

Teaching a Catholic Philosophy of Interpersonal Communication: The Case for “Soul Friendship”

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While social justice education has a rich and ancient history within the Catholic Church, academic disciplines have only recently begun to make the idea of social justice relevant within courses for undergraduates. In the communication discipline, debate about social justice has been lively and varied over the last two decades, and has provided rich entry points for philosophical interpretation. This paper considers interpersonal communication from the vantage point of social justice in the Catholic intellectual tradition. While the importance of friendship for society is nothing new (Aristotle addressed this issue in the Nicomachean Ethics), contemporary cultural hindrances to a just or spiritual friendship are many in the United States. The essay discusses philosophies surrounding social justice, communication, and friendship—ultimately asking what a university course centered on “soul friendship” might look like.

Courses in interpersonal communication are common in American colleges and universities. Typically taught at the introductory undergraduate level, in its most basic form interpersonal communication seeks to assist students in developing communication skills for managing one-on-one relationships. For Catholic colleges and universities where communication departments exist, there may be cause for greater purpose in interpersonal communication. The missions of Catholic institutions uniformly suggest that their faculty and students focus their attention on the dignity of the human person and on issues of social justice. These missions suggest too that a course like interpersonal communication ought to strive for more than “skill-building.” Interpersonal communication, like all courses related to the humanities in some way, benefits at a Catholic institution from philosophical foundations.

The suggestions that there are philosophical foundations to interpersonal communication, and that Catholic institutions of higher education might be the most imperative places for these philosophies to emerge, begins with the assumption that interpersonal communication is not just a course topic but also a field of scholarly inquiry. Interpersonal communication is a field within

the larger discipline of communication. Although communication's origins can be traced to the study of rhetoric and oratory, interpersonal communication is something quite different: Interpersonal communication emerged as a formal area of study for communication scholars in the 1960s as a result of several social and intellectual streams converging and bringing focus to the individual person. The communication forms analyzed are informal, dyadic interactions—not formal oratory.

Since its beginnings 50 years or so ago, most scholarship in interpersonal communication has been quantitative (Knapp, Daly, Albada, & Miller, 2002), accompanied by philosophical approaches from the tradition of dialogue (Arnett, 1981; Ayres, 1984). These latter approaches are experiencing a resurgence of scholarly interest (e.g., Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2003), although the study of friendship within interpersonal communication has not been deeply impacted. This essay is the beginning of a conversation between interpersonal communication and philosophies of social justice and friendship.

Since the topic of social justice has been solidly incorporated into communication research over the last 15 years or so at least, and has been a tradition in Catholic thought for nearly two millennia, the social justice approach in this paper is not totally new. However, those two streams of thought—the ancient one of Christian social justice and the much newer one of communication research—have not yet converged, and that convergence is precisely what this paper sets out to do. Taking the concepts of social justice research in communication that have been previously published, I consider the areas of debate for social justice in communication and grapple with the ways in which interpersonal communication education in Catholic colleges and universities might help to reconcile power inequalities in communication through a focus on social justice in interpersonal interactions.

This essay is above all interested in the ways in which specific approaches to love, embodied within interpersonal relationships, can ensure justice not just between individual persons in discrete interactions, but also how those approaches have implications for larger societal issues that pertain to justice and Catholic higher education. In order to provide depth of inquiry in this essay, a single area of interpersonal communication will be examined—friendship. This choice in itself speaks to issues of power in interpersonal communication, since friendship is often underanalyzed but plays a vital part in other human relationships and contexts such as family, romantic love (Eros), and the workplace.

It seems that in the field of communication social justice, too, is underana-

lyzed. The review of literature below suggests that communication scholars have not yet placed social justice within the intellectual tradition from which social justice emerged. Rather, communication scholars see it as a relatively new phenomenon. The purpose of the current research is to bring the Catholic intellectual tradition to the discussion of social justice in communication, and to expand the significance of interpersonal communication courses in students' lives. I bring the following four questions to this endeavor: What past inspirations about friendship do we find in the Catholic intellectual tradition? How do these inspirations pertain to social justice? Is soul friendship a viable philosophy for teaching interpersonal communication? Finally, what practical implications might there be?

Before explaining specific approaches to understanding and teaching interpersonal communication from the vantage point of the Catholic intellectual tradition, however, I outline the perspectives on social justice that have come before within the field of communication. I also add to these perspectives with Christological and Trinitarian approaches in order to set a foundation for the rest of the essay.

State of the Field: Interpersonal Communication, Concepts of Justice, and (Soul) Friendship

Though communication scholars have yet to write directly about interpersonal communication from the Catholic intellectual tradition, social justice is firmly entrenched within the field of communications. It is, in the words of Julia Wood, "alive and well" (Wood, 1996). Communication journals were the sites of two special issues in the 1990s that addressed the topic of social justice: one in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research (JACR)* and the other in *Communication Studies*. The majority of essays on social justice in the field approach the topic as it concerns the realm of research and scholarship—there are no essays solely dedicated to social justice as an important theme in communication pedagogy, or constituting a significant theme for communication courses in general (let alone interpersonal communication in particular). These essays on social justice and research are, however, essentially praxis-oriented. Pearce (1998) dedicates his contributions to the intersections between social justice as an idea and as a set of practices. Frey (1998) also describes social justice in terms of applied communication research, as is fitting *JACR's* special issue.

Interestingly, though, the question of a *praxis* (theory-informed practice)

approach to social justice is precisely what sparks debate in the communication discipline throughout these two special journal issues. If communication as a discipline ought to be concerned with social justice, and these concerns lead to research with practical or applied implications, where exactly ought these research outcomes have their impact?

For Pollock, Artz, Frey, Pearce, and Murphy (1996), communication finds itself caught between a "Scylla and Charybdis:" Social justice as a concept is often criticized within our discipline for being either too narrow or too general. This assessment is significant, for "social justice" is often a vernacular term whose meaning one presumes to understand without much reflection or investigation. While the Catholic intellectual tradition indicates that social justice is a topic of vital importance from the inception of Christianity, scholars writing outside of this tradition approach the topic as a relatively new idea. The lack of depth in some approaches may cause social justice to seem amorphous as a concept. Indeed, that is one challenge in the communication articles cited here: Social justice in its contemporary communication iterations is not rigorously interrogated. Within theology, unreflective allusions to social justice have been critiqued for their overreliance on Marxism rather than Christology (McGovern, 1989). Communication scholarship on social justice also reflects the Marxist approach: It is a general term that stands for the eradication of contemporary socioeconomic inequalities. In many scholarly examples, social justice is not clearly defined and there is an implicit assumption that it does not *need* to be. Again, social justice in communication is occasionally at risk of becoming empty language—an example of the kind of "broad statements that are so abstract and mean so little that they are virtually impossible to oppose" (Brooks, 2003, p. 20).

This risk of positing social justice as a vague concept may affect undergraduate students. Without a philosophical basis or understanding of the Christological history behind it, social justice is a good they may know they ought to support, but they may be hard-pressed to define it without at least some guidance. Pollock et al. (1996) set the parameters of social justice as pertaining to ethics, and their definition of social justice requires not only that sources of inequality are investigated but also that the researcher do as much as possible to dismantle those sources. This is the crux of their praxis approach. These authors also understand social justice to mean that researchers will advocate directly for the oppressed (Pollock et al., 1996).

My starting definition for social justice contains these criteria as well; I would not add or subtract from Pollock et al.'s four elements of ethics, inves-

tigation, dismantlement, and advocacy (1996). However, working from the perspective of the Catholic intellectual tradition, I ground social justice in Christology and Trinitarian anthropology. From this perspective, social justice is the commitment to (1) the dignity of every human person in recognition of Christ in every person; (2) solidarity across the human family—despite cultural divisions—in recognition that human persons are created in the image of a Triune God and therefore flourish in community; and (3) working to ameliorate the structures of human society that undermine the first two goals listed here. The approach in this essay is therefore additive to “social justice” thus far articulated by communication scholars, whose approaches advocate a reversal of the societal structures that create inequalities. Again, these communication approaches are based in sociological critiques from the last half century or so, and omit philosophical or theological foundations for social justice.

This essay’s approach to interpersonal communication and social justice through the Catholic intellectual tradition is additive in another way. By bringing social justice to the specific realms of interpersonal communication and friendship, a new avenue opens between communication research and direct human experience. My juxtaposition of social justice and friendship is meant to enhance the idea of social justice for very particular practices that pertain to everyday life between private persons—not merely institutions in the public sphere. Issues of social justice are not limited to broad public issues, but are just as relevant to everyday relationships between friends.

This assertion that social justice ought to be both public and private responds to another debate within the communication journals’ special issues of the late 1990s. Specifically, Makau (1996) expressed concern that a preoccupation with social justice as focusing on structural change would negatively impact practices in interpersonal communication. She is not alone in these reservations. Much of the criticism of social justice practice in theology, for example, indicates that social justice (in this case, liberation theology) can become too instrumental in its focus on the political outcome of liberation and thereby neglect the need for compassionate interaction that respects the dignity of each unique human person (McGovern, 1989). Likewise, Olson & Olson (2003) are uneasy with Pollock et al.’s (1996) requirement that social justice research must always yield “usable knowledge.” This criterion, they believe, infringes on the creativity and freedom of both researchers and laypersons, and unnecessarily restricts social justice in its significance for communication.

This brief review should justify Wood’s (1996) identification of social justice in communication as “alive and well.” At the same time, in comparison to the

Catholic intellectual tradition on social justice, social justice is only vaguely defined in communication research. Many of the communication scholars' ideals of social justice are instrumental, seeking largely political and socioeconomic outcomes without robust attentiveness to interaction with individuals. Except for Makau's (1996) work, interpersonal communication is missing from communication discussions of social justice. By considering social justice's impact on interpersonal communication praxis as well as pedagogy, this essay attempts to shape the institutional/structural concerns of Pollock et al. (1996) to the interpersonal virtues that Makau (1996) stresses. Below, I explain the connection between this effort and philosophies of friendship.

Friendship and Interpersonal Communication

This project understands friendship, or *philia*, to be the love that exists between two persons whose love is based neither on familial relation nor sexual intimacy. This is not to say that friends may not be biologically "related" or that spouses are not friends. Rather, the definition arises from ancient concepts of *philia*. Ancient philosophers insisted on the external quality of friendship: Friendship must always be "about" something. It is neither familial obligation or comfort, nor sexual attraction. It should be stressed that in describing friendship as a "love," I am isolating a certain deep kind of relationship. Certainly "friends" are very often companions, for instance, who enjoy similar activities or interests. Rawlins (1992) has drawn a difference between "agentic" and "communal" friendships. Agentic friendships form when people share a classroom or workspace; they enjoy each other's company as long as they are "thrown together" for some fairly random reason. But once they graduate school or change jobs, the friendships fade. Communal friendships, on the other hand, tend to be lifelong. Friends may meet in school or the workplace, but the friendship is a genuine deep commitment: Regardless of how far apart they may be in the future, their communication remains lively and their bond remains strong.

Rawlins' (1992) classification above is one example of the importance of distinguishing the many instances of friendship in human life. It shows that *philia* is unique in the category of friendship. In this love we call *philia*, friendship is a deep love indeed—more like the communal love identified above. In *philia*, friends are persons who "see the same truth," are focused on an external good, and whose closeness emerges over joint commitment to similar goals (Lewis, 1960). It is more than the desire for a companion in certain activities or a cure for general loneliness. Friends are committed to similar interests and

goals, a “third thing” on which they focus. This good is always “between” and in front of friends. Even physical posture, according to Lewis (1960), distinguishes friendship from romantic love. Lovers “gaze into one another’s eyes,” but friends are “side by side” and shoulder to shoulder (Lewis, 1960). Taken to its most idealistic ends, being “shoulder to shoulder” implies a metaphor for solidarity and is especially significant for friendship and social justice, as I discuss later in the essay.

Since friendship is a love between two persons, one might ask how it is a social good benefiting the public sphere? Aristotle knew the answer to this question well, and Lewis (1960) elaborates upon it. For Aristotle, friendship was a social good because friends encourage our best work in the prime of our lives. The companionship and positive energy between good friends who are also involved in the same project—engineers, inventors, doctors, and even literary artists like Lewis and his best friend J.R.R. Tolkien—spur each other to greatness. Lewis did not leave out the possibility that friends also spur each other to evil, if their “joint commitment” is not to an external *good* but is instead poisoned by their own exclusivity and belief in infallibility. But friendship by its definition is love that emerges out of joint commitment to a good. Aelred of Rievaulx (2010) speculated that when two so-called friends break apart over disagreement related to the good—if one violated the good, in other words—then no friendship ever actually existed between the two. For Aelred, goodness thus becomes almost a “prerequisite” of sorts for love in the public sphere.

Few contemporary studies of friendship in interpersonal communication discuss the topic of moral and ethical goodness, friendship as a social good, or the potential for social justice in friendship. This is understandable, given the relative dominance of social scientific methods in communication (Knapp et al., 2002). Recent scholarship on friendship in interpersonal communication discusses the impact of new technologies and shifting social norms on communication behavior between friends. Intriguing new terms have been coined by writers interested in friendship, such as Watters’ (2003) “urban tribe,” which describes the roles and communication patterns surrounding groups of friends who are young, single, and living in American cities. Since 2005 many communication articles on friendship are preoccupied with new technologies that enable social networks (Kleinberg, 2008; Westerman, Van Der Heide, Klein, and Walther, 2008). Other recent works build on classic communication theories used to explain relationships with those outside our families, such as social exchange theory and social judgment theory.

This essay explores the possibility of another social theory—not about exchange or judgment, but about justice. Given the limited but healthy range of works on interpersonal communication, one might ask why it is important to consider a synthesis of social justice and friendship. I answer this in the next section of the essay, and then move to a description of friendship informed by philosophical notions of social justice.

Friendship as Social Justice—and Vice Versa

An attempt to integrate the study of friendship and social justice is worthwhile not merely because it is interesting to do so, but because the integration invites possibilities for enhanced human experience and for enhanced academic study. Both friendship and social justice are opened up by the question, for several reasons.

In the first reason, one might revisit Makau's (1996) concern that a preoccupation with societal change detracts from our efforts at real ethical *interpersonal* action. Above, I likened this important point to the critique of liberation theology, which states that the goal of liberation runs the risk of becoming too instrumental and losing sight of real human persons (McGovern, 1989). By bringing concepts of social justice to the teaching of interpersonal communication philosophies of friendship, one begins with love between two persons. The love between two unique persons is not sacrificed for the good of the social order. On the contrary, as I argue later in this essay, unique aspects of friendship actually provide for positive social change. When two friends turn their commitment to social justice and work on it together, there is a greater possibility of their efforts bearing fruit—and simultaneously, their love for one another itself deepens.

The second reason to merge social justice and friendship has direct bearing on scholarship and pedagogy in philosophies of interpersonal communication. Within the field, far more studies concern romantic love than friendship. Perhaps this imbalance in scholarship reflects some vernacular worldviews that there is little to learn or say about communication between friends. Simon (1997) writes of contemporary Anglo-America: "The relationships that are often the focus of our energies are romantic ones" (p. 109). Friendship seems commonplace, and indeed it is—even in popular fictions and media that Simon could not have envisioned in 1997. "Friend" is now not just a noun but a verb, as on Facebook where one individual can "friend" another online. "Friend" also becomes a generic term rather than a specific one: in my toddler's daycare,

everyone in the class is called a “friend.” This is a nice sentiment and perhaps a way of getting around the stuffy term “classmates” for 2-year-olds, but toddlers are not the only ones who seem at a loss to describe the people they meet outside their families. At every level of society, American English has very few words to describe the people outside of familial or romantic relationships. In American English one is a “friend” or a “best friend” or, more recently, “BFFL” (best friend for life). Slang terms like “peeps” or “posse” come in and out of fashion, but these describe groups rather than dyads. These American English examples are particularly striking when contrasted with Japanese, which has over 10 different precise words to describe levels of companionship and commitment between nonrelated individuals who are not romantically involved (in other words, friends). These words are used explicitly in Japan, both internally (between the friendship partners) and externally (to explain the friendship to others). The special attributes of the commitment between friends are thus honored, whether they are casually companionable or very deep. Although scholars like Rawlins (1992) may introduce academic terms like “agentic” and “communal” to describe different levels of intimacy or commitment in friendships, these are not part of everyday American discourse.

Another cross-cultural examination of perspectives on friendship may help to illustrate the American “generic” approach to friendship as potentially problematic. Without words to describe levels of friendship—and without the rigorous study or reflection needed to achieve these levels—the line between acquaintanceships and friendships is often blurred in Anglo-American culture. This is evidenced by Basso’s (1990) work among the Apache. The Native Americans with whom Basso lived described their bewilderment at the “instant friendship” most whites tried to achieve with them, not taking the time to get to know Others as well as they should before interacting in friendly and informal ways. Basso (1990) concludes that the Apache regard most Anglo-Americans as insincere and condescending in their communication with Others. I offer this example not necessarily as an indictment of American friendliness in general, but instead as a caution against Anglo-American perceptions of friendship as simple and irrelevant for reflection. In Basso’s (1990) study, the Anglo-Americans were no doubt “acting naturally”—but they were unaware that friendship communication arises from cultural philosophy, and their own worldview infringed on the interpersonal comfort of Others.

The misunderstanding between Anglo-Americans and Apaches indicates that “friendship” is at least in part a *cultural* formulation, and it is to everyone’s benefit to reflect upon what we mean by it and what we mean through our in-

teractions. In higher education, this reflection on friendship may not be consistently achieved in a formal sense. Why is friendship seen as commonplace, simple, perhaps even dull in both academic and vernacular spheres? Simon (1997) points to social norms and worldviews in the United States which tend to exalt romantic love as the most valuable and fulfilling of the human loves when compared to family relationships or friendship. The majority of "love stories" in popular culture, for instance, are preoccupied with romantic love (Simon, 1997, p. 109).

This fact points to a third reason why this essay strives to bring together social justice and friendship in the philosophy of interpersonal communication: because the "love story" focus on romantic love is itself a potential interpersonal injustice. The exaltation of romantic love over friendship can cause a kind of "narrative disconnect" for persons who do not sustain long-term romantic love relationships. Stone (1975) describes the effect of passive fairy tale heroines on women she interviewed, for example. Interestingly, the original collection of fairy tales by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm that forms the basis for most American collections (and Disney films) had only a handful of "passive and pretty" heroines (p. 42). But Disney films of her generation, taken from children's literature collections published in the United States, saw the vast majority of women depicted either as villainesses or weak, passive protagonists. Stone's (1975) research subjects were preoccupied with the romantic nature of the tales in one way or another—either as youngsters, fantasizing about how their lives might one day change; or as older women, unhappy and dissatisfied with how the fairy tales related to their own real experiences.

Stone's (1975) essay is just one example in a body of literature that offers a feminist critique of Disney films and fairy tales. But it speaks to a larger cultural issue: How is it that American editors chose only passive heroines for literary collections of Grimm tales (translated from the German), upon which the Disney films were ultimately based? These editorial choices speak to a particular cultural worldview of romantic love as life-changing and always positive. Certainly the heroines' lives are not changed for the better by family (especially stepfamilies), and friendships are vague in the stories. Indeed, friendships too are passive, especially in the Disney films, for friendships are forged with equally helpless animals or other creatures, many of whom do not speak.

I consider this fairy-tale preoccupation with romantic love to be stemming from a particular cultural worldview because, as in the case with names for friendship, there *are* cross-cultural comparisons available. Baxter and Akkoor

(2008) show how American notions of romantic love as a basis for marriage are a cultural construct, especially in comparison to the worldviews and thought processes that form a foundation for arranged marriages in India. Their research indicates that over long periods of time, spouses in arranged marriages are ultimately *more satisfied* with their relationships than are spouses who independently chose their partners for “romantic” reasons. This is because the value of compromise, foundational to arranged marriages, is a more realistic precursor to married life than is “romance” (Baxter & Akkoo, 2008).

Cross-cultural comparisons like these are helpful for social justice, for they point out not only the presumptions and misconceptions one might have about Others, but also the faulty “reasoning” behind one’s own cultural norms and attitudes. Simon (1997) attributes the faulty reasoning to an “undisciplined heart” that creates unrealistic fictions (fantasies) rather than imagining a realm of possibilities. The feminist critiques of popular cultural depictions of romantic love in the United States are a clear example of this. Unfortunately, the faulty reasoning here is that friendship is somehow less valuable than romantic love—especially to women. While I do not believe that consumers of popular entertainment media are by any means brainwashed by what they see (even at a very young age), perhaps there is some connection between the exaltation of romantic love in both popular culture and scholarship in communication. These parallel developments continue in vernacular language about friendship and the commonplace, casual attitudes that Anglo-Americans may sometimes take in everyday life toward friendship.

A resultant “narrative disconnect” between the expectation of romantic love and the actual reality of lived experience can be distressing on two fronts. First, an examination of ancient and medieval philosophies of friendship indicates that the exaltation of friendship *is* in fact an aspect of Western worldview—and Western higher education. This honoring of friendship in the heritage of American universities and colleges began with the Catholic intellectual tradition. It has merely been lost amidst several societal shifts, including the overbearing nature of cultural representations of romantic love. This essay attempts to recapture those philosophical traditions concerning friendship, especially for Catholic education. The second front on which the narrative disconnect is troubling is more pragmatic: When we lose reverence for friendship, we lose opportunities to strive with others for social justice. This essay will address that as well, showing how friendship can ensure social justice not just for persons who are friends but also for persons who are neighbors—who live together in society.

By now the potential benefits of a philosophical integration between social justice and friendship should be clear. What does this integration look like when it becomes a praxis? As with Aristotle's view of friendship as a social good, we find that the ancients have already meditated upon the qualities necessary for friendship to serve social justice, and vice versa. These qualities converge in the idea of a *soul friend*, which is a concept expounded at least since the time of Cicero. I discuss the case for "soul friendship" as one permutation of the combination of friendship and social justice in the next section.

Soul Friendship and the *Anam Cara*

In the previous section I discussed the dominance of romantic love over friendship in both academic and vernacular discourses. Another example of this dominance occurs even in the Celtic term *anam cara*, which means "soul friend" but has been appropriated by New Age literature to mean "soul mate" (O'Donohue, 1998). One can purchase wedding rings with the Celtic phrase engraved on them, for example. This translation and appropriation is misleading (though not surprising, given Anglo-American preoccupation with romantic relationships). *Anam cara* refers not to a soul mate, a predestined spouse, but to a "soul friend." Many cultures traditionally speak of a search for a "soul mate," as in the Hebrew *bashert*. But the Celtic tradition of *anam cara* is not one of them. It has always been a philosophy of soul friendship (Hanlon, 2000; Leech, 1977; Murphy, 1997).

Leech (1977) suggests that the idea of *anam cara* probably existed in pre-Christian Ireland, but one of its most celebrated proponents was St. Brigid of Kildare. The philosophy of soul friendship I wish to explore has a number of components, some of which emerge from ancient Greece and classical Rome. However, I begin with Brigid because her narrative provides an interesting hermeneutic entrance into the characteristics of soul friendship.

Brigid was born in the fifth century. She was the daughter of a chieftain and one of his slaves, and more historians agree that she was probably about 8-years old at the time of St. Patrick's death. Since Patrick is the apostle to Ireland, it is obvious that Christianity was a fairly new movement even at the time of Brigid's coming of age (Reilly, 2002). She was raised as a Christian and there are wonders attributed to her even at a young age, most of them pertaining to her hospitality and generosity. She refused marriage after her father freed her, and instead dedicated her life to Christ (in today's terms, she became a nun). At that time nuns remained at home with their families, living

in a kind of seclusion from society. They spent all their time in prayer or doing needlework and other crafts to decorate the new Christian churches. This was a difficult life, most especially because it was lived in solitude away from other like-minded women and because many nuns' families disapproved of this choice to refuse marriage (Curtayne, 1954). Certainly it would have been most difficult for Brigid, whose father sought to increase his wealth and power through her marriage and who by all accounts was regularly exasperated with her habit of giving away his household goods to beggars (Reilly, 2002). His wife, who was not Brigid's mother, also felt less than affectionate toward Brigid. So Brigid made a radical move: She decided to establish a community of nuns, the first of its kind. She and eight other women made a commitment to live together in community and were received by the Bishop of Kildare, given property, and began their life in their own self-sufficient monastery (Curtayne, 1954).

The image of the convent or cloister or even monastery for females seems so familiar to us today that we miss the significance of it for Brigid's philosophy on the *anam cara*, the soul friend. Brigid believed that dedication to Christ and lives together in community were one and the same thing—not merely because life alone in a house (often with nonbelievers) was dreary and painful. She wrote compellingly of the pitfalls one faced with a solitary life: The hermits, she wrote, were prone to pride in their own asceticism and a surety in their righteousness that no one else could test. The itinerant preacher, on the other hand, spent so much time in conversation that he or she scattered all their contemplative energy to the winds (Curtayne, 1954). If nuns lived together, they could form soul friendships—they would take care of one another's souls in a mutual commitment to truth (Leech, 1977).

Though soul friendship exists outside of Christianity (Leech, 1977) and though we have precious few details of Brigid's philosophy (Reilly, 2002), her narrative nonetheless opens up the significant themes of soul friendship. First, one might ask what is meant by "soul." Again, while the *anam cara* was solidified as a Christian concept, the soul friend existed long before that. In Christian tradition the soul is immortal, but one's sense of immortality can be distorted without a commitment to the good. For instance, William Shakespeare's play *Othello* aptly captures a shift in European thinking from heavenly destiny to earthly reputation (Roberts, 2007). In the play, Michael Cassio laments in true humanistic fashion the loss of his reputation: "the immortal part of myself" (Shakespeare, II.3.263-264). Thus, the soul is not just that which "lives on" after one's death. The soul is that part of oneself that is *accountable*

to questions of the common good and social justice. Certainly Brigid and her nuns shared this. What other aspects of soul friendship are clarified by even this brief account of their lives? The following list describes the basic themes of soul friendship.

1. *Friendship begins with mutuality.* In the starting definition of friendship for this paper, I cited Lewis (1960) as stating that friends “see the same truth.” Brigid and her fellow nuns saw the same truth not only about their chosen life paths, but about the nature of God and love. Cicero put it well: Friends are two people “in agreement in things human and divine, with good will and charity” (*Amic.* 6.20). Leech (1977) describes the history of the soul friend tradition as being steeped in the necessity of orthodoxy, obtained through *discernment*. Practicing discernment together, soul friends achieved mutual agreement in human and divine matters.
2. *The soul friend is a particular commitment of relation.* While all friendships that are truly loving are based in the above concept of mutuality, not all friendships are soul friendships. Soul friendship requires a particular commitment, and unlike other friendships that are ever expanding (Lewis says that two friends “always invite a third,” for instance), soul friends might be better served to remain in a dyad. De Guibert (1956) describes soul friendship as different from spiritual direction, but still best accomplished between two persons. The greatest reason for this is the necessity for each friend to confront the enemies of the other’s soul, as Aelred states quite strongly. One friend loves his friend’s soul as much as his own: This love of one’s own soul, and protection of the other’s, can only arise among persons committed to the good (Aelred, 2010). Not only is this different from the youthful “carnal friendship” described by Augustine, or the “companionship” described by Lewis; it is a much deeper commitment than *philia* alone. Brigid shared friendship with all her companions in the convent, but encouraged each to have one particular soul friend. She herself did, and the two died within days of each other and were said to be inseparable (Hanlon, 2000). For Brigid and her nuns the necessity of discernment concerns heaven and how one might get there—which leads to the next aspect of soul friendship.
3. *The soul friend is a personal guide.* The soul friend keeps the Other on the “right path.” This kind of spiritual guidance is not uniquely Chris-

tian, as Leech (1977) points out: He identifies the *Chimbulei* in South Africa, the shaman in multiple cultures, and most especially the Hindu guru. In Brigid's case this was the path to God. As Nouwen (1977) writes: "It is to God and only to God that the soul has to be led by the soul friend" (p. ix). Later Christians living in monastic communities echoed this aspect of *anam cara*, emphasizing as St. John of the Cross did that one cannot reach God on one's own: A director, a guide, a friend is needed (Leech, 1977). Thus, the next aspect of soul friendship was very important also.

4. *Soul friends live in community.* I described above in the story of Brigid that her decision to live with other nuns in community was shockingly new to Christianity in Ireland—something that had never been done before. Her narrative thus emphasizes the communal nature of care of the soul: Again, one cannot and should not go it alone. This is basic to Christian anthropology, where God is one in three persons, but it also arises from pre-Christian Celtic notions of the soul friend (*anam cara*, or *anmchara*). Celtic chiefs had druid advisors, who after the advent of Christianity were replaced by clerics. These were counselors and guides, not in sacramental terms but in interpersonal ones. Leech (1977) traces this Celtic history of the soul friend/*anmchara* from the Welsh *periglow* back to the Greek *syncellus*, which means "one who shares the cell" (Leech, 1977, p. 50). This reference to "cell" is one of a monastic order, the rooms that Brigid and her nuns would have inhabited. Thus the *anam cara* finds a particular manifestation in medieval Christianity, though its philosophy is older than that. The benefits of living in community were crucial for social justice, as the next point illustrates.
5. *A community of soul friends is not passive or internally focused.* Brigid's monastery at Kildare, like other monastic communities, was highly active in prayer—and Aelred (2010) points out that this above all was the task of the soul friend, to pray for the Other. The communal life was also a protection against evil, for as Ignatius of Loyola praised, one cannot keep secrets in community (Leech, 1977). Indeed, for Cicero, Ambrose, and Aelred, the very definition of a soul friend was one to whom one could "pour out one's heart freely" (Aelred, 2010). Aelred agrees with Cicero's pre-Christian view, and then adds a new element for the medieval soul friend. Aelred explains that when Christ revealed all to his apostles, he concluded by saying they were "no longer slaves: I call

you friends . . . because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father [Jn 15:15]" (p. 108). This was the model of Christian soul friendship. Again, however, one can look to Brigid's life to understand more deeply the nature of community. Despite the stereotype of "cloistered" monasteries in medieval history, Brigid and her fellow religious traveled a great deal out to other communities. This was particularly necessary during the fifth and sixth centuries in Ireland where Christianity was still new (Curtayne, 1954; Reilly, 2002). So the community not only contained the model for soul friendship; it also contained a model for social justice. The nuns and brothers did not look inward for peace: They were, as Thomas Merton has pointed out, some of the earliest social critics (Leech, 1977). The point can be made: *Soul friends take care of each other's soul not just for the soul's sake, but for the world's sake.* Roszak (1972) asserts on the topic of spiritual direction that if our souls wither, so will the world. Soul friends will not hesitate to confront one another over aspects of evil, to confront the enemies of each other's souls. They do this to "bear witness against the world," to "stand before the storm and the fire" (Leech, 1977, p. 45).

These elements added together make for a unique philosophy of friendship. But the final point, using Brigid's monastery as a model of community committed to social justice, begins to achieve the synthesis for interpersonal communication and social justice for which one might hope in this project. The soul friend/*anam cara* is a Christian concept, shaped from ancient Greek and classical Roman philosophies (Aelred, 2010). It was lived out as praxis in medieval life and philosophies, from the Eastern Desert Fathers to the monasteries of Brigid and many others (Leech, 1977). How does the uniqueness of a soul friend speak to social justice in our own moment for philosophy of interpersonal communication? That is the topic of the final section below.

Building a Philosophy of Social Justice in Friendship for Catholic Education

As I noted earlier in this essay, my approach to social justice is well in line with Pollock et al.'s (1996) four elements of justice, structural investigation, action for change, and advocacy. Because the idea of the soul friend/*anam cara* incorporates both ancient and medieval (specifically Christian) philosophies, I also draw on the Catholic philosophical tradition of social justice. In this vein,

focusing social justice on friendship, I stress two elements: first, that society contains inherent inequalities that should be investigated and understood with the purpose of healing. This is done in the name of the Trinity, in whose image we are created and by whom we are created for community. Second, every human person is called to honor the dignity and unique humanness of every other, in the name of Christ who died and was resurrected for all.

Much of the work on soul friendship cited earlier in this essay fulfills these elements. For instance, feminist critiques of American “love stories” often posit responses to inequalities between men and women in society. Yet soul friendship, being an act of the will and not simply a descriptor of a relationship, completes the integration of social justice and interpersonal communication, as elaborated below.

Some writings on the soul friend over the centuries have given stringent proscriptions for how communication can be enacted. Jean Grou, a Jesuit writer in the 18th century, listed five rules for spiritual direction in the context of *anam cara*:

1. For soul friends not to meet except from necessity and then to speak only of the things of God
2. Mutual respect, courtesy, and gravity
3. Never to conceal anything
4. Measureless obedience
5. To look beyond the friend, and see only God in him; only to be attached to the friend for God’s sake, and to be always ready even to give him up if God requires it (Leech, 1977, p. 106).

Some of these rules seem impossible to keep—an unrealistic kind of friendship for those outside of the monastery. But nonetheless it is anchored powerfully in a profound ideal. Commitment to truth trumps all human questions; it is an impossible infinite. On the other hand, perhaps the human striving toward these practices of communication is much different. The *anam cara* is very practical, very finite, and very human. It is the mutual humanness between two soul friends that allows them to succeed: They can easily see each other’s faulty reasoning, being guilty of it often themselves; they can call one another to humility in light of the truth. This essay offers only a brief introduction to the soul friend, but perhaps it inspires us to look differently at friendship as a kind of social justice. When two friends walk toward the same truth together, then all of society benefits: They will commit themselves

to social justice. Aelred (2010) goes so far as to say that friendship is impossible unless people are themselves good. If one of them forsakes goodness and truth, the relationship between the two was never friendship in the first place. It was a farce, for only someone wholly committed to goodness and truth can be a friend to another.

Throughout Lewis's work on human love, he emphasizes that one should not become so preoccupied with any other human being that s/he becomes the center of one's life. If a relationship takes over someone's life, she makes the love her "god" and in so doing, it has become a demon (Lewis, 1960). Friendship can become a "demon" when one is preoccupied with the friendship and does not want to lose it. Anam cara, as I articulate it here, is an embodiment of social justice because it loves the person and the external good—not the friendship for friendship's sake. An anam cara respects and loves the friend, not the friendship. As Aelred of Rievaulx (2010) wrote in the 11th century: "We delight not in any blessing won through friendship so much as the true love of a friend" (p. 85).

My students' work in interpersonal communication at a Catholic university indicates that one of the challenges of friendship is to take care of the other person, regardless of the consequences. This is much like the prescription of soul friendship, which compels a friend to confront the enemies of the Other's soul at all costs. The nature of love in friendship is unique, for a friend is neither biologically related to the other, nor are they the sole lover of that other (as would be the case in erotic love). So love in friendship is potentially problematic: one must walk a narrow ridge between seeking what is best for the other, and appreciating the other's difference from oneself. The anam cara, however, steps in where social justice is infringed or where self-destructive behavior ensues. For instance, students have related in their papers instances where their friends' problems with substance abuse required their direct intervention. Almost unanimously, these interventions disrupted—and in some cases permanently ended—the friendships for my students. However, to have chosen not to act would have been an act of injustice. These students truly loved their friend, even to the point of losing the "blessings won through friendship," as Aelred (2010) puts it.

Friendship is also just in its fundamental existence: Loving and appreciating someone who is outside one's family is a unique choice to enter into relationship. Students report in their assessments of their friendships, too, that they are committed to social causes more readily when those causes affect one or more of their friends. Students report strengthened or renewed commit-

ments to support gay marriage, for example, or to fight against racism, when they develop friendships with people very different from themselves. Like the *anam cara* described by Leech (1977), two friends committed to the good can form a powerful “witness against the world” (p. 96). Friendship is indeed a social good in and of itself, when it shapes the ethical commitments individuals can make to support the dignity of every human person.

These opportunities to question indignities and injustices are important witnesses against the world, and as Thomas Merton pointed out, it is the role of soul friends living in community to critique society when necessary (Leech, 1977). While many people find comfort and solace in friendship, the soul friendship runs deeper. Leech (1977) writes that it is a worse thing for the world if we only use friendship for our own comfort and happiness—for we will not take action and fight for what is right and good. Like Aristotle and like Lewis (1960), Elliott (1975) argues that friendship is a social good because friends committed to a cause will spur each other to remarkable heights. The achievement of peace through friendship is indeed possible—but as Elliott (1975) colorfully argues, this peace is “not the peace of the dairy cow, but the peace of God” (p. 138). Contemporary soul friendship, like the mutuality shared by Brigid and her nuns in their cells, is not just an interpersonal project, but a wholly (and holy) social one.

This concept of *anam cara* has begun to shape the idea of social justice within my courses in interpersonal communication at a Catholic university. While the basic tenets of social justice articulated by Pollock et al. (1996) are directly discussed, in examining *anam cara* I have also added the ancient and Christian ideas regarding friendship, dignity of the human person, and the importance of social action. Nonetheless, the bridge between interpersonal communication and social justice is still beginning. It is an interesting moment for teaching these concepts, and one ought to be inspired by the history of social justice within communication to bring philosophical concepts of justice and friendship to bear on a field that has typically considered interpersonal communication in light of more behavioral outcomes than choices of external goods. While the idea of *anam cara* is pragmatic and finite, and has proscriptive communication philosophies attached to it, it always begins with an external good—belief in a soul and its rightful destiny.

Implications for Teaching Interpersonal Communication

Given these foundations, there are possible implications for the teaching of in-

terpersonal communication courses at Catholic colleges and universities. First, as the literature review early in this essay bore out, some fields of inquiry in communication would benefit from a broadened attention to previous scholarship in the humanities. In that review of communication essays on social justice, it was clear that "social justice" has not been clearly defined for communication and instead takes a broad, sometimes Marxist view toward general inequalities. Two thousand years of Catholic intellectual tradition stands in stark contrast. So, likewise, interpersonal communication instructors need not content themselves with social science research and the textbooks of the field. While all of these are good and useful, they are made even more so when supplemented by readings in Catholic philosophy and theology. In terms of friendship, many of the citations from this essay by Brigid, Aelred, Leech, and others would be suitable.

Of course, teaching in a Catholic institution means bringing a sense of ecumenism to one's students. The readings in Catholic philosophy are not provided as a means of proselytization, but as a means of exploration. Though Lewis's *The Four Loves* seems a "dated" source (1960), I have been consistently and pleasantly surprised by the way students connect to it, especially in comparison with more recent theories regarding technology and social networking. They find Lewis rich in philosophical approach because he posits each of the loves, including friendship, as strivings for an ideal form of human existence and flourishing. Though students often come from different faith perspectives (and sometimes no faith perspective at all) at my university, they find encouragement in Lewis to identify the ideal through which they will attempt to love others (just as Lewis found his in Christ).

In addition to supplemental philosophical readings, a second option in retooling the interpersonal communication course is to ask—from a social justice standpoint—who is underrepresented in communication scholarship and publications. This is important in terms of authorship, as it is in most fields in higher education. But here I especially refer to the subject matter of communication publications. Interpersonal communication is especially challenging in its overall tendency to suggest that there are norms in human interactions. These norms are announced without regard, in most cases, for differences in race, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, or ability. For instance, when it comes to Eros, very little is written for undergraduates about same-sex relationships, leading to a heterocentric bias in the field. In another example, models of nonverbal communication research certainly omit persons with disorders on the autism spectrum, for their use of nonverbal cues may

be different. Some of the most popular work has come from Tannen's (1990) hypotheses about differences in male and female communication styles in interpersonal communication. Yet Tannen used as the basis for her research only white, American, upper-middle-class couples. It is worth asking if her description of the passive "female" communication style is valid for women of all cultures. If social justice is about attempts to identify injustices (however unintended), the first place interpersonal communication can look is at its own structures—including the "canon" of assigned readings. There are important human persons who are omitted when scholars attempt to announce "norms" of human communication.

Finally, the way students are assessed in interpersonal communication courses can be attempted with a renewed sense of social justice. It is not enough to offer readings in philosophy without providing students opportunities to practice it themselves. Students in my course undertake a "humanities project" that allows them to focus on a friendship and to produce an expression of it in some art form. In so doing they are searching for the essence—the soul—of the other person. They also are required to work in groups to produce a presentation on friendship that reflects on modern technological means of interpersonal communication, including texting, social networking, and the like. Through this assignment, students isolate potential challenges these technologies pose to friendships, as well as additive benefits. These are analyzed according to contemporary research as well as much more time-tested philosophies of friendship such as those cited in this essay.

Conclusion

The philosophical foundations and the practical implications discussed above are intended to come together as a kind of praxis for social justice in interpersonal communication. The *anam cara* provides a good model for this. Rethinking the interpersonal communication course seems especially significant because it is a popular course for nonmajors, making it one of very few opportunities they have to reflect on relationships and social justice.

Based on the literature review that began this essay, it seems that the "Scylla and Charybdis" identified by Pollock et al. (1996) may still be present in the communication discipline whenever the topic of social justice is broached. However, for the field of interpersonal communication, it may yet be possible to begin to articulate how the bases of our relationships when grounded in justice can serve both the bonds between individual persons and the larger sphere

of ethical human life. In other words, our interactions with others can—when done reflectively—build a bridge between what is interpersonally good, and also what is socially just. This paper articulates just a few ideas for how this might begin to happen, especially in response to unique cultural problems and potential injustices in the United States. It is my hope that the conversation may continue, beginning most robustly in Catholic institutions of higher education where the long tradition of social justice can announce itself more strongly to a new generation of thinkers.

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