METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM OF CARITATIVE SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract
History of professional caritative social work reaches back to the beginning of Christian era, 100–600 AD, the golden age of Christian charity work, when it was administered in and by the Church. The then founded paradigm of caritative work hasn’t lost its importance in modern Europe and today it is executed as caritative social work. In Latvia it has received approval in legislation since 2007 and is taught at Latvian Christian Academy. The concept of caritative social work is rooted in basic notions of European Commission regarding social policy and human capital in the name of solidarity, subsidiarity, and social and caritative cohesion. The article deals with both the making of paradigm for caritative social work and its place along with that for traditional social work, and describes human resources required for successful implementation of the concept.

KEY WORDS: paradigms for social work, integrity of man, faith and experience, caritative cohesion.

Introduction
The profession of Caritative social work in Latvia has received legitimate basis when Amendments to the Law of Social Assistance and Social Services were approved by the Latvian Parliament in December 20, 2007. Following those Amendments, the profession “Caritative social worker” now is mentioned in the paragraph 1.16 as one of the specializations of traditional social work, but paragraph 1.41 states that “rights to perform social work are given to social workers and caritative social workers”. Making of the paradigm of Caritative (Christian) social work has been the focus point of Latvian Christian Academy since mid-1990ies both from academic and practical perspective. Although both professions
are accepted by Latvian legislation, it is well-known that particularly the methodo-
logical paradigm is what differs seemingly parallel phenomena.

There are two approaches to the status of social work as an academic discipline: the first one is that of theoretical foundation composed by mutual interchange of academic disciplines dealing with manhood and society (social philosophy, anthro-
pology, sociology, medicine, psychology, ethics, legislation, etc.); the other one treats social work as a self-contained academic discipline with certain theoretical and applicable aspects.

Consequently two trends in theoretical reasoning can be separated – the first one based on summarization of practical experience, practical efforts to find possible solution of the given social problem; the second one stems from capturing of both general and particular issues in separate theories laid in the foundation of various forms of social work and building up the essence of social work as a social phenomenon.

Surely social work can be interpreted as interdisciplinary, integrative, complex by its nature, and various forms of social work interweave all theories, creating complex constructs of social work models. One could agree that the contents of social work theory are determined by social practice. We can’t but agree with Latvian social work specialist Lidija Šiļņeva that “three groups of methodical principles rest upon three important dimensions of social work: theoretical concept of social work, practical intervention executed by social worker, and phenomenon of creating mutual relationships between the social worker and a client” (Šiļņeva, 1999, p. 7). All three make up for the “skeleton” of the paradigm in the practice of social work. Methodological paradigm is pictured in Figure 1.

Any theory in order to be usable must be experienced and found helpful in social practice. The possible revelatory context in social logics may differ from the assertive context (see Figure 1, right, with arrows pointing down). However, even if the given theoretical idea generates positive result we still cannot verify that separately taken theory. It should be viewed within the system of theories. But it’s more than that. Traditional or secular social worker primarily looks upon a client in the system rather than focuses on personality taken individually. Selection of particular social phenomena and understanding of differences are also theoretically conditioned: the form of questions already contains certain contents of answers. System analyst Thomas Kuhn has proved that scientific conclusions largely depend on the dominating paradigm of theoretical approaches.

Paradigm by its nature is defined as totality of conceptual and methodologi-
cal assumptions which are manifested in certain scientific theories of social work. Paradigms indirectly determine those questions to the given group of scholars which have to be answered and specified, and which result from standardized gen-
eralized situations (cases): students recognize existing social objects and determine which methods should be used for the proper grip, analysis, and solution.

"The change of paradigm" is a radical transformation of scientific imagination usually rejected at first glance since it doesn’t correspond to the well-known criteria; this was exactly the case with the attitude to Caritative social work in Latvia for several years until the profession finally received official approval in legislation.

Within the well-used paradigm limits of regular academic research four criteria are used in evaluation of scientific theories.

1. *Agreement with facts and individualized case* — although theoretical (conceptual) understanding of both social work and practical intervention are mutually inter-connected it should be noted that sometimes still-unfinished theories may equally or sometimes even better reflect the effects of practical intervention. Therefore academic achievements, theoretical approaches, dominating views are not taken as true cognitions for solution of the given particular social problem by a social worker; he or she has to come to individualized understanding of the problem.
2. **Agreement with other theories.** Any given theory of social work should agree with other previously accepted theories in its concept. Thus scholars evaluate the inner wholeness of the given theory, simplicity of its formal structure, inner symmetry, etc.

3. **Conceivability of the theoretical concept.** Comprehensiveness of the given social work theory is important for its evaluation. Theory may be of higher value if it links various social traits, evidences, and social phenomena subjected to large-scale changes.

4. **Fruitfulness of the given theoretical concept.** Theory is valued not only for its effect but also for its potential to analyze the challenging social situation and how does it help to create future opportunities for prognostic programmes, and how the given theory serves for building up further theoretical concepts and new hypothesis by individualized understanding of the client’s problem in the name of solidarity and subsidiarity.

As it is well testified in the history of recognition of epistemological processes conclusions from scientific theories are always incomplete by definition and they can be repeatedly revised. Theories and methods change over time. However, it’s already today when the secular science of social work offers valiant procedures for test of theories applied in the practice of individual solution and which are based on certain methodological principles and criteria.

Although it should be noted that approach to the client is determined by the sum of theoretical and conceptual views, the foundation of particular theoretical ideas is called a paradigm. Those articles and books which are of great importance for the secular approach may possess just some occasional minor load in another paradigm.

Decision as to which paradigm should be applied is not irrational due to the fact that any paradigm is based on certain values, important to those specialists who work according to the requirements of chosen paradigm. Position of shared values is exactly what promotes mutual understanding of specialists and encourages development of sustainable academic consensus.

### 1. Historical roots of Caritative Social Work

In order to understand the content and context of caritative social work, there are six historical roots of this work that should be taken into consideration looking for coherent understanding of the concept.
Historical roots of caritative social work are as following:

1. **Judeo-Christian cultural tradition** (4th cent. B.C.–1st cent. A.D.; deaconal tradition of the Early Church);
2. **Heritage of the Eastern Church Fathers** – anthropology, theology and social ministry (4th–8th century A.D.);
3. **Tradition of social and spiritual ministry in monasteries** of the Christian East (beginning with 4th century A.D.);
4. **Social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church** (since 19th cent. A.D.);
5. **Tradition of Christian democracy in European countries**: principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, cohesion (19th–20th century A.D.);
6. **Modern European Social Agenda**:
   a. Open method of coordination (OMC) – new European method in social work;
   b. Europe 2020 Strategy – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (2010);

These aspects of Christian ministry in European Union are described by leading experts in European social dialogue as – "new sensibility" and fresh understanding of social work resources" (Bruno Machiels, EUROMF-European Middle-field organization; Leo Pauwels, EZA-European Centre for Workers’ Questions).

In the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee on Social cohesion: fleshing out a European social model (2006/C309/25) it is said: “The analysis of the European Social Model has to start with the value systems as developed in the European countries. The value systems provide the basis for any discussion on common features of a social model The European Union is founded on certain common values: freedom, democracy, respect for human rights and dignity, equality, solidarity, dialogue and social justice […] The social model cannot be confined only to the traditional meaning of the term social.”

**2. Relations between faith and experience in Caritative social work**

Understanding of both the individual and the social processes in Caritative social work, on the one hand, and knowledge about them, on the other hand, are considered as *value conditions* where the social work specialist establishes cognitive contact with both the social and the divine reality. Therefore the knowledge
is always primarily the relationships: here particular resources of Caritative social work lay hidden apart from the secular social work.

On the one hand, there is the subject of conscience, and on the other – “portions” of spiritual and social reality with which the specialist feels directly or indirectly connected. Therefore the difference between the knowledge as assumptions and knowledge by learning should be made clear: knowledge as assumptions can be transferred over via certain theories and concepts. And, as it was said earlier, theoretical knowledge may change. Consequently the initial progress towards metaphysical Truth starts, by which all assumptions regarding social environment characteristics are seen as metaphysical challenge. Why so? – Because once a person turns his eye onto himself, he faces Eternity or, as the Church Fathers have put it, “the matter embraced by the Spirit”.

The sense of Eternity is characteristic to all people: when it is awaken, it manifests itself through religious conscience whereas in the sleeping condition it yields to ignorance, nihilism, atheism. Non-religiosity takes hold of people when the cosmic sense of Eternity and Immortality is replaced by humanism, solipsism, egotism, egocentrism. Once a person starts to reach for deeper meaning of his or her life, the ultimate sense of Eternity is being awakened. Because of this original metaphysical setting an individualized knowledge about the problematic social situation of a client is viewed as “condition of knowledge”: portion of particular social reality available to caritative social worker. In mediation of that particular portion it is important to be aware of the truth: “Even if the person stands at the edge of sin and evil – nothing keeps him away from the light, freedom, eternal state of blessedness. (...) Although evildoing of the enemy have not ceased its working. (...) When the soul strains its innermost strength to come out from the self-indulging sphere of sin, sorrowful lament comes in: just one more day and then it’s enough, you can step over the border tomorrow. This is the law of sin” (Theophan the Recluse, 2009, p. 137).

A person in this state usually is blind to God, overwhelmed with unending worries and anxieties, at the same time amazingly inactive and careless regarding to his own fate, insensible towards spiritual life. All powers of his very being are crushed by sin and the sinner is overwhelmed by obsession, neglect and senselessness. Thanks to the work of eternal grace of God the original conviction is verbalized in the conscience of caritative social worker: “Wake up, sleeper, and rise from death, and Christ will shine on you” (Ephesians 5: 14). The history of Caritative social work during 100–600 A. D. took its start exactly with this comparison with a sleeper – i.e., the sleeper wakes up, rises and gets ready for his walk. Five centuries, from St. Ignatius of Antioch to St. Gregory the Great, when Caritative social work celebrated its golden era, the charity work was administered by and in the
Church. The Ecumenical Council in Nicæa (325) emphasized invaluable importance of this ministry: charity worker acts in order to wake up sleeping powers within a person. The parable of the Prodigal Son in the Gospel describes those steps in the following sequence: *came to understanding* – remembered himself; *I will rise and go* – decided to leave his former life; *rose and went* – and further he said to his father: *I have sinned* – repentance; but father wraps him in precious clothing (releases, justifies, frees from sin) and arranges feast for him (Holy Communion) (Luke 15: 11–32).

Thus the professional knowledge for caritative social worker means combination with faith in Christ and subsequent and corresponding professional acting: to wake up centripetal force in his client. Geographical, economical, political, social, and even the state centre often doesn’t tell much about the client’s life; the centre of meaning is the dominating one: the centre of spiritual resources abiding in a person where cultural and historical, social, and political events cross each other. In most cases the clients are unaware of the deficit of that centre of meaning. The finding of the right centre – which is put there by God in every man – and the change of the mindset from spiritual province to the center – is crucial.

A key word in the work with client is *koinonia* (from Gr. ‘mutuality’) and that reveals the concept of *Imago Dei* – image and likeness of God in a person. The focus point of the professional intervention is activation of the *Imago Dei* (i.e., spiritual capacity to act), which is foundation of the social capacity and physical health.

The concept of charity (Latin *Caritas*) – God’s love through grace – is a manifestation of God’s energy in a person. That can be found / manifested in three forms:

1. *Charity:*
   a. Endeavor on behalf of somebody,
   b. Empathy towards other,
   c. God’s given ability.
2. *Compassion* (Greek ‘spaghna’):
   d. To get together because of other person’s suffering (‘Good Samaritan’ in the Gospel: he acts because he is one with God).
3. *Consolation:*
   e. Verbal;
   f. Nonverbal.

Caritative social work argues that spiritual development won’t happen with only *intellectual, emotional* or *wishful* efforts, since these aspects are just intermediary. Need for God and for the Truth is given to every person from the very birth.
Hence social problems of a client should be listened to and understood individually and simultaneously in spiritual setting: although there are various limits, directives and standardized norms, caritative social worker is required to view his/her client primarily as a spiritual being and he or she is called to act in the name of social cohesion. Or putting it another way: caritative social worker acts in the name of spiritual and social integrity of a client. Latin root for the verb *integrare* (‘to integrate’) corresponds to the ancient Greek verb *epanalambano* which means ‘rise up’, ‘to straighten’, ‘to revive’; from the same root we have the term *ep-analepsis*, which is usually translated as ‘restoration’, ‘revitalization’. The Greek word *epanalambano*, which is found in the Gospel, may well be used to describe professional acting of caritative social worker: to understand, to meet, to acquire point of view, to evaluate, to accept, to hold, to wake up. Semantic load of the word permits conclusion that to *integrate* means to re-raise, to bring back to the original source (in our case – to Christ), to re-understand anew, to re-evaluate, to put in order. Reintegration of a client in social environment, intervention in his or her crisis may turn out unsuccessful sometimes unless it corresponds to real integration in its deepest sense: finding the innermost *spiritual roots within personality* which have caused his or her social problem. Hence the principle of social-logical approach in the practice of caritative social worker should never be distinguished from Church-based prerequisites of spiritual orientation of people.

All what has been said could be described metaphorically with some peculiar event from the life of R. M. Rilke (1875–1926): while living in Paris the poet daily crossed the square where a beggar women usually asked for money. With bent eyes, disinterested face – she always was standing in the same place and asked to help with some money. Usually the poet passed by in urgent walk. One day he passed by together with his girlfriend who wanted to know why the poet refuses to help her. Rilke answered: “First we should find out what we could give to her heart rather than mouth.”

After some days Rilke crossed the square again with a white, beautiful, just-a-bit-opened rose flower and, passing by the beggar, put the flower in her hand. Then something unexpected happened: the beggar woman lifted her eyes, stared at the giver, grabbed the poet’s hand and kissed it. Then, holding the wonderful rose, she left in stately walk.

For another week there was no beggar woman in her regular place. Only after some time she quietly showed up in her place with stretched hand.

“What did she live from those days?” the girlfriend asked Rilke.

“From the rose. From what is genuinely human,” the poet answered.
To see needs that can’t be met only by money. To see dead-ends – both social and spiritual. To show the light that shines in the darkness over those who have never heard about God. “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light,” testifies Bible prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 9: 2).

The structure of professional Caritative social work is distinguished by faith conviction and acting motivation in the name of this faith. It stems from recognition that – yes! – professionally there are individualized approaches to a client manifested through logics, interconnections between action and understanding, ability to comprehend social problems in a system with respect to logical goals of the problem solving and particular socio-ethical principles. However, there is also a paradigmatic foundation, that of sacralized intellect, which suits to all other methodological principles of social work.

It contains: 1) the principle of justice in terms of obedience to the will of God to see every person as carrier of the image of God; (2) the precondition of certain “subtlety” of mind (as Russian philosopher S. S. Averintsev has put it) and clarity of conscience – conviction that “wisdom in the middle of constantly changing situations stems from the fear of God, faith and meekness – from His grace” (Bible, Wisdom of Sirach 1: 20, 27).

Meanwhile wisdom (by which we understand Biblical concept of fear of God) on axiological level is a sacred value worthier than “gold and silver, and precious stones” (i.e., salary); that is the highest value in working with people that has no equivalent meaningfulness to be found elsewhere.

“Riches and honor are with me [Wisdom], enduring wealth and righteousness. My [Wisdom’s] fruit is better than gold, than pure gold, and my revenue than choicest silver. I [the Wisdom] walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of judgment, to endow those who love me [Wisdom] with wealth, filling their treasuries […] The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 8: 18–21; 9: 10–11).

This is why structures of religion and science are similar in certain aspects, but they differ when caritative social specialist analytically deals with particular social situation by using rich heritage of experience of the Church Fathers, models of experience received in and by their faith, and analogies, in order to find out spiritual resources for solution of the given social problem of a client.

Experimental testing of religious faith is a problem domain, therefore the arrow pointing down is interrupted (Fig. 2). Experience of caritative social worker isn’t free from interpretation and the most penetrating analysis and interpretation of charity is given in the heritage of the Church Fathers.
The paradigm embraces six various types of religious experience:

1. Revelatory (spiritual) understanding of the Triune God.
2. Certain mystical experience of unity with God (denominational diversity exists as regards to this between Christians of different kinds), but on the highest level this unity is manifested as a self-sacrifice and ability to love.
3. Transforming openness towards people.
4. Virility, when facing human suffering and death.
5. Opinions about what is good and bad, truthful and false are made within the frame of both social and spiritual cohesion.
6. Incessant accumulation of spiritual strength in man excluding “burning out”.

Types of religious experience may seem something inwardly personal and individual, separated from social work profession, interpreted in the setting of humanism. However, as testified by the 7th Humanist Manifesto, humanism finds itself short of overcoming crisis of implementation of values. Analyst of social processes S. McFague argues: “Faith always protects the specialist from just one and formal solution, from beadedom, and offers strength to find resources inside the man itself” (McFague, 1982, p. 19). The religious process of social modeling is embedded in all-human experience, that of spiritual healing, resurgence and
change of people (Greek ‘metanoia’), accumulated during two thousand years in the Christian Church.

Religiously influenced models of professional caritative acting are multiform, creative, mutually enriching, diverse, inwardly connected, perceiving anomalies with endurance, humility and respect. There is no doubt that ability to model situation both spiritually and socially testifies of high level of professionalism.

Analyzing professional activity in both social sciences and social professional activity, epistemologist P. Hefner concludes: “We, people, professionals, are created after the image of God – as co-workers and co-creators, – and this is in God’s plans for action also today. We all will share the same fate as humanity, and our destiny will determine what it means to be a true man” (Hefner, 1989, p. 35).

Christian anthropological and social doctrine can still provide orientation for the design and implementation of sustainable social work policies that will stand the test of time in the 21st century and don’t betray the value of every person. The point of departure for Christian social doctrine has always been the value of the human being.

Christian social doctrine traditionally rests on four pillars: 1) human dignity, 2) solidarity, 3) subsidiarity, and 4) common wealth. It provides a sufficient degree of orientation and is full of vitality. By implementing it we can, indeed, create the real, material and legal conditions that allow all people to live in a peaceful context of the holistic meaning of an individual being.

One of the key architects of Christian social doctrine, the Belgian Joseph Cardijn, originally a social worker and later a Cardinal, once remarked: “It is not enough to attend to the welfare of the fishes when the water in which fishes swim is itself deceased. To extend the metaphor: the crisis phenomena (anthropological first, and socio-economical the second) is nothing but the surface of something that happens on a far more profound level.

How do we decide what is of lasting value in ourselves in a society which is impatient, which focuses on the immediate moment? Christian or caritative social work mission is not affirming God against man or man against God, but rather it affirms: only in God does a man have a unique and eternal value.

The social dimension of the Gospel, the social diakonia of the Church possesses not only an ethical normative significance, but also a sacramental or mystical dimension: “The poor are doorkeepers of the Kingdom of God” (St. Gregory of Nyssa, 4th cent. A. D.).

The Last Judgment of Christ reveals that His secret presence in those who suffer, feel hunger or are ill, are in prison or poverty, is another form of His sacramental or mystical presence in the world. These who are “pure in their hearts” (as said in Matthew 5: 8) and open to the work of Holy Spirit, will experience the divine
calling which turns them into joyful co-workers with Christ regardless of difficulties they face. It should be asked from Christ to use our eyes to see and our hands to do what God requires today from His people in a changing world.

There would be hardly any doubt that Christ is the most perfect prototype of humanity, Who has opened up a new page in human experience, also an era of renewed social culture. In Christ we see the will of God in its all-embracing love. We don’t see it possible or necessary to reject this transforming power out from the professional field of Caritative social work. Sin is manifested not only in personal alienation and rejection of God in one’s professional activity, but also in preventing others from coming close to God. Sin manifests itself also in structures of social injustice and exploitation. In Christ, Who stands in the centre of caritative work, we see transforming power, stronger than sufferings, injustice and death.

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