

## The Place of Friendship in Christian Ethics—A Response Written in Gratitude

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**A**FTER READING THE ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE of the *Journal of Moral Theology*, I found myself thinking: “I should retire more often!” In a career marked by countless surprises, surely none was more unexpected than to be told that an issue of this journal would contain a section of essays dedicated to my work; in fact, when word came to me, I thought there must be a mistake. Like all gifts, it came unbidden and undeserved, but will be forever cherished. I am joyfully indebted to each of the authors of these essays, and particularly grateful to Tobias Winright who, amid a stressful and unsettling time for anyone in the academic world, came up with this idea and generously agreed to edit these essays when absolutely the last thing he needed was one more thing to do. Both the essays and Tobias’s editing are exquisite acts of friendship, blessings that touched and humbled me, and for which my best possible response, however inadequate, is to “give thanks always and for everything” (Eph. 5:20).

The primary focus of these essays is friendship, the central theme of my work in Christian ethics. Even though I was strongly attracted to thinking and writing about friendship when I emerged from graduate school in 1985, I feared, especially in the early years, that the subject would be dismissed as theologically soft and superficial, scholarly cotton candy that was highly alluring but hardly nutritious. Too, what’s the point of talking about friendship when everybody already knows what it means? Those misgivings did not stop me from probing the moral and spiritual dimensions of friendship nor lessen my conviction that it was worth doing; however, these essays happily bolster that belief. Collectively, they squelch any attempt to marginalize friendship as something that should be considered only once the more serious work of Christian ethics has been done—and certainly not a subject to be taken up prior to receiving tenure—by breaking open how friendship is not only theologically rich and substantive, but also truly integral to a flourishing human life, a truly just society, and to properly understanding the Christian life and the nature and mission of the church. Put differently, absent friendship, we will easily misunderstand who we are, what we are about, and where we are heading.

That is why each of these essays can be read as an argument for why friendship deserves considered attention in Christian ethics. Thus, in this response I want to address the central arguments of each essay in order to underscore the many dimensions of friendship they uncover, and consider the gracious insights that were offered about my work and my career.

### THEOLOGY AS A BEFRIENDING ACT

In “Stories of Friendship,” Charlie Pinches notes that sprinkled throughout my writings are stories, often stories about friends, and suggests my aim in sharing those stories is to befriend the reader. He’s right. Though theology and, therefore, Christian ethics, deserve the utmost scholarly rigor and academic seriousness because understanding them rightly is crucial for living rightly, it is precisely because theology and, in my case, Christian ethics, matter for life that I wrote in the hope of inviting readers to join me on a journey of understanding why that is true. I wanted to write in a way that was engaging and accessible, first, because as a Christian theologian I believed I was entrusted with something unsurpassably good to share with any reader who came along, namely that the God who created us from love ceaselessly desires our good, our highest possible happiness; and, second, because I envisioned my readers as potential companions on a journey with me, a journey in which all of us *together* could make our way to God and learn from, help, and steady each other as we did so. I knew some readers would reject the invitation, some might join me for only a short while, and others might stay around long enough to see why I reached out to them in the first place; but regardless of how they responded, I wanted them to know that, like any friend, I wanted what was best for them.

That may sound shamefully sentimental, but for me it was what it meant to take theology seriously. In my first graduate seminar at the University of Notre Dame in the fall of 1980, my advisor and mentor, Stanley Hauerwas, offered us a compelling model for doing theology. He let us know that, yes, studying theology was a privilege that demanded the very best from us (discipline, attention, hours of hard work, patience, and rigor), but also that we do not study theology in order to advance or draw attention to ourselves, but as a service to others, particularly the church. Studying theology was a *gift* meant to be shared, a *commission* we must faithfully execute through our teaching and writing. Moreover, Hauerwas impressed on his students that theology is joyful work—indeed, there is no better way to spend one’s time—but joyful work that is best undertaken with others. In Stanley’s classes we weren’t competitors out to score points; we were friends, and as friends always do, we helped one another, learned from one another, challenged one another, and made one another better theologians, laughing and having fun as we did so.

Hauerwas introduced me to Aristotle and convinced me to give Aquinas a second chance. When I visited Notre Dame prior to deciding about graduate school, I had a memorable (and truly life altering) conversation with Hauerwas. He told me that I would “either be an Aristotelian or a Kantian, and that the sooner I knew the better.” To help me toward that momentous decision, he agreed to do a guided readings course on Kant and Aristotle with me during my first semester. When we came to Book VIII of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, where Aristotle introduces friendship into his schema for the moral life, I was hooked. Not only did he offer a profoundly insightful and compelling account of moral formation in the virtues through good friendships, but he also gave me a framework for understanding my life. I had been blessed with good friends, particularly during four years at a high school seminary in Warrenton, Missouri, then a tiny town about fifty miles west of St. Louis. I knew those friendships had changed my life, I knew they had indelibly formed me and given me great joy, but prior to reading Aristotle, I could never articulate why. So when Aristotle said that we become good by spending time with good people, when he wrote that friendship is “some sort of excellence or virtue, or involves virtue, and it is, moreover, most indispensable for life,” it helped me make sense of my own story. It was from Aristotle that I gleaned the first two elements that Charlie rightly identifies as essential to my understanding of friendships: (1) they are absolutely necessary for a good life and (2) they both orient us toward and form us in goodness and truth as we acquire and grow in the virtues through them.

Still, there was something missing. My initial exposure to Catholic moral theology introduced me to the natural law, to probabilism and casuistry, to the idea of intrinsic evil, the principle of double effect, and to seemingly endless debates on proportionalism. It was interesting, and I knew it was important, but it didn’t energize or inspire me, and I wasn’t sure how it would help people live better and more meaningful lives. I remember thinking these are accessories to a house that has not yet been built. Yes, these ideas could help people make better decisions or think their way through nettlesome moral dilemmas, but how could they shape their lives as a whole? How could they help them live and grow and flourish on all the days when they were not confronted with problems of conscience or troublesome decisions? And how could these appendages to Catholic moral theology answer the call of the Second Vatican Council to reinvigorate the discipline by making it centered on Christ and decidedly more scriptural, by linking it to the liturgy and the sacraments, and by bridging the unfortunate abyss that had grown between moral theology and spirituality, a chasm that led to an overly juridical and depressingly sterile approach to the moral life?

It was here that Aquinas proved invaluable. In college I had read about Aquinas, principally through the work of Jacques Maritain and Etienne Gilson, but the only texts from Aquinas I had encountered were selected passages from the *Summa Theologiae* on the natural law; thus, I shortsightedly connected Aquinas with the natural law, but nothing more, and foolishly concluded there was little else I could learn from him. I pictured putting the *Summa* back on the shelf, never to be revisited. Thankfully, and multiple epiphanies later, I was rescued from that costly error when I got to Notre Dame and, under Hauerwas's guidance, met Aquinas for the second time. Now I entered the *Summa* not through the door of the natural law, but in the much more expansive opening of the *Prima Secundae* where Aquinas describes the human journey as a quest for happiness, a happiness so complete and fulfilling that once we possess it there is nothing else for us to desire. We move toward happiness through the virtues because the virtues are the habitual ways of being and acting—the enduring qualities of character—that enable us to live wisely and well and that form us into persons capable of knowing and enjoying the good in which happiness is found. Here, Aquinas was no different from Aristotle. Like Aristotle, Aquinas claimed that every human being has a natural desire for *eudaimonia*, a life of genuine flourishing, that we reach *eudaimonia* through the virtues, and that the virtues are acquired through friendships with people who are not afraid to reach for what is best. In short, as Charlie notes, for both Aristotle and Aquinas happiness is not an emotional state but an activity, expressly an activity done with others.

But still something was missing, and it wasn't until I moved into the *Secunda Secundae* where Aquinas shifts from the acquired virtues to the theological, and from talking about happiness to focusing on beatitude, that I knew what it was. Now the *telos* of the human journey was not a flourishing life in the city-state of Athens or anywhere else in the world, but the flawless beatitude found in everlasting communion with God and the saints. Most staggering (and for me that's the word) was to discover that Aquinas defined charity not just as a single virtue—even the “form” of all the virtues—but, more comprehensively, as a whole way of life characterized by friendship with God, a friendship that begins, and is only possible, because God has first befriended us, and that grows as our friendship with God unfolds in love and friendship with others. It was from Aquinas that I received the third and fourth elements that Charlie names as essential to my account of friendship: (3) friends are God's gift to us, providential blessings for the journey to beatitude, and thus evoke gratitude; and (4) we need these friends if we are not to lose our way on our journey and thus abandon the story that is eminently worth the gift of our lives, the story of making our way to God as together we follow Christ.

Over the years, although this understanding of Christian ethics has been deepened, refined, expanded, and enriched for me by the work of Stanley Hauerwas, Josef Pieper, Alasdair MacIntyre, Servais Pinckaers, Iris Murdoch, Charles Curran, Bernard Häring, Richard Gula, William Spohn, Herbert McCabe, Julia Annas, William Mattison, Patrick McCormick, Diana Fritz Cates, James Keenan, Christine Pohl, Tobias Winright, Enda McDonagh, Charles Pinches, and so many others, I have never strayed far from the vision of the Christian life that Aquinas awoke in me, a vision I find hopeful and true and beautiful. It is for me the clearest and fullest revelation of the truth of things. And so what Charlie says in his article is unquestionably true: I did have “designs” on my readers and my students. I wanted my writing and my teaching to be morally and spiritually formative. Yes, I wanted readers and students to think about and wrestle with what I was saying, but I also wanted them to be open to grace and new possibilities, to more hopeful ways of envisioning themselves and their lives, to growth and transformation, and to being blessed with unanticipated peace and joy. I wanted them to awaken to the call of goodness and to find goodness so attractive and compelling that they would begin to pursue it wholeheartedly not as isolated pilgrims, but as strangers who had become friends. As they took that journey, I wanted them to connect goodness to a person, Jesus, so that their goodness would become holiness and their holiness would become a happiness that might be perfected in the reign of God, but that they already, however incompletely, knew now. In this way, happiness became the “activity” of a life of discipleship, a life of following, learning from, and imitating Christ in order to be transformed in the love and goodness of God. Thus, Charlie is correct in affirming the centrality of the Eucharist in my understanding of Christian ethics and why from the start my primary audience was not the academy, but the church and whoever, whether student or reader, I might meet along the way.

In the second half of his article, Charlie makes several important observations, two of which I want briefly to address. First, he notes that “friendship has its limits,” helpfully reminding us (in ways my writings often do not) not only that there are other relationships important to our moral formation that should not be lost in the shadow of friendship, but also that to make friendship carry too much weight in the moral life is ultimately to lose sight of its distinctiveness. Friendship contributes *something* indispensable to our understanding of the shape of the moral life, but it cannot contribute *everything*. Friendship may be a philosophically and theologically rich concept that deserves more attention from philosophers and theologians than it sometimes receives; however, if it becomes too capacious it risks becoming meaningless. Too, as Charlie notes, there are important differences between, for example, friendships and families simply because while we choose our friends, we are born into our families. Thus, along with

friendship we must attend to kinship relationships, to the various groups and communities to which we belong, and our relationships with persons we may not even know but to whom we are connected, and in some way obliged, because they are human beings.

Second, Charlie reminds us that when we move from the natural law to the gospel we are in a different world telling a different story. This is why a Christian understanding of friendship will exceed, challenge, transform, and possibly subvert our typical normative assumptions about friendship. For instance, if to be baptized is to live *in Christ* and to make the life of Christ paradigmatic for our own, how does that both inform and transform every other relationship of our lives? And if Christ, as the gift of God's friendship to us *in person*, is the one in whom we see what it means to live in friendship with God and others, how does the life, teaching, and ministry of Christ summon us not only to think about friendship differently, but to practice it differently as well, perhaps most of all by extending an invitation of friendship beyond our most carefully chosen friends? As Charlie intimates, if we follow Christ and are led by the Spirit, who knows what may transpire? This is why for Christians the natural home for musing about the meaning and possibilities and trajectory of friendship is the church at worship.

#### **A FRIENDLY RESPONSE TO TWO FRIENDS' FRIENDLY OBSERVATIONS**

In "A Consideration of Teaching, Friendship, and Boundaries in Catholic Higher Education," Bridget Burke Ravizza and Mara Brecht, my former colleagues at St. Norbert College, begin with a comment that a teacher and mentor once made to me, a comment that permanently marked how I approached moral theology and how I understood its purpose: "All good theology must be pastoral theology." That mentor and teacher was Sebastian MacDonald, a Passionist priest who for eleven years taught moral theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and who, in befriending me, was the first to introduce me to the field. My debt to him is enormous. Sebastian was highly influenced by the work of Bernard Häring and Charles Curran, both of whom confirmed his conviction that the ultimate aim of any good theology is to help people find their way to truly good ways of being and acting, and in order to do so you had to meet them where they were and prudently adapt your theology to the complex, imperfect, and sometimes messy circumstances of their lives. As Bridget and Mara write, any "good theology, in particular moral theology, ought to be focused on and designed to benefit real people." That was Sebastian's core insight. You were not there to judge or denounce people, but to help them, and helping them meant realizing that sometimes asking too much of a person at once is more harmful than asking too little. Sebastian taught us that a genuinely pastoral moral theology is not a

lesser form of theology, a diluted version of a more rigorous scholarly approach that should be the reserve of the less academically gifted; rather, it is to share the fruits of a highly informed academic theology in a way that can be useful to others; it was not to hoard a gift but to share it. Bridget and Mara capture the essence of a pastoral moral theology when they write: "On the contrary, good moral theology ought to be geared toward making flesh-and-blood lives flourish and concrete communities thrive. Moral theology at its best guides ordinary persons toward a better life: a life marked by right relationship with God, others, and the created world."

Moreover, Bridget and Mara are right that the desire to have a pastorally inspired moral theology influenced my conviction that Christian ethics should begin not with asking, "What should I do?" but with the more fundamental questions, "Who should I be? What kind of person should I be trying to become through the most persistent attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and actions of my life? What should I make of my life as a whole?" That first question undoubtedly matters because we can make a colossal mess of our lives as well as the lives of others if we never learn how to answer it well; however, it seemed to me (and here Hauerwas's influence is unmistakable) that how we act in any situation—even how we recognize a moral dilemma—is a reflection of our character. It made sense to me that we were much more likely to make good decisions if we had become good persons, people of virtuous character and integrity. Too, by shifting the focus to the formation of virtue and character, morality, rather than arriving on the scene only when tough decisions confronted us, was woven into the fabric of our everyday lives.

The shift from *doing* to *being* enabled me to think about morality more broadly. Christian ethics became not only a distinct theological discipline, but an introduction to a whole way of being in the world—a distinctive way of life—whose aim was to help one understand what a truly good human life, one that helps us achieve our highest possible excellence, looks like and how we have to live to achieve it. That led naturally to questions of happiness and well-being, flourishing and fulfillment, and to the virtues since our happiness and well-being increase as we acquire and are formed in the habits and qualities of character that make both who we are and what we do good. And, as noted above, we acquire and are transformed in the virtues in relationships such as friendship, relationships in which through the love and care we extend to our friends and that we receive from them, and the good things we pursue and enjoy together, we become good ourselves.

Mara and Bridget's essay is itself a wonderfully insightful exercise in pastoral theology. They want to show how friendship can be an apt model for teaching, particularly in Catholic higher education, and how it can help both teachers and students skillfully negotiate three bound-

aries they encounter in contemporary society and Catholic higher education. Everything they say underscores that we grievously misunderstand the mission of Catholic education if we equate it with nothing more than transmitting oodles of facts and information to our students or if we think we have done our jobs well if we equip them for lucrative careers. The mission of Catholic higher education, they attest, is to instill in students a deep desire for what is true and good and lovable so that they may learn how to live in ways befitting human beings by growing in justice, holiness, compassion, and truthfulness, through lives of love and service to others, and through a resolute commitment to build a world where life abundant is possible for all. For this to happen, Catholic higher education, they stress, must form students not only intellectually, but morally, spiritually, and emotionally. In other words, an indispensable element of this education is the formation of character. Learning is an invitation to change, a summons to ongoing intellectual, moral, and spiritual conversion as one moves from knowledge to wisdom, from wisdom to goodness, from goodness to holiness. That should be the trajectory of Catholic higher education: from knowledge to wisdom, from wisdom to goodness, from goodness to holiness.

Mara and Bridget's essay calls attention to the holistic character of Catholic higher education. Perhaps this could be expressed by saying that Catholic higher education is a way of *seeing*, *knowing*, and *acting*. It is a way of seeing because education involves teaching students to see that the world and all that is in it is a dazzling gift of the love, goodness, generosity, and amazing creativity of God. If we *act* according to how we *see*, then the respect for persons that Mara and Bridget argue ought to penetrate every dimension of Catholic education flows from the realization that every person—and indeed the whole creation—is a sacrament of God, an awesome revelation of the being of God whose sacredness we must recognize and revere. Teachers recognize, respect, and respond to the singular sacredness of each of their students when, as Mara and Bridget write, they love them as a “teacher-friend.” Extending that love to students is to want what is best for them and to express that in the classroom by attending to them as particular persons with unique gifts and personalities, by demonstrating care for them in how we listen to and respond to questions and comments, by encouraging, supporting, and complimenting them, and by not hesitating to challenge them because to love someone is to have a vision of who they have it in them to be and to call that forth from them. In other words, if learning to see is an integral element of Catholic higher education, it is obviously an integral element to good teaching. This is one reason that adopting friendship as a model of teaching is to expect more not only of students, but of their teachers as well.

Catholic higher education is a way of knowing rooted in the conviction that to be human is to answer the call to seek what is true and

good in order to live what is true and good. Moreover, we can come to some understanding of what is true and good because God has gifted us with intelligence, curiosity, reason, creativity, and imagination. This is why while there should always be abundant space in Catholic education for endless questions, for critical scrutiny, for doubt and uncertainty, and for charitable disagreements and refutations, there is no room in Catholic intellectual life for permanent skepticism, entrenched relativism, casual nihilism, or cynicism. But, and this is crucial for appreciating the appropriateness of Mara and Bridget's turn to friendship as a model for Catholic higher education, we seek, discover, and embrace what is true and good *together*. At its best, the Catholic intellectual tradition envisions the intellectual life as a community of friends, a community of those who have come together to seek what is true and good in partnership with one another. This is why the metaphor of friendship is so fitting for understanding what should happen at Catholic colleges and universities, whether in the classroom or in our various scholarly disciplines. Catholic higher education is an inherently collaborative endeavor whose success hinges on creating precisely the kind of learning community Mara and Bridget describe, one characterized and sustained by hospitality, humility, and love. Humility is particularly pertinent for creating a truly collaborative community of learning because a humble person readily admits that he or she doesn't know everything, both needs and is enriched by the knowledge and expertise of others, and is able to delight in and be grateful for the achievements of others because they contribute to the betterment of the whole. Such learning communities are not sabotaged by envy and jealousy, resentment and backbiting, but rather are animated by a general desire to help one another and a heartfelt eagerness to celebrate each other's success.

Catholic higher education is a way of acting because teachers and students should use what they learn in service to others. Education is a gift, but a gift that comes with responsibilities. The purpose of education is not seizing a privilege in order to leave others behind, but to form us into the kind of people who are eager to use what they have learned in service to the needs of others. Catholic education should equip students with the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to address the needs of the world, a point Bridget and Mara make when they suggest that practicing hospitality in the classroom means "including diverse voices and perspectives in the curriculum," particularly the wisdom and insight of those whose voices have been silenced and whose experiences have been dismissed and ignored. As they write: "Teachers train students to practice intellectual and moral hospitality by exposing them to diverse theological perspectives and helping them engage those perspectives with open and generous minds and hearts." Practicing "intellectual and moral hospitality" and cultivating

“open and generous minds and hearts” must be a central focus of Catholic higher education if students are to grasp how what they learn in the classroom is completed in lives of justice, service, and compassion. If learning should ultimately lead to the praise and glory of God, that can only happen when both teachers and students use the knowledge entrusted to them to work for a more just and humane world.

In the second half of their article, Bridget and Mara explore how the model of friendship can help students negotiate three predominant boundaries in contemporary society. They speak first of what it would mean to befriend students in an age where boundaries are blurred and diminished due to relentless exposure to social media. While not denying the benefits of advances in technology and social media, they forthrightly address their unsettling negative effects on students’ physical, emotional, moral, and spiritual health, effects that are especially damaging when students become addicted to devices they are constantly told will improve their (and our) lives. Addictions are always costly because through them we invest our lives in things that can never deliver what we hope from them and deny ourselves the very things that can bring peace to our seemingly insatiable desires. This is why Mara and Bridget’s turn to temperance is so important. Lacking temperance, we lose our way and become confused about what really matters, which is exactly what social media companies want to happen. They want us to remain distracted, always in need of further stimulation, but the result is that we increasingly distance ourselves from the deepest needs of our lives and how best to fulfill them. When use of social media becomes excessive, it forms (or, more accurately, *de-forms*) us into persons who continually act against their own well-being and thus never find the joy and contentment for which we thirst and hunger. In this respect, to feed on social media is to remain chronically famished.

As Mara and Bridget demonstrate, when our students are self-destructing right before our eyes, we need to intervene. The model of friendship helps us remember that such intervention is an act of love, a heartfelt rescue of young persons whose good is paramount to us. To befriend students caught in a web of diminished boundaries is not only to help them break free of destructive habits, but also to point them to something better, namely, as they say, the “rich, messy, and demanding” relationships where we learn the risk and vulnerability, but also the absolute satisfaction that comes in being known and loved for who we are and in knowing and loving another. Given their susceptibility to the lures of technology and social media, and what is lost to them if they succumb, to help students appreciate the character of genuine friendships and the joy to be found in them is an urgent calling of Catholic higher education today.

It is hard not to feel sad when reading Bridget and Mara's analysis of stressed boundaries because it poignantly reminds anyone in a position of authority (bishops, priests, and ministers; teachers, counselors, coaches, and therapists; executives and administrators) of the terrible harm inflicted on others when professional boundaries are transgressed and power is used for the pleasure and satisfaction of one regardless of the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual damage done to another. As Bridget and Mara ask, what does it mean "to befriend students in an ecclesial and cultural environment in which personal and sexual boundaries too often have been, and continue to be, violated"? And "in an educational culture charged by Title IX, mandatory reporting, and the #MeToo movement"? As they rightly observe, we cannot underestimate the loss of trust and abiding fear of betrayal in students who have grown up at a time when stories of violated boundaries are part of the background chorus of their lives.

And yet, the situation is further complicated when teachers become uncertain about how rightly to interact with students who confide in them, come to them troubled and confused, and look to them for guidance. In the world of Title IX reporting and the #MeToo movement, is it really prudent to speak of befriending students? Is it even morally responsible? I think it is; in fact, I believe properly modeling what friendship means in the teacher-student relationship can be a promising way to help restore the trust in persons of authority that so many students have understandably lost. That will happen if teachers remain focused on the good of their students rather than on their own needs. It will happen if they remember the difference between a teacher-student friendship and the other friendships of their lives. One of those differences, as Mara and Bridget note, is that the reciprocity and mutuality characteristic of friendships will be different in a teacher-student relationship because, in important ways, the teacher-student relationship is not one of equality. That is why the shared vulnerability and mutual dependence that mark most friendships would be an egregious violation of a teacher-student relationship. And friendship can be a fitting model for the teacher-student relationship if teachers honor the boundary that friendship naturally establishes, a boundary defined by the moral demand to seek—and never diminish—what is genuinely good for a student. Of course, this means that the model of friendship only works if teachers, in addition to being proficient and well-trained, are also people of character, integrity, and virtue.

Their essay concludes with a brief analysis of threatened boundaries. This describes how the language, principles, values, and categories of capitalism and consumerism can lead colleges and universities to compromise their mission and core ideals, thus becoming businesses rather than educational institutions. This is especially the case today when so many smaller liberal arts colleges struggle to survive. When market categories prevail, students become potential customers,

education becomes a product to market, and faculty become easily replaceable resources. In such an environment, Bridget and Mara comment, “Students too often become consumers to whom faculty, staff and administrators cater, rather than persons whom we befriend. Students rate professors on social media, and we, in turn, become commodities.” The temptation for teachers is to pander to students rather than educate them, to be popular rather than responsible, in the hope of garnering class evaluations conducive to tenure. Furthermore, when faculty positions are reduced and job security diminished, teachers feel so pressured to publish, to serve on endless committees, and to say yes to every request, especially if it comes from the administration, that what should be a demanding yet fulfilling *vocation* becomes an exhausting and dispiriting job they begin to resent.

Instead of surrendering to these dynamics, Catholic institutions should steadfastly combat them and one way, they suggest, is by creating institutional cultures of friendship. In this way, friendship, rather than being an escape from a dreary reality, becomes an act of resistance—a vigilant protest—against it. Friendship is an insistent refusal to let the ethos of capitalism and consumerism determine what Catholic colleges and universities should be. In institutional cultures of friendship, students are unique human beings entrusted to staff and faculty to educate, form, guide, and mentor; faculty and staff are not commodities, but professionals who have answered a very special calling; and teaching is not a career designed to make one anxious and insecure or to drain every ounce of joy from her, but a vocation through which she uses her gifts to serve and, amid many challenges, thrives in doing so. In an ethos of friendship, the dehumanizing dynamics of a capitalistic and consumeristic culture, dynamics that emphasize continual busyness, constant productivity, and dangerously fluid personal and institutional identities, are recognized, named, and collectively resisted. In short, if an important purpose of Catholic higher education is to show students a truly healthy and humane way to live, faculty and staff can hardly do so if they are governed by the very things they tell their students to resist.

#### **FRATERNAL CORRECTION – AN ESSENTIAL BUT NEGLECTED ACT OF FRIENDSHIP**

Darin Davis’s “On Spiritual Rescue” is likely the most unexpected essay in this issue because he examines an act of friendship that for far too long has been neglected, overlooked, or mistakenly left behind. That’s odd (and also rather revealing) when we consider that the fundamental act of friendship is to seek the good of another and to be devoted to their well-being, a responsibility we fail miserably if we see our friends slipping into attitudes, feelings, and behavior that are morally and spiritually detrimental and say nothing. Should not fraternal correction—what Darin names “spiritual rescue”—be an essential

component of friendship, an obligation friends take on as a requirement of love rather than a ticklish task to avoid? If anyone is willing to speak uncomfortable truths to us, truths we might prefer not to hear, shouldn't it be our friends precisely because they care for us in ways that others do not? And isn't fraternal correction especially important in a Christian account of friendship where each friend helps the other grow in the love, goodness, and holiness of God? Aquinas certainly thought so because he named fraternal correction one of the essential acts of charity, an absolute requirement of a life of friendship with God. Darin is right that far from its being an afterthought, no Christian theology of friendship is complete that does not have ample room for fraternal correction, a practice he describes as the "giving and accepting of counsel, exhortation, admonishment, and rebuke when a friend has taken a wayward moral path."

Darin describes his essay as a "recovery project" for fraternal correction and spiritual rescue, an aim that reminds us of how marginal these concepts have become to our understanding of friendship. Rather than being skittish about fraternal correction, he wants us to realize that true friendships cannot flourish without it. After examining four common objections to practicing fraternal correction, he acknowledges that fraternal correction can do more harm than good if it is not an expression of love, if one's intention is not to help a friend but to "embarrass or humiliate" them, if the person offering the correction lacks the humility necessary to acknowledge his or her own shortcomings, and if the correction is not guided by the perceptiveness and wisdom of prudence. In other words, in order for fraternal correction to be a genuine act of love and to be efficacious, emphasis must be on *fraternal* rather than *correction*, a point made in Galatians 6:1 when Paul tells the Christians of that community that if they see a brother or sister falling into sin, they "should correct that one in a gentle spirit."

Two important considerations emerge from Darin's essay. First, his exploration of fraternal correction and spiritual rescue reminds us that good friendships, friendships of depth, substance, and resilience, and friendships that have stood the test of time, are not a refuge from the rigors and discipline of real love but exactly where we learn and practice what real love requires. A superficial understanding of friendship—and one our culture too often promotes—suggests that friendships are rather breezy, lighthearted affairs in which the friends, always having fun, likewise must always affirm and support one another. Friendships, according to this cultural script, are relationships in which exhortation, admonishment, and correction clearly have no place and, if risked, will predictably end the friendship. But that isn't love, it's sentimentality. Darin's use of the friendship between Johnny Cash and June Carter is so apt because it is a powerfully moving example that true friends do not abandon each other when one of them

is struggling or has lost his way. True friends do not admonish, then flee; rather they walk with their friend, guiding and helping and supporting him, offering the kind of encouragement Darin describes as “a genuine pat on the back, a sincere word of exhortation, some sign that someone truly believes in us and wants us to do and be well.” In short, *rescue* must lead to *restoration* because the purpose of fraternal correction is to help a friend understand that he has lost his way precisely in order to call him back to a path that will lead to life.

Second, Darin’s comment that fraternal correction is countercultural is undoubtedly true, but makes one wonder why it has become such a rare, even alien practice? Why are we more surprised by incidents of fraternal correction than by its absence? And what do we lose when both individuals and communities find it, in Darin’s words, “strange and out of place”? One thing we obviously lose is the proactive care necessary to sustain healthy relationships, healthy communities, and healthy institutions. Whether it is in marriages, families, friendships, communities, or institutions, people committed to practicing fraternal correction or spiritual rescue for the sake of one another testify that they care enough to be truthful with each other and to embrace the hard work real love requires. They risk practicing fraternal correction because they know what is lost when they do not. It is easier not to embrace these practices because it is always easier not bothering to love when doing so might provoke anger or rejection, hurt or misunderstanding. Telling uncomfortable truths takes courage, but such courage witnesses a depth of care that assures us that we are loved no matter how many times we fail, fall short, and need to be forgiven. This is why friendships, communities, and churches have vitality, moral credibility, and a hopeful future only when fraternal correction is widely esteemed and practiced as love that cares enough to speak the truth.

#### **JESUS – A MAGNANIMOUS MAN ARISTOTLE WOULD NEVER RECOGNIZE**

Justin Bronson Barringer’s “Jesus Is Not Just My Homeboy—A Friendship Christology,” begins by examining how Jesus might be the exemplar of Aristotle’s “high-minded” or magnanimous man, then proceeds to demonstrate how Jesus completely subverts Aristotle’s understanding of greatness. Jesus is akin to Aristotle’s magnanimous man inasmuch as he is “full of all the virtues and is thus truly good,” but the gospels testify that Jesus manifests virtues Aristotle would never affirm, virtues such as compassion, humility, meekness, gentleness, and particularly love for one’s enemies. Athens is indeed far from Jerusalem! Moreover, Justin rightly suggests that the greatness Jesus embodied, and Christians are called to imitate, is mapped not in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but in the famous passage from Philippians

(2:5–11) where Paul exhorts the church at Philippi to take on the attitude of Christ, who “though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.” That passage can be read as a commentary on the incarnation, life, ministry, teachings, and especially the death of Jesus, and proclaims that for Christians greatness is measured in service, in humility and obedience, in standing with the poor and marginalized, and in sacrificial love. For Christians, Justin observes, the definitive revelation of greatness is the crucified Christ, which means that we find true greatness where we least expect and are most afraid to look.

In the second section of his essay, Justin increases the distance between Aristotle’s views on friendship and a Christian theology of friendship in his analysis of Jesus’s friendship with sinners. It is frequently noted that Jesus’s practice of table fellowship was a scandal to the social and religious leaders of the time because he chose as table companions the very persons respectable people diligently avoided: sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, and anyone else who was continually told they could never belong. Jesus did not shun them, he embraced them and identified with them—he gave them a place at the table—and in doing so taught that the reign of God was a new kind of society, one in which unjust boundaries were not reinforced but transgressed and overcome. In light of Aristotle’s elitist views on friendship, Jesus’s table fellowship is the beginning of a very different world, one characterized by justice, equality, hospitality, and an abiding resolve to continually expand the circle of friendship and love. This is why Justin’s remark that Jesus establishes “a new type of civic friendship” cannot be overlooked. As he says, Jesus inaugurates a liberatingly different type of civic friendship because it is rooted in a wholly new understanding of community, one established not by nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, wealth, status, or even religion, but on the creative and salvific love of God, a God who has shared the divine life with everyone. There are no carefully constructed walls and no strategically designed borders to Jesus’s community because it is open to every person who has been loved and befriended by God, which, of course, is absolutely everyone. In such a community of unchecked solidarity, no one is truly a stranger and no one can ever be an outsider. The social and political consequences of this Christian theology of civic friendship are breathtaking, so much so that most will dismiss them (just as Jesus’s contemporaries did) as scandalously impossible. That is why, as Justin says, the natural home for encountering this “new creation,” for learning about and witnessing this flagrantly new social and political possibility, is the church.

Near the end of his essay, Justin notes that “Jesus’s invitation into friendship reshapes friendship itself.” That is undoubtedly true, and two of the ways it does so seem especially important. Friendship is preferential love based on an attraction we feel toward some rather

than others. The preferential character of friendship is one of the things that distinguishes it from other kinds of love; but it is also, at least for Christians, a potential liability. If I only welcome into my life people I prefer—people I enjoy being with and am comfortable with—then my world quickly becomes much too cozy and insular. That is always a possibility, but it is one Christians should studiously avoid because Jesus summons us not to shrink our circle of concern, but to consistently extend it. A Christian understanding of friendship, as Justin’s analysis demonstrates, helps us become the kind of persons who do so. Second, Jesus reshapes our understanding of friendship by showing us that for Christians, friendship is completed in mission. Jesus’s life and ministry teach us that for Christians friendship is not an end in itself, but exists to serve a larger purpose, namely the plans and purposes of God. Jesus reshapes our understanding of friendship because friends of God are called to participate in the creative and redemptive activity of God in the world. We see this in John’s account of the Passover meal Jesus shared with his apostles on the night before he died. Jesus addressed them as friends, but then added: “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain” (John 15:16). This adds another dimension to what it means to speak of the church as the community of the friends of God.

#### **CIVIC FRIENDSHIP – WHAT CHANGES WHEN AMOS SPEAKS BEFORE ARISTOTLE**

Anne-Marie Ellithorpe’s “Reciprocity within Community: Ancient and Contemporary Challenges to and Opportunities for Civic Friendship” is as fascinating as it is instructive. She turns to the ancient oracle from Amos 8:4–6 and the Book of Deuteronomy not only to show there are biblical texts centuries before Aristotle that can broaden and deepen our understanding of civic friendship, but also that those texts push us to a much more challenging understanding of the term by summoning us to reconsider the obligations we have to other members of society. A biblically inspired understanding of civic friendship, Anne-Marie illustrates, is potentially socially, economically, and politically transformative because it exposes unjust power dynamics that contribute to social inequity, poverty, exploitation and oppression, and violence, and demands that they be addressed and overcome. Thus, a theology of civic friendship guided by the oracle from Amos and the vision of covenant community in Deuteronomy can initiate something too often deemed impossible: the conversion from social sin to social justice. In this respect, Anne-Marie shows that a biblically informed notion of civic friendship is a prerequisite for the flourishing of all creatures that is aptly named *Shalom*.

Anne-Marie notes that with civic friendship the “willing good and doing good” that characterize the genuine reciprocity that is an essential part of personal friendship is extended to the broader community. She then shows how the same idea is present in Amos 8:4–6 as a prophetic protest against the injustice, exploitation, deceit, and dishonesty that accrued from a rapidly changing socioeconomic context characterized by unfair market practices, the acquisition of land by the wealthy, crushing taxes and rent, and a monetary system rigged to give more power to the already privileged. In this new social and economic order, the inherent human dignity of the poor was violated as they became commodities to be used rather than sacred images of God who had a right to the goods and resources necessary for a healthy and flourishing life.

When she turns to Deuteronomy, Anne-Marie observes, “Like Amos, and other prophetic authors, Deuteronomy reflects concerns regarding a stratified society. Yet whereas Amos proclaims judgment, Deuteronomy advocates for reform,” specifically “practices and attitudes that promote community.” In Deuteronomy, the covenant community is called to befriend anyone and everyone, particularly the most vulnerable, because that is what God did. The community is to live in keeping with the character of God, which means they are “to image a God of love, friendship, and justice,” a God who sides with the poor and is passionately committed to their well-being. Anne-Marie summarizes that “the covenant community is challenged to image God through living out *civic* friendship,” but adds that this covenant inspired notion of civic friendship falls short if it does not lead to the restructuring of society; in other words, civic friendship is completed in just social structures, institutions, and practices. “This friendship is theologically grounded,” Anne-Marie writes. “Within Deuteronomy, loving God with the totality of one’s being clearly includes loving the wider community. Having experienced God’s redemptive love, the covenant community is to share this love with others, including strangers. The community is to image God in promoting justice (socially, economically, and legally).”

Her analysis of Amos and Deuteronomy reveals that civic friendship, far from being mild and modest, is a rallying cry for social change and one that urgently needs to be heard and heeded today. Anne-Marie writes: “I am convinced that theologically inspired civic friendship remains relevant to contemporary contexts.” In light of her essay, I would go further to say that “theologically inspired civic friendship,” as she has described it, is a call to *conscientization*, a summons to a penetrating and pervasive moral conversion rooted in an undying awareness of our responsibility to care for other human beings, to reduce human suffering (and the suffering of other creatures), to confront racism and bigotry and every ideology that sabotages community, and to end the social and economic inequities that crush and

discard persons as if any human being who is neither wealthy nor powerful is casually expendable. In light of her argument, civic friendship is an emphatic rebuke of and antidote to the neoliberal capitalism willing to sacrifice endless millions of lives on the altar of wealth and profits. Instead of “privatized, sentimentalized” understandings of friendship too impotent to change anything, Anne-Marie offers a version of civic friendship that can remake the world according to the justice and peace of God because a life of friendship with God demands fidelity to the ways of God. At the end of her essay, Anne-Marie says that today “it is the market rather than civic friendship that shapes our social imagination.” Think of the energy and hope that would be unleashed if the church—and other Christian institutions—risked living according to the social imagination of the biblically informed civic friendship that Anne-Marie offers.

God has befriended us so that we can befriend one another. This means that for Christians friendship is both a *gift* and a *calling*. Each of these articles probes some dimension of that claim and in doing so opens up the wonderful richness of friendship for understanding who we are and what we should be about in the world, but also for offering a fitting model for doing theology, for Catholic higher education, and undoubtedly for the church. Most importantly, they expose the often overlooked power of friendship to give birth to a more just and humane world by embracing it as an act of protest and resistance against economic, social, political, and religious structures and practices that exploit, crush, and oppress. Far from being a comforting and irresponsible retreat from the world, a Christian theology of friendship compels us to engage the world so that God’s vision for it, a vision most fully disclosed in Jesus’ proclamation of the reign of God, can fully come into being. That is why when we are open to the work to which God calls the friends of God, amazingly hopeful things always result.

**M**

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