis of the interplay between social structures and personal moral character and human acts.

In adumbrating this sociological analysis, Daly relies on Peter Bergman and Thomas Luckman's explanation of a dialectical process by which societies and persons are formed through externalization and objectification, and through internalization and re-subjectification. Basically, by means of individual agency persons externalize moral values, etc. and thereby create the objective reality of social structures, or "impersonal mechanisms and institutions that function in their own right."[69] Internalization, in turn, is the process by which individuals are shaped by these structures, which function to either "systematically promote the human good, the common good, and human happiness, or frustrate the realization of these goods."[70] When internalized, "structures not only influence the person's actions, but further, they shape a person's moral character," and this can be for good or ill.[71]

Thus Daly's concept of structural virtue and vice captures the moral character of institutions as well as socially embedded character traits of individual agents.[72] Many examples could be given that show the importance of structures both for ensuring (or thwarting) basic justice and in forming character. For instance, the Jim Crow laws of the American South were the objectification of the process of externalization of racism, bigotry, etc. This objectified structure in turn influenced generations of Southerners, contributing to their formation in these vices and perpetuating the situation of discrimination and racism. The overturning of these laws, through resistance by virtuous individuals committed to justice, and the establishment of new laws in Federal legislation was the process of externalization and objectification of virtues. Eventually the new

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[68]Daniel J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," *New Blackfriars* Vol. 92, Issue 1039 (2010) 341-58. Online at: DOI:10.1111/j.1741-2005.2010.01355.x

[69]Daniel J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 355.

[70]Daniel J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 353.

[71]Daniel J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 355.

[72]Daniel J. Daly, "Structures of Virtue and Vice," 357.

reality of just laws influenced the formation of individuals in society, and while racism surely still persists, it is not on the same scale, and does not have the same institutionalized support. It would not have been helpful to simply extol conversion, the unjust laws had to be dismantled to achieve basic justice, and the conversion had to come about in part through the influence of more just structures.

For our purposes, Daly's analysis shows that even for the long-term outcome of ongoing conversion, structures are much more important than Benestad recognizes. Indeed, not only are structures important for basic justice, but they also heavily influence individual character (and are in turn influenced by it). Thus by decrying a focus on structures, Benestad undercuts his own aims of fostering a long-term and effective path to social justice through virtuous individuals. In contrast, Vogt and O'Connell seem to understand the relationship between structure and virtue (or vice); this is apparent both in their recognition of the way current constructs shape us for ill and in their stress on the capacity of compassion (or the constellation) to lead to structural change, which can in turn foster greater virtue and justice. As Vogt says of solidarity, it entails developing a sense of the current state of things marked by sin, and developing an understanding of what "moral patterns of relationship should replace the existent structures that are marked by sin."[73] The church can be a place where virtues are fostered to help individuals resist structures of vice and to build structures of virtue. But this cannot happen when structures are made to seem unimportant or unrelated to justice and the common good.

So, while structural reform should not be seen as a replacement for ongoing conversion and formation in virtue, neither should conversion be seen as a replacement for changing structures; in fact, the two should be seen as interrelated. Structural reform is necessary both for more basic justice and for the long-term process of conversion and building of individuals of virtuous character.

Conclusion

I have looked at the evolution of approaches to relating virtue to CST, and have determined that the newer approach takes us in the right direction going forward. Basically, while CST should look to conversion and the formation of virtue both as an end and as a means

[73]Christopher Vogt, "Fostering A Catholic Commitment...," 403.

to the end of its vision for society, it is important to be precise in what this means. J. Brian Benestad was indeed long-sighted in his vision, and he was surely right to insist that virtue be a larger part of the discussion. However, by extolling virtue vaguely and hinting that virtue's role is largely to promote individual responsibility, his approach opens the door to misuses and misunderstandings. Further, by over-resistance to the changing of structures, he fails to capture both the importance of dismantling and rebuilding structures for basic justice and the way in which structures affect character and thus the long-term about which he is so concerned. A new generation, on the other hand, has put forward an approach which avoids these pitfalls and provides promising ways of understanding the role that virtue can play in realizing the vision of CST. Basically, the new approach looks toward forming individual persons in virtues that are constitutive of the vision and that therefore enable people to respond to the contemporary realities of suffering and injustice. Further, they recognize that concern for a deeper moral vision does not obviate the need for structural change, and in fact, they see the two as linked. Surely, much more could be said about individual virtues and their relation to constellations, about how these virtues relate to the virtue of justice, and about what other virtues could be added. My aim was simply to show that we have moved beyond the vague extolling of virtue and toward the exploration of specific virtues with an emphasis on the interconnection and importance of both structures and virtue. This new generation thus offers a promising way of proceeding in relating virtue to CST.