

FOSTERING A CATHOLIC COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD: AN APPROACH ROOTED IN VIRTUE ETHICS

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The author argues that virtue ethics offers a potentially fruitful framework for approaching Catholic social thought. A virtue-based approach provides a means of connecting a Catholic understanding of social justice to issues of personal morality and moral formation. Three overlapping virtues are proposed as foundational to this approach: solidarity, compassion, and hospitality. The cultivation of these three virtues involves developing habits of thinking, feeling, and acting that concretely express a vision of Catholic social teaching.

MORE THAN 40 YEARS HAVE PASSED since the close of the Second Vatican Council. At this remove, it seems sadly but undeniably true that the world has not answered the council's call to read the signs of the times by the light of the gospel so as to bring about the renewal of human society.¹ The vision of social justice put forward in *Gaudium et spes* remains compelling, but the Church has proven itself unable to leverage the political will necessary to make significant progress toward the realization of that vision. This article considers what obstacles stand in the way of promoting a politics of the common good in the United States, and suggests that linking the vision of Catholic social thought to the practice of key Christian virtues offers one way to facilitate its concrete realization.

Those who hope for a renewed commitment to the common good in American society face two enormous challenges, one intellectual, the other

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¹ *Gaudium et spes* no. 3. For the text of this document see David J. O'Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, ed., *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 166-237.

more practical. The former is rooted in a profound doubt in our ability to say much of anything with certainty.² Under the influence of Michel Foucault and other postmodern thinkers, we have grown skeptical about our ability to know anything about the world including the shape of the common good.³ This epistemological skepticism is compounded by an acute awareness of the growing diversity of visions of the good life embraced by people around the globe.⁴ John Rawls has proposed that, given the present diversity of the world, a shared vision of the good is impossible.⁵ Others have gone further to assert that the pursuit of a common good can even serve as a means of oppressing some members of the community. For example, Judith Shklar argues that the public, civic pursuit of any comprehensive vision of the good will be at the expense of those who lack the power to define and enforce their own definition of the highest good.⁶

The intellectual obstacles to the development of a politics of the com-

² The work of Richard Rorty is particularly pertinent for those who wish to call into question the possibility of discerning a common good, universal norms, or shared understandings of morality. See his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University, 1989) and “The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy,” in *Prospects for a Common Morality*, ed. Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1993) 254–78. For a persuasive argument in favor of the possibility of a culturally situated universalism, see Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (New York: Oxford University, 1993) 242–76.

³ The view expressed here is that nothing is given or independent of our perception of it. For example, in Michel Foucault’s thought even something as seemingly basic and “natural” as human sexuality is seen to be socially constructed. It is a concept that *gives* (i.e., creates or constructs) unity and meaning to a set of biological functions, pleasures, sensations, and behaviors. Sexuality is more than a descriptive construct. It also serves as a very subtle and deeply entrenched locus for the exercise of power. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, *An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1978–).

⁴ Even many supporters of a politics of the common good recognize that the fact of diversity limits the form that any contemporary political community would take. David Hollenbach, for example, grants that the size and diversity of the United States today precludes the possibility of developing a form of political life resembling an Athenian-style democracy. See David Hollenbach, “Virtue, the Common Good, and Democracy,” in *New Communitarian Thinking*, ed. Amitai Etzioni (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1995) 143–53, at 149.

⁵ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University, 1996).

⁶ Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1984). Shklar is not alone in her fear (she terms her stance the “liberalism of fear”). Mary Elsbernd writes that “the most crucial of foundational resources and approaches in social ethics is voice: Whose voice is heard? Which perspective is published? Which values are promoted?” (“Social Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 66 [2005] 137–58, at 137). The point of using the lens of “voice” is to expose the fact that the powerful inevitably have a disproportionate influence in politics, including the politics of describing the common good.

mon good will not be my focus here. Others have already capably addressed these criticisms.⁷ In fact, these intellectual concerns have loomed so large in the field that more practical concerns regarding such issues as formation have suffered from relative neglect. Therefore, I aim primarily to address the second, more practical, challenge facing those who would advance a politics of the common good, namely, that most Americans, as well as many persons in other countries, hold a radically individualistic view of the world.

Adela Cortina provides helpful categories for describing this trend, arguing that the bonds of human community are typically understood according to one of two dominant paradigms: contract or covenant.⁸ If one views the nature of human community through the lens of contract, human relationships are understood to be artificially created on the basis of calculating reason; in contrast, a covenantal paradigm sees humans as social by nature, as naturally members of a community rather than members on the basis of free, calculating reason.⁹ Cortina observes that in the last two centuries, the contractual paradigm has become increasingly dominant, to the extent that contract has come to be seen as the basis even for social arrangements traditionally founded and interpreted under a covenantal model (e.g., the family).¹⁰ The result of this shift in the United States has been a dilution of the general public's sense of responsibility toward one another and diminishing expectations regarding society's obligations to support the common good or general welfare.

Rather than using the image of contract, David Hollenbach describes the same phenomenon as an "eclipse of the public."¹¹ He cites data provided by the *General Social Survey*, which found that two-thirds of Americans regard morality as a "personal matter." This belief can be interpreted as a refutation of one of the most fundamental assumptions in the common good tradition, namely, that the good of the individual is inseparable from

⁷ Hollenbach's *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2002) effectively addresses these intellectual concerns.

⁸ Adela Cortina, *Covenant and Contract: Politics, Ethics and Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003). She herself sees the two paradigms as complementary and regards both as essential. Her book seeks to develop a social theory that continues to "tell" or draw upon both models of understanding.

⁹ Cortina refers here to the second creation account in Genesis as paradigmatic. The first man recognizes the first woman as part of himself—"bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh." They do not choose a connection to one another but rather become aware of a preexisting connection. This type of human connection is more enduring than the contractual model. A contract can expire, at which point one might flee the relationship; a covenant is a bond that endures even in difficult times. See Cortina, *Covenant and Contract* 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 8.

¹¹ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 3–31.

the good of the community of which she or he is a part.¹² Without this common life, experiencing the full potential of human flourishing is impossible.¹³ Hollenbach concludes that the deeply held American belief that we are masters of our own fate (and fully responsible for our own success or failure) leads Americans to conclude that “there is little reason to be concerned about the quality of public life; morality becomes a matter of the private rather than the public good.”¹⁴

Such an attitude is a deadly obstacle to a politics grounded in the common good, because its most important ingredient is the very existence of the community itself; members of a community must relate to one another in order to develop a more comprehensive common good.¹⁵ This attitude can also impede the ability of society to address critical human needs. What John XXIII observed over four decades ago in *Pacem in terris* has proven even truer today, namely, that many of the most pressing social problems we face (globalization, human migration, environmental issues, chronic unemployment) cannot be adequately addressed by an individualistic or isolationist ethic.¹⁶ Thus, resuscitating a politics of the common good can be seen as a moral imperative. Of course, the real question is, how can this be done?

LINKING SOCIAL JUSTICE, MORAL FORMATION, AND VIRTUE

Judith Merkle has argued that if the Roman Catholic Church is to be successful in transforming the world according to its social vision, it must first be attentive to the shape of parish life. In her recent *From the Heart of the Church*, she asserts that the Church will be unable to carry out its social mission without first becoming a strong community, for it is in the Church that people are morally formed. She writes, “The human spirit must have experiences that hold the historical forms of the criteria that will provide ethical guidance in social interactions. It is only by participating in the truth of values such as equality, respect, and dignity that one under-

¹² Ibid. 3. Hollenbach is referring here to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* 1094b.

¹³ While one might seem to live well enough in isolation, the fullness of human flourishing is possible only in the midst of a vibrantly good common life, which facilitates a higher level of human flourishing. As Michael Sandel put it, “We can know a good in common that we cannot know alone” (*Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* [New York: Cambridge University, 1982] 183).

¹⁴ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 27.

¹⁵ Ibid. 9.

¹⁶ See *Pacem in terris* no. 40, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html (accessed September 13, 2006); and *Gaudium et spes* no. 30, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed September 13, 2006).

stands them.”¹⁷ Merkle asserts that the health of community life depends on a willingness to reexamine the forms it takes: “Community today must be built from within as a new type of community, free from the limitations of the past, yet able to form the humanity of the future.”¹⁸ She goes on to provide some of the qualities that would be the marks of that new vision (among others: shared history, mutuality, shared identity, and pluralism).

In addition to pursuing these excellent suggestions for reenvisioning community, I would suggest that the Church should also frame its approach to social ethics in terms of the formation of particular virtues. Instead of understanding its primary social mission to be the proclamation of a social doctrine to the world, the Church should see its role primarily in terms of the conscious, public practice of specific virtues and intentional efforts at the formation of those virtues among its membership.¹⁹ For some time now, Catholic social teaching has been described primarily as a set of values or principles that the Church should endeavor to share with the world. Of course there is much more to Catholic social teaching than principles, but principles are the dominant conceptual paradigm used as a summary or short-hand for the teaching as a whole.²⁰ I am calling for more balance between the use of principles and virtues as two complementary approaches to Catholic social thought because I believe that this conceptual shift might point to a way to move toward the concrete realization of the vision set forth in Catholic social teaching.

¹⁷ Judith Merkle, *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002) 242.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The recent *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* describes the task of proclaiming justice to the world as a central priority for the Church. In a section specifying the significance of the *Compendium* itself we read: “The Christian knows that in the social doctrine of the Church can be found the principles for reflection, the criteria for judgment and the directives for action which are the starting point for the promotion of an integral and solidary humanism. Making this doctrine known constitutes, therefore, a genuine pastoral priority” (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [Washington: USCCB, 2005] no. 7). Note the use of the term *doctrine* here and the fact that the task of the Church is described as the dissemination of information rather than in terms of its own conversion or in terms of striving to embody the values articulated in the tradition.

²⁰ For example, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference distributes a small card titled “Values for Eaters’ Food Choices.” On it are listed seven values or principles drawn from Catholic social teaching (human dignity, common good, universal destination of goods, subsidiarity, option for the poor, solidarity, and the integrity of creation). The reverse side of the card offers ten applications of the principles (e.g., “Human Dignity: support fair wages, healthy working conditions for farmers, farmworkers, food workers”). None of the values is described in a way that pertains to a person’s character or way of being.

What is the advantage of thinking in terms of virtue rather than in terms of principles? What difference would it make, for example, to conceive of solidarity primarily as a virtue rather than as a principle? Perhaps most importantly, conceiving of solidarity as a virtue would force us to think carefully about what a disposition toward solidarity and the common good would look like in individual persons. It would force us to ask what changes need to take place within real persons for them to embody the virtue of solidarity. Typically, such questions are not emphasized by social ethicists. Instead, scholarship in this area tends to examine social systems and whether those systems measure up to the standards of solidarity, appreciation for human dignity, and so on.²¹ Scholarship in social ethics also often seeks to clarify the proper organizational shape of society (stressing the importance of participation, etc.), and to defend the rightful place of specifically religious voices within dialogue about the common good.²²

There is real value in work of this sort, but I would observe that it is often pursued apart from consideration of issues of personal morality that are quite relevant for the pursuit of social justice. To frame the pursuit of solidarity as a question not only of principle but also of virtue would lead us to conclude that it is equally necessary to think about how the embrace of solidarity would play out for individual members of the Church. How can narcissism and individualism be overcome? How is the person to be moved from his or her current state to the desired state envisioned by our social teaching? These are fundamentally questions of virtue ethics.

As is well known, virtue ethics is teleological, developing a rich description of what constitutes a good human life. More important for our purposes here, virtue ethics is concerned not merely with the shape of the *telos* itself, but equally with the questions of how a person's dispositions, practices, and ways of living must be formed in order to lead to that goal. As Joseph Kotva has argued, virtue ethics begins with an examination of human nature as it exists, develops a vision of human nature as it could be,

²¹ Charles Curran argues that Catholic social teaching tends to focus on changing institutions and structures at the expense of emphasizing the simultaneous need for a change of heart. He writes: "Without a change of heart, there will never be a change of structure. Yet the documents of Catholic social teaching do not give central importance to the change of heart" (*Catholic Social Teaching: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* [Washington: Georgetown, 2002] 46).

²² Brian Stiltner has argued that Catholic social thought provides a model for illustrating "how religion might help us understand and pursue the common good in a liberal society." Stiltner asserts that the specific contribution Catholic social thought makes to contemporary political philosophy lies in the tradition's ability to bridge the gap between liberalism and communitarianism (Brian Stiltner, *Religion and the Common Good: Catholic Contributions to Building Community in a Liberal Society* [Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999] 4).

and describes the habits, capacities, and inclinations (i.e., virtues) that would lead from the starting point to the *telos*.²³ Thus, virtue ethics is concerned with individual formation or with what Christians might describe as the process of ongoing conversion. To reconsider solidarity as a virtue and not merely as descriptive of a social system requires attentiveness to the question of how people are to learn to embody solidarity. In other words, it requires consideration of the process of habituation, as Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle understood it.²⁴

Considering the pursuit of solidarity within the framework of virtue ethics is also useful in the sense that it implies a link between solidarity and other important traits of character. It is a classic principle in virtue theory to say that the virtues are a unity and therefore can be understood only as part of a whole.²⁵ For example, an individual Christian's attempts to be patient at the end of life depend on her possessing the virtue of hope.²⁶ Thus we can begin to think about solidarity in terms of which other virtues would foster its development and deepen our understanding of the meaning of solidarity itself.

THE NEED FOR THREE INTERDEPENDENT VIRTUES

In what follows, I will describe three virtues whose pursuit is critical to the rebirth of a politics of the common good: solidarity, compassion, and hospitality. Other virtues might be added to these, but I would contend that none of these three can be excluded without substantially diminishing one's understanding of what it would mean to be virtuous from the point of view of Catholic social teaching. There is considerable similarity among these three virtues. Solidarity, compassion, and hospitality all lead people to be attentive to the suffering of others and to regard that suffering as morally relevant to their own lives. All three are heavily influenced by justice operating as a general virtue; that is to say, all three are directed toward the common good, which is most properly the object of the virtue of justice.²⁷

²³ Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown, 1996) 17.

²⁴ On this issue, see Bonnie Kent, "Habits and Virtues," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 116–30.

²⁵ David Baily Harned provides a helpful discussion of this point within the specific context of the virtue of patience. See "The Unity of Virtue," the final chapter of Harned's *Patience: How We Wait upon the World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley, 1997) 155–78.

²⁶ Christopher P. Vogt, *Patience, Compassion, Hope, and the Christian Art of Dying Well* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

²⁷ Jean Porter, "The Virtue of Justice," in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen Pope (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 272–86, at 273. Porter explains that cardinal virtues such as justice can be understood as distinct because they have

Before explaining how the distinctiveness of these three virtues emerges, a brief definition of virtue is required. Jean Porter offers the following definition: a virtue is “a stable quality of the intellect, will, or passions through which an individual can do what morality demands in a particular instance, and do it in the right way, i.e., with an appropriate motivation.”²⁸ Solidarity, compassion, and hospitality are alike in that they each have a threefold dimension: each specifies a particular and enduring manner of thinking, feeling, and acting. However, each stands apart from the other two in terms of which of these forms of habituation is most central to it. Solidarity pertains primarily to thought, compassion to the affections or to feeling, and hospitality to practicality or acting. Furthermore, solidarity is directed toward the more abstract goal of the transformation of society, whereas compassion and hospitality (while sharing the goal of social transformation) are more interpersonal.

Since solidarity, compassion, and hospitality each entail the perfection of thought, affection, and action (in varying degrees), it might have been possible for me to ground a virtue-based approach to social concern in a single virtue.²⁹ I have chosen instead to use three overlapping virtues because I believe that an attempt to widen the applicability of any one virtue too broadly will obscure rather than enhance its meaning. The use of three separate but closely connected virtues brings into relief the complexity of what it means to actively promote justice and the common good. The threefold approach emphasizes that, to be formed in the tradition of Catholic social thought, entails a conversion of the whole person.

Finally, the use of multiple virtues provides a more precise analytical framework within which one can analyze various moral situations and begin to draw connections between one’s everyday interactions with people in one’s immediate context and one’s relationships with more re-

distinctive spheres of operation—right relations between persons in the case of justice—but can also be understood as general virtues in that they are present and play a role in the exercise of many other virtues.

²⁸ Jean Porter, “Virtue,” in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (New York: HarperCollins, 1995) 1316–17, at 1316.

²⁹ To my knowledge, the best example of the single virtue approach can be found in the work of Martha Nussbaum, who describes compassion (which she also calls pity) as a virtue that perfects one’s thoughts, affections, and actions toward others. Her argument for why compassion and many other emotions should be understood in cognitive terms is a strong aspect of her work. For a concise treatment of her approach see her “Compassion: The Basic Social Emotion,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 13 (1996) 27–58. For a more extensive elaboration of her position see her *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (New York: Cambridge University, 2001), esp. part 2, “Compassion.”

mote strangers.³⁰ For example, let us say that a married, retired couple lives next door to a recently widowed young woman with two school-age children. The woman works as an office manager but does not earn enough to afford quality childcare for her children. The couple observes that the woman and her children are suffering in these circumstances, and they offer to care for the children for a few hours every afternoon. This is most properly described as an act of compassion. The couple observes the suffering of their neighbors, they themselves are pained at the sight of this suffering, they judge that this suffering is unwarranted, and they act to alleviate the suffering. If we consider compassion alone, we might stop here, but the simultaneous practice of the virtue of solidarity would require the couple to analyze the way our society is organized in order to understand better how their neighbor came to find herself in this desperate situation, and how the structures of society might be reformed in light of that analysis.

I now turn to a more substantial definition of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality. In the process I will try to clarify how these three virtues mutually inform one another, and why all three are needed to sketch out an adequate approach to social concern. To make this point, I will take up the issue of human migration between Mexico and the United States as a case that illustrates how solidarity, compassion, and hospitality interact.

THE VIRTUE OF SOLIDARITY

It is best to begin my consideration of solidarity as a virtue by examining how it entails developing a particular way of thinking or knowing. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz begins her own definition of the “true meaning” of solidarity with a word about understanding: “Solidarity has to do with understanding the interconnections that exist between oppression and privilege, between the rich and the poor, the oppressed and the oppressors.”³¹ Thus, developing the virtue of solidarity entails acquiring true knowledge about

³⁰ James F. Keenan, “Proposing Cardinal Virtues,” *Theological Studies* 56 (1995) 709–29, develops this issue more fully than I do here. He proposes that justice is insufficient on its own to govern a person’s right relationships with others because the right treatment of a stranger would be quite different from the right treatment of a person close to us (our own child, for example). Keenan notes that our obligation to the stranger in society can conflict with what we owe those we love (including ourselves). He argues that the virtue of justice should be understood more narrowly as pertaining only to our relationships with strangers. Interactions with friends and family would be governed by the virtue of fidelity instead of justice. It falls to the virtue of prudence to discern which virtue should be given priority when a conflict arises among justice, fidelity, and self-care.

³¹ Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity: Love of Neighbor in the 21st Century,” in *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside*, ed. Susan

the world, particularly an awareness of how humans currently relate to one another socially, politically, and economically.³² Such knowledge is not achieved from a supposedly neutral vantage point, but rather with the assumption that one needs to be particularly attentive to the voices of the marginalized whose perspective has been systematically ignored; as Jon Sobrino has written, solidarity must begin with an acknowledgment of one's own need to be evangelized by the poor.³³ For the privileged, part of the knowing entailed in developing the virtue of solidarity is cultivating an awareness of the need to forge new ties with the oppressed and to nurture a dialogical, mutually beneficial, relationship with them.

Solidarity is a virtue of knowing not only in the sense of coming to an awareness of the actual, often sinful, state of the world; it also entails developing a sense of moral concern about the current state of things, and developing some understanding of what moral patterns of relationship should replace the existent structures that are marked by sin. In the words of the recent *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, "solidarity must be seen above all in its value as a moral virtue that determines the order of institutions."³⁴ In a globalized world, human beings are unavoidably in relationship with one another. Solidarity demands that the structures of society be reformed in such a way that this situation of interdependence is transformed into a morally positive relationship that respects the human dignity of all.³⁵ Hollenbach describes well how solidarity requires a proactive, universal respect for human dignity:

[Solidarity] is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. This virtue is not simply an affective sensitivity to the needs of others. It also calls for an *intellectual recognition* that interdependence is a necessary quality of human existence and that this interdependence must be reciprocal if the equal human dignity of the participants is to be respected in action.³⁶

In Hollenbach's account, we see hints of the importance of feeling a particular way, and it is clear that solidarity eventually leads to action, but

Brooks Thistlethwaite and Mary Potter Engel, rev. and exp. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998) 30–39, at 32.

³² This is one of the central points of the classic work by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983).

³³ Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994) 90–91.

³⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine* no. 193.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 17, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis_en.html (accessed September 13, 2006).

³⁶ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 189 (emphasis added).

his description makes clear that the key to a right practice of solidarity is a right perception and a proper analysis of human interrelationships.³⁷

The virtue of solidarity also entails a way of feeling, although the intensity of this feeling has been variously understood. For example, Isasi-Diaz links solidarity ultimately to a feeling of love. The intellectual or “knowing” aspect of solidarity is achieved not exclusively 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.³⁸ Isasi-Diaz and others maintain that, through the process of coming to know the oppressed, one establishes not only a sense of the mutuality of one’s interests, but also a feeling of connection or sympathy for one another.³⁹

From a liberationist perspective, solidarity as an activity engaged alongside the oppressed is inseparable from the idea of solidarity as a process of knowing. One does not first come to know the truth of solidarity and then act upon it, but rather one comes to know the true meaning of solidarity only by first acting.⁴⁰ This liberationist insight is important for our understanding of solidarity as a virtue. It explains why we cannot understand solidarity to be exclusively intellectual; the process of coming to know how human beings should be interdependent cannot stand independently of acting alongside the vulnerable and developing feelings of concern for them.

The precise actions and practices that solidarity demands often remain unspecified, but its social character is clear. Hollenbach writes: “Solidarity is not only a virtue to be enacted by individual persons one at a time. It

³⁷ Ibid. 137–70. Hollenbach implies that solidarity has a primarily intellectual component; yet it is more than that. The aspect of solidarity that he develops at greatest length is what he calls “intellectual solidarity,” which refers to the process by which a pluralistic community should move dialogically toward a shared vision of the good life. Even when Hollenbach uses the concept of solidarity more broadly (as in his question, “How can the Catholic Church respond to this challenge to pursue a form of globalization based on solidarity?”) it is a particular understanding of right human relationship that is most central to the concept. See David Hollenbach, “Globalization, Solidarity, and Justice,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 43 (2006) 21–38.

³⁸ Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity” 34.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Sobrino argues that we can really know Christ and the shape of liberation only by following Christ. Sobrino envisions a hermeneutical circle of mutually informative praxis and reflection. Liberative praxis leads to a more liberative way of knowing; contemplation and reflection in turn help one to know how to witness or act more effectively and authentically (“Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God,” in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993] 440–61, at 448–52).

must also be expressed in the economic, cultural, political and religious institutions that shape society. Solidarity is a virtue of communities as well as individuals.”⁴¹ Despite Hollenbach’s affirmation that solidarity is a virtue of “communities as well as individuals,” the practices of solidarity he describes tend to be almost exclusively institutional or political.⁴² Likewise, Isasi-Diaz describes the praxis of solidarity as leading to the elimination of unjust structures that preclude the full human flourishing of the oppressed.⁴³ Thus, solidarity is rooted in discovering the fact of human interdependence and in nurturing the developing of mutual relationships, but both activities seem to be ultimately in service of transforming the structures of society.

THE VIRTUE OF COMPASSION

We saw above that a central component of solidarity involved coming to an awareness of the suffering of the oppressed. Compassion is another important virtue that entails acquiring the ability to perceive and respond to suffering. While it complements solidarity, compassion can be distinguished from it in at least two ways. First, solidarity is directed to “the social” or toward a general transformation of society, whereas compassion more explicitly attends to the suffering of specific individuals. Second, whereas solidarity is primarily a way of knowing and understanding the world and how we should organize society, compassion emphasizes the affective dimension of encountering suffering.

My claim here is that the more affective, particularist virtue of compassion is needed to create the emotional preconditions for the pursuit of solidarity. Without first becoming adept at the practice of empathetic understanding that is most characteristic of compassion, it would be very difficult to move from the predominant privatized, individualistic view of the world to an embrace of solidarity. In this sense, the virtue of compassion is a prerequisite for the ability to develop solidarity.⁴⁴ At least in part, an answer to the question of why there has been little success in transforming a politics based on the common good from a theory to an actual

⁴¹ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 189.

⁴² *Ibid.*; see Hollenbach, “Globalization, Solidarity, and Justice.”

⁴³ Isasi-Diaz, “Solidarity” 39.

⁴⁴ Compassion is not a prerequisite in a strict sense because it is theoretically possible to develop a concern for the other in general without first being moved by the suffering of people situated more closely to oneself. However, the development of empathetic understanding is the most typical path from self-absorption to solidarity. Nussbaum discusses this process, although she uses different terms—she uses *empathy* and *compassion* in a way similar to my use of *compassion* and *solidarity*. See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* 327–32.

movement lies in the fact that the roles of emotion, empathy, and thus compassion have been overlooked.

I now take up the specific ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that the exercise of compassion entails. Put simply, to be compassionate is to develop the capacity to be moved by another's suffering in such a way that one shares in the other's pain and is moved to relieve it.⁴⁵ As a virtue by which one is moved by the suffering of others, compassion entails first of all developing a particular way of "seeing"—that is, a way that has a strong affective dimension to it. The first step toward acquiring the virtue of compassion, then, is to develop intentionally the habit of noticing people who are suffering.⁴⁶ In some cases this noticing will entail allowing people previously invisible to us to enter into our conscious awareness (i.e., expanding the range of persons whom we notice at all). In other cases—with regard to those we already know and relate to—this noticing will demand becoming more attuned to their reality, that is, no longer blind to their suffering.

Beyond the capacity to see suffering in the first place, compassion entails learning to respond to that suffering in a particular way. A response to suffering rooted in Christian compassion begins with an effort to know and understand the other's suffering more deeply. This is accomplished by listening carefully to the voice of the suffering. Although obvious, this practice can be challenging. As Warren Reich has observed, often a person who is suffering will be incapable of putting the nature of his or her suffering into words. Thus, listening must sometimes include what Reich terms "silent empathy," which entails simply being with someone while striving to put aside one's own expectations, wishes, advice, and interpretations of the other's suffering.⁴⁷ Thus, compassion requires an openness 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. Compassion is similar to solidarity in that both virtues involve coming to know about the suffering of others, but compassion is distinctive in its specific focus on the suffering of particular persons with whom one can have direct contact.

Compassion is more than the acquisition of knowledge *about* the suffering of another person. It involves experiencing that suffering emotionally.

⁴⁵ Paul Wadell, "Compassion," in *Collegeville Pastoral Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Carroll Stuhlmueller (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1996) 157.

⁴⁶ Diana Fritz Cates, "Caring for Girls and Women Who Are Considering Abortion," in *Medicine and the Ethics of Care*, ed. Diana Fritz Cates and Paul Lauritzen (Washington: Georgetown University, 2001) 162–203, at 170.

⁴⁷ Warren Reich, "Speaking of Suffering: A Moral Account of Compassion," *Soundings* 72 (1989) 83–108, at 93.

In the words of Diana Fritz Cates, this component of compassion is “to take in, or be taken in by, another person’s original physical sensation, her dislike of that sensation, her wanting that sensation to cease, and her accompanying agitation, such that we can be said to feel one and the same pain.”⁴⁸ Exactly how it is possible to bridge the gap between persons and feel the pain of another is a complicated matter that I cannot take up here except to say that the ethics of Aristotle and Aquinas suggest that nurturing a deep and ongoing relationship with someone facilitates our ability to feel another’s suffering as our own.⁴⁹

Recognizing that compassion entails a particular way of feeling is significant because a substantial body of recent work in ethics tells us that emotional experience is a key dimension of moral knowing.⁵⁰ For example, Giles Milhaven (d. 2004) argued that moral judgment tends “to be incomplete, overly abstract, and untrue to human reality” when it lacks an embodied emotional dimension.⁵¹ Milhaven wrote of racism as an example of a social issue about which he had developed a rational, ethical opinion while lacking a full moral understanding of it.

Milhaven, who was white, was intellectually opposed to racism but found that it was only in feeling compassion for a particular black person that the evil he suffered became real; only then did Milhaven come to full moral knowing. He wrote that it was only after “co-feeling the horror, repulsion, longing, anger, despair, and hope” of a person who suffered racism regularly that he understood how evil it is.⁵² The pressing nature of social problems and the urgency of fostering a politics of the common good can be understood fully only in the wake of an emotional experience of the

⁴⁸ Diana Fritz Cates, *Choosing to Feel: Virtue, Friendship, and Compassion for Friends* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1997) 139–40. Nussbaum takes a contrasting view, arguing that compassion is not an identification of oneself with the other or a fusion of the other’s suffering with one’s own. The compassionate person feels pain at the undeserved suffering of the other and senses that he or she would suffer in a similar situation, but there remain two separate instances of suffering, not a single shared experience. See Nussbaum, “Basic Social Emotion” 34–35, and *Upheavals of Thought* 324–27.

⁴⁹ Cates addresses this issue very skillfully in *Choosing to Feel*. See especially 91–106 and 136–53.

⁵⁰ See Diana Fritz Cates, “The Religious Dimension of Ordinary Emotions,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25 (2005) 35–53, and Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*. For a helpful analysis of the latter, see Diana Fritz Cates, “Conceiving Emotions: Martha Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought*,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31 (2003) 325–41.

⁵¹ Cates, “Caring for Girls” 171, is referring to J. Giles Milhaven, “Ethics and Another Knowing of Good and Evil,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, ed. Diane Yeager (Washington: Georgetown University, 1991) 237–48.

⁵² Cates, “Caring for Girls” 72.

kind that only the practice of compassion can bring. Furthermore, it is primarily this empathetic feeling that provides the motivation for a person to act to dismantle injustice and relieve the suffering of the other.⁵³ In this sense, practicing the virtue of compassion is a prerequisite for the pursuit of solidarity and social justice.

Compassion is not only noticing and being moved; its final dimension entails acting in concert with and on behalf of the suffering person in order to relieve that suffering. Acting with compassion has sometimes been characterized as a way of dealing with suffering and social problems on the terms of the more powerful, privileged “giver”—that is, a way for the rich and powerful to assuage their guilty consciences while protecting their privileged status and stifling the voice of the oppressed.⁵⁴

Such a view, however, is based on a misunderstanding of compassion. A better understanding of how one is to determine the proper course of action associated with compassion would be to see it as involving a dialectical process. On the one hand, the compassionate person seeks always to bring about what is actually good for those with whom he or she has developed a caring relationship; the compassionate person does not seek merely what others regard as good but what in fact will be for their good.⁵⁵ On the other hand, one wants to benefit others in a way that they want to be benefited, for it is ultimately their own unique good that one is seeking.⁵⁶ It is necessary to find a point at which the perspectives of the compassionate actor and the one suffering can converge in a plan of action.

Up to this point, my examination of compassion has highlighted the ways in which compassion supports the development of solidarity. In the context of discerning how to respond concretely to another’s suffering, the relationship between the two virtues is reversed; solidarity supports the

⁵³ Hille Haker, “Compassion as a Global Programme for Christianity,” in *In Search of Universal Values*, ed. Karl-Josef Kuschel and Dietmar Mieth, Concilium (London: SCM, 2001) 55–70, at 64.

⁵⁴ This sort of self-serving response to suffering is not always named as compassion. It is sometimes referred to as charity. In either case, what is described and critiqued is a particular way of loving the neighbor. For example, Isasi-Diaz writes, “Charity, the word used most often when talking about love of neighbor, has been implemented mainly through a one-sided giving, a donation, almost always, of what we have in abundance” (“Solidarity” 31). She makes clear that she is not condemning charity categorically, but rather calling for solidarity to replace charity as the most appropriate form of Christian behavior in today’s world.

⁵⁵ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* 310–11, insists that compassion always involves several judgments that are made from the perspective of the onlooker. For example, a compassionate person must judge whether the other’s suffering is serious or trivial, and what actions would remedy it. The compassionate person’s response is rooted in his or her conception of a good human life.

⁵⁶ Cates, *Choosing to Feel* 159.

proper exercise of compassion. The fact that compassion leads one to desire the objective good for those with whom one has cultivated a relationship is an invitation to enter into a dialogue. If one is to come to know what will relieve another's suffering and promote his or her flourishing, one must begin by asking the sufferer to suggest how relief might be achieved.⁵⁷ One does not stop there, however; one goes on to try to reconcile what the sufferer wants with one's own understanding of the shape of the good human life and how it should be nurtured and supported.

To discern the specific action that should result from one's compassionate concern, one has to engage the sufferer in a dialogue marked by what Hollenbach calls "intellectual solidarity" and Isasi-Diaz, in her analysis of solidarity, describes as a "strategy of mutuality." A key part of the development of solidarity is the establishment of dialogue between the privileged and the oppressed. Isasi-Diaz writes, "The first word in the dialogue that can bring awareness to the oppressor is uttered by the oppressed. Oppressors who are willing to listen and to be questioned by the oppressed, by the very action of listening begin to leave behind their role as oppressors and to become 'friends' of the oppressed."⁵⁸ Although the first "word" of such a dialogue must always be listening (as noted in my description of compassion above), the dialogue does not stop there; it must be truly dialogical. Again, as Isasi-Diaz has written: "Friends answer the initial word of the oppressed not only by questioning their own lives but also by responding to the oppressed. . . . If we do not recognize the need for the oppressed to learn from the 'friends,' then we cannot claim that mutuality is at the heart of solidarity."⁵⁹

In practicing compassion, one engages in a dialogue with an afflicted person about what actions would end the affliction and promote flourishing. Although this dialogue is focused on the hardships and aspirations of a unique individual, the conversation may yield insights that have much wider applicability. As Hille Haker has argued, analyzing a specific person's needs from personal, social, and structural perspectives can serve more than the good of that individual because the determination of specific norms for one case can inform the development of a broader set of norms and a more comprehensive theory of justice.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Haker, "Compassion as a Global Programme" 65.

⁵⁸ Isasi-Diaz, "Solidarity" 36.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 37.

⁶⁰ Haker, "Compassion as a Global Programme" 66.

Hollenbach and other proponents of a politics based on the common good have lamented the lack of serious civic engagement regarding the shape of the good human life and the social infrastructure required to support such a life. Promoting the practice of compassion and dialogue about the good of specific persons might nurture the growth of more robust public discussions about these broader questions. At the very least, the practice of compassion might establish the emotional connection between persons that is a prerequisite for conversation about the shape of the good human life. Compassion bears the power to shatter the selfish isolation of an individualistic ethic so that solidarity might begin to take root in its place. 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.

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?—THE PRACTICE OF HOSPITALITY

From the preceding discussion, it should be clear that the virtues of solidarity and compassion both entail acting to relieve suffering and promote justice. This being the case, why is it necessary to propose a third virtue—hospitality—that has a particular way of acting as is its most central characteristic? To answer this question, I must pose two more: Toward whom exactly should the church community practice solidarity and compassion? How will the life of the church community be structured concretely to make the expression of compassion and solidarity central?

Hospitality can be understood as a particular expression of compassion and solidarity that is meant to shape the overall practice and development of these other virtues in at least two ways. First, practicing hospitality would integrate a preferential option for the poor into the practice of compassion and solidarity by always challenging the community to expand the circle of those toward whom it shows concern. Second and quite simply, practicing hospitality would dramatically increase the opportunities for church members to cultivate compassion and solidarity by providing a concrete, institutionalized setting in which members of the church encounter people who suffer from real injustice. In addition, the specific practice of hospitality is important because it has very deep Christian roots traceable to the early church and to the Gospel portraits of Jesus himself.

One mark of Jesus' public ministry was his effort to engage society's marginalized. He visited the home of tax collectors and shared a table with them (Lk 19:1–10 and 5:29–32), conversed with a "sinful" woman (Jn 4:7–30), allowed a disreputable woman to anoint his feet (Lk 7:36–50), and so on. His aim was not only to seek out the lost, but also to facilitate their

reintegration into their community.⁶¹ In his encounter with Zaccheus the tax collector, for example, Jesus not only affirms his dignity and worth by visiting the man's home, but demands that the crowd accept the validity of Zaccheus's conversion and recognize him to be a rightful member of their community. Jesus declares that Zaccheus "too is a son of Abraham" (Lk 19:10).⁶² The importance of reintegrating outcasts into society can be seen also in Mark's Gospel where Jesus not only heals a man who has leprosy but also insists that he "show himself to the priest" (Mk 1:40–45), thereby formally and officially to reverse the man's unclean status and restore him to his community.⁶³

The Christian practice of hospitality is one of the most important ways that Jesus' concern for strangers has continued to find concrete historical expression. Hospitality is one of the oldest and most important Christian virtues, although it was not invented by Christians. It was cultivated in both Greek and Roman culture, but in those contexts it was typically practiced as part of a system of reciprocal obligation that cemented one's connection to the broader community and garnered favor with influential members of society. Early Christians transformed this virtue by directing hospitality toward strangers and the marginalized as well as toward the powerful.⁶⁴

This expansion of the circle of the intended recipients of hospitality gave the virtue itself an entirely new meaning and social-ethical significance. Rather than a wholly conventional means of securing one's own social status, hospitality became a counter-cultural expression of concern for strangers and outcasts, and a means of integrating them into the local Christian community. As such, the practice of hospitality implicitly challenged existing social divisions and stratification. Through the practice of hospitality, the community reminded itself of Jesus' firm teaching that no one should be considered beyond the scope of being "neighbor."⁶⁵

⁶¹ For a similar description of the shape of hospitality, combined with a discussion of its applicability in a very different context, see Christopher P. Vogt, "Recognizing the Addict as Neighbor: Christian Hospitality and the Establishment of Safe Injection Facilities in Canada," *Theoforum* 35 (2004) 317–42.

⁶² Robert J. Karris, "The Gospel according to Luke," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990) 625–721, at 711.

⁶³ Daniel J. Harrington, "The Gospel according to Mark," in *ibid.* 596–629, at 601.

⁶⁴ Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 17–21.

⁶⁵ John Donahue asserts that the central claim of the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke's Gospel is that everyone is worthy of the designation of neighbor. Indeed, Jesus tells the parable as an answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" (*The Gospel in Parable* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988] 130–31). Similarly, Fitzmyer asserts that Jesus' response rules out the validity of the question, Who is my neigh-

The practice of hospitality typically took the form of providing food, shelter, and welcome to strangers or foreigners. Christine Pohl, however, in her masterful *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition*, has shown that the most salient factors for determining who is a “stranger” is not their geographic origin. Instead, a stranger could be anyone who finds him- or herself disconnected from the vital relationships that provide security and a sense of place in the world; strangers may in fact be people who have lived in the same place all their lives, but find themselves in a state of vulnerability and invisibility as a result of their disconnection from family, church, or community.⁶⁶ Thus this virtue can find wide applicability in contemporary American society. Hospitality’s focus on the stranger incarnates a preferential option for the poor, because it directs the practice of compassion and solidarity specifically toward the marginalized. Even though Christian compassion and solidarity imply that they should be practiced toward anyone and everyone, the full force of this universality will go unrealized unless these virtues are wedded to concrete practices such as hospitality that bring the privileged into meaningful relationship with their otherwise socially invisible neighbors.⁶⁷

The mechanics of hospitality involve offering people food and shelter; one literally makes a space for the “other” or the unwanted. Of course, the meaning of this act must be interpreted at a deeper, symbolic level. By offering basic goods and by “making room” or creating a space in which the goods can be shared by all, Christians would be modeling (and coming to know more deeply for themselves) Jesus’ teaching that they must restore outcasts to community. Indeed, restoration is at the heart of Christian hospitality. As Pohl has written:

Especially when the larger society disregards or dishonors certain persons, small acts of respect and welcome are potent far beyond themselves. They point to a different system of valuing and an alternate model of relationships. . . . Many persons who are not valued by the larger society are essentially invisible to it. When people are socially invisible, their needs and concerns are not acknowledged and no one even notices the injustices they suffer. Hospitality can begin a journey toward visibility and respect.⁶⁸

At the heart of the practice of hospitality is the conscious development of attentiveness to the presence of “the least of these” in our midst and the establishment of a relationship or solidarity with them.

bor? Everyone must be considered neighbor; the real question is how one should treat one’s neighbor (*The Gospel according to Luke: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible 28 [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985] 884).

⁶⁶ Pohl, *Making Room* 13.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 76–77.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 61–62.

Properly understood, hospitality in practice must bear the marks of solidarity and compassion as these virtues have been described above. Most importantly, hospitality does not create a situation of one-way dependence, but rather seeks dialogical relationship with those offered welcome. This quality of hospitality must be actively nurtured, an aspect of which is constant vigilance against the temptation to control the recipients of hospitality.⁶⁹ Essentially, hospitality means not so much giving as sharing.

Serving a meal, as an instance of hospitality, is sharing a meal with those one welcomes. The dynamic of sharing a meal facilitates the connection between hospitality and the virtue of solidarity. Pohl observes, “Often we maintain boundaries when offering help to persons in need. Many churches prepare and serve meals to hungry neighbors, but few church members find it easy to sit and eat with those who need the meal. . . . We are familiar with roles as helpers but are less certain about being equals together eating.”⁷⁰ True hospitality requires caregivers to see care-receivers as their equals and to establish a relationship of true mutuality with them. In other words, hospitality demands that one act with compassion and solidarity.

The practice of hospitality begins the process of forming a relationship marked by solidarity, but the virtue of solidarity itself remains important for bringing that process to completion. The practice of hospitality should raise questions about the economic, social, and political structures that cause individuals to become invisible and to be in need of hospitality in the first place. Answers to these questions do not lie with hospitality itself, but rather with the sort of intellectual reflection more proper to solidarity. If hospitality is to accomplish its aim of fully integrating the marginalized into the community, structural changes must be implemented under the guidance of solidarity.

THE THREE VIRTUES IN ACTION: THE CASE OF UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES

The interaction of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality might be clarified by examining how the practice of these virtues might shape a response to a particular issue. One of the most pressing, contentious, and complicated issues in American political life today is immigration. More specifi-

⁶⁹ Pohl writes, “Under the guise of acting generously, [some] avoid the questions of maldistribution of power and resources and reinforce existing patterns of status and wealth. They make others, especially poor people, passive recipients in their own families, churches, or communities” (“Hospitality from the Edge: The Significance of Marginality in the Practice of Welcome,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* [1995] 135). See also *Making Room* 119–21.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 74.

cally, a vigorous debate is under way on how to regulate human migration across the U.S.-Mexican border, and how the U.S. government and U.S. society should deal with the fact that millions of immigrants now live in the United States without the benefit of legal residency.⁷¹ Since my intention here is merely to provide an example of the interaction of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality, and not to address the issue of human migration in all its complexity, I will focus only on how the issue has played out in my own context of Long Island, New York, a context that is by no means atypical.⁷²

Ironically, although Long Island's economy (particularly the landscaping and construction industries) has come to depend on lower-wage laborers who are not legal residents, the local community has acted in a way that forces such persons to remain "invisible" or on the margins. Workers lacking legal status are segregated into substandard housing and forced to congregate on street corners in search of someone who will pay them a day's wage.⁷³ These workers sometimes suffer financially because of their inability to hold their employers legally accountable for refusing to pay their wages, and even have been victims of violence.⁷⁴ The local population has failed to make room for these newcomers and has refused to allow their full participation in the social and political life of the community.

Hospitality is a practice that pertains directly to the issue of human migration. The many people who crossed the U.S.-Mexican border illegally and went on to settle on Long Island and to find work as day laborers fit Pohl's description of strangers in need of hospitality. Not only are they

⁷¹ For a Catholic moral perspective on this issue, see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope* (Washington: USCCB, 2003).

⁷² The docudrama *Farmingville*, written and directed by Carlos Sandoval and Catherine Tambini, DVD (New Video, 2004), brilliantly portrays the situation on Long Island. For more on the DVD and related issues see <http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2004/farmingville/> (accessed August 30, 2006).

⁷³ Bruce Lambert, "On L.I., Raid Stirs Dispute over Influx of Immigrants," *New York Times*, June 26, 2005.

⁷⁴ A study released in 2006 by the Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy at Hofstra University found that over half of day laborers on Long Island have experienced at least one instance of violence, intimidation, or harassment while seeking employment—a rate more than 109 times that for average citizens of New York. The study also found that day laborers on Long Island were exposed to unsafe working conditions at a rate 5.45 times higher than that for the average New York state worker. Over half of the workers reported not being paid after a full day's work, and over a third reported one or more incidents of being abandoned at a work site. Gregory M. Maney et al., *Protecting Human Rights in a Global Economy: The Impact of Government Responses to Day Labor Markets* (Hempstead, N.Y.: Center for the Study of Labor and Democracy, 2006).

foreign-born, they are socially, economically, and politically marginalized. Furthermore, in many instances these workers literally lack a place in the local economy. Some local governments have refused to use tax dollars to construct and support hiring sites where contractors and laborers can connect, leaving many workers standing at the side of the road or in the parking lots of home-improvement stores while they look for work. A local study has shown that this physical marginalization results in a higher incidence of human rights violations against day laborers.⁷⁵

The practice of hospitality on the part of the receiving community would demand first of all the provision of a physical space for day laborers such as a hiring hall, but a truly adequate expression of hospitality would require additional acts of compassion and solidarity as well. The first step of a compassionate response in this instance would be to provide an opportunity for the newly arrived to declare their most pressing needs, to name the difficulties they have endured, and to propose what forms of assistance from the local community are most urgently needed. The process of listening and then trying to know how to promote concretely the human good of the newly arrived would not be a one-time event, but the beginning of an ongoing dialogical process that compassion requires. The practice of compassion—of seeking to know the suffering of the undocumented and to determine how their suffering can best be alleviated—would forge a relationship between the newly arrived and those who would try to show them compassion. New forms of compassionate action would emerge (e.g., offering language courses, or providing free legal advice); other forms of hospitality would be practiced (e.g., helping the newly arrived to find a spiritual home in the local church by facilitating the celebration of liturgy in Spanish and in the languages of other recent immigrants); and relationships of mutuality and concern would begin to grow.

The growth of these relationships at the local level should be guided by solidarity in at least two ways. First, individual acts of compassion and hospitality should be in accord with solidarity in that they should be marked by the establishment of mutuality and an interdependence that promotes the flourishing of all parties involved. Second, the practice of solidarity should lead the community to engage not only questions of how local political, social, and economic arrangements must be reshaped to serve the common good, but also how those local questions are intimately tied to the consequences of globalization.

Solidarity would demand that the face-to-face relationships of concern

⁷⁵ Maney, "Protecting Human Rights" 23.

forged by the practice of compassion and hospitality should come to serve as a context for fostering a new sense of internationalism. In this case, relationships formed between U.S. citizens and immigrant workers might lead to the development of new relationships between communities in the United States and those located in other countries.⁷⁶ In this way, the complex moral question of what it means to promote solidarity in an age of globalization could begin to take on a human face. The “we” of those facing globalization together could extend from Long Island (and countless other places around the United States) to Mexico and beyond. Thus, hospitality and compassion could serve as a concrete means of moving the church community toward a true embrace of solidarity.

THE PATH TOWARD SOCIAL JUSTICE

Nussbaum has observed that, if we try to care for everyone equally, it is likely that in the end we will care for no one. To avoid this, she calls for the cultivation of compassion first toward those near to us, and then toward others in an ever-expanding circle.⁷⁷ Sounding a similar note, James Gilman has argued that concern for justice cannot stand on its own without compassion. Compassion serves as a moral source for justice in the sense that it is through the emotional intersubjectivity and beneficent activity of that virtue that our common humanity is made real. Where compassion is absent, people slip into a culture of self-absorption in which their understanding of justice is limited to the protection of their own rights and interests.⁷⁸

Nussbaum and Gilman are right about the essential importance of compassion for moving us toward social justice and a politics of the common good. Compassion moves us toward these goals by establishing new relationships and occasions for dialogue and by providing the emotional formation that enables us to notice “others” and to hear their needs. However, if the cultivation of compassion is to achieve these goals, it must not be pursued in isolation from other virtues. The practice of compassion must be paired with hospitality and its preferential option for strangers of all kinds, and with solidarity, 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. By turning more

⁷⁶ Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics* 215, 219.

⁷⁷ Martha Nussbaum, “Can Patriotism Be Compassionate?” *Nation* 273.20 (December 17, 2001) 11–14, at 11.

⁷⁸ James E. Gilman, “Compassion and Public Covenant: Christian Faith in Public Life,” *Journal of Church and State* 36 (1994) 747–71.

deliberately to the task of forming Catholics in these three important virtues, the Church can give expression to the vision of social justice it has long proclaimed.⁷⁹ In so doing, it might lead American society as a whole toward a politics of the common good that might be embraced by all.

⁷⁹ I would not claim that the virtues of solidarity, compassion, and hospitality as I have described them here can be embraced only by Roman Catholics. However, as Judith Merkle has observed, "Stress on the universal message of social teaching can overshadow the question of the link between social teaching and Catholic life" (*From the Heart of the Church* 4). By calling for the renewal of a Catholic commitment to the common good, I am suggesting that Catholics should regard the cultivation of these three virtues as central to individual faith formation. Furthermore, the Church must find ways to make clear that the public practice of these virtues is integral to Catholic life. This is not to say that a life marked by compassion, solidarity, and hospitality could not be embraced by people with no connection to the Church.