
Caritative Social Work as Innovation from Antiquity

Skaidrīte Gūtmane

Prof., Dr. philol., Latvia

The article deals with the profession of Caritative social worker, its legitimate status in Latvia, as well with historical roots of the profession and its methodology. The concept is based on the Judeo-Christian anthropological paradigm and reflects European guidelines for Social work development, stemming from the founders' of the European Union concept of the Social stand of man and human dignity as spiritual subject.

Keywords: caritative social work, Patristic ontological anthropology, cohesion.

Profession “Caritative social work” was legally recognized in Latvia in December 20, 2007, when it was included in the Law of Social services and Social assistance. The Paragraph 1, p.16 defines Social work specialist as a “person having education prescribed by the Law and carrying out ... professional duties ... of a Caritative social worker”. P.41 of the mentioned Law specifies that “persons with rights to carry out Social work must have the 2nd level higher professional or academic education in Social or Caritative social work.” Amendments to the Law of Social services and Social assistance from July 1, 2009, state that “Caritative social work is analogous to social work with a goal to help persons, families, groups or society in general to regain **ability to function both socially and spiritually.**” [Emphasis: S.Gūtmane.] (“Sociālo pakalpojumu un sociālās palīdzības likums.”)

Following the mentioned norm of the Law the Social work profession has clear anthropological focus, since “social and spiritual functioning” oversees specific field for both academic attention and professional activity, namely, integration of the awakened spiritual resources of a man into his/her positive social functioning. This task is directly linked to anthropological approach to a human situation.

As we all know the profession of a Social worker is called to promote social changes, to deal with inter-human relationships, to reveal and to strengthen the already-existing human potential with purpose to improve his/her well-being by application and use of various conceptual approaches to human behavior and social systems. Consequently, the essence of Social work is rather complex and no wonder in practice there are tensions between the focus on how to help, how to relax sufferings and distress of individuals caused by either structural oppression or inequality – on the one hand, and by the individual need for empowerment and protection – on the other.

Social work practice is a complex one. Every professional deals with the case as a complex, however, he is forced to admit that his efforts not always guarantee success. Therefore, anthropological approach and its application in Social work profession as such, and in Caritative social work profession particularly should be taken as a professional activity of a very high importance. It is possible only with clear understanding of and competence in meaningful forms and contexts of human relationships which have existed for centuries. In this all-encompassing source and its meaningful forms there are hidden values, which cannot be generalized in the same manner as we summarize facts, - these forms require special knowledge. The concept of Caritative social work recommends ontological anthropology formulated during the Patristic period of the Christian Church (especially in the East, 2nd-7th centuries).

Although the Social work profession undergoes constant changes and development, its central function stays the same, namely, it promotes social changes, deals with problems of human relationships, activates clients' inner resources for his/her well-being. Caritative social worker does exactly the same job, however, his approach is based on two key vectors combined in mandatory wholeness: on the one hand, it activates resources for social functioning of the client, on the other – it activates spiritual resources inherent in the client. Only then the professional task will be accomplished effectively, if these two vectors will integrate in one act. For successful implementation of this task rather voluminous anthropological knowledge is required.

For better understanding of the Caritative social work paradigm a brief insight in its history is needed. It may be reminded that traditionally the profession of Social worker stems from the 19th century Europe, encompassing various models for social welfare and protection, whereas Caritative social work goes back in the history several thousands of years ago when human society started to deal with the concept of marginalism and ways how to deal with it, how to help to recover one's spiritual and social functioning simultaneously. Its roots can be found in the Judeo-Christian anthropology and theology which dates back to ca. 6th-7th century BC in the writings of the Old Testament, followed by the New Testament (1st-2nd cent.), and the tradition has been polished to details in systematic academic discourse in the University of Alexandria (2nd - 6th cent.), and insinuated into the tradition of Ecumenical Christian Councils and anthropological paradigm of the Patristics. Judeo-Christian revelation developed not only during the Patristic age, it was kept up by the Eastern Orthodox Christianity.

Patristic anthropology is not a descriptive science, it is related to ontological knowledge about man structured on three levels:

1. within a phenomenon of social life where human existence is taken in relational contexts;
2. it clarifies perception of existence through analysis of practical enactment of both vertical and horizontal relationships;
3. dynamics and processuality of man shows capacity to reach the anthropological border of his/her existence. Anthropological teaching of the Eastern Orthodoxy borrowed a lot from the idea about the ontological transformation of man, i.e., his capacity to step over the nature of the "fallen" man and to enter into the dimension of Deification (*theosis* in Greek).

The Judeo-Christian anthropology defines this concept as a process of “overcoming the self”. It encompasses cognitions like inner strength within a man which is expressed through self-sufficient singularity and spiritual potential. By rejection of its activation man loses foundation of his identity and experiences various depressive crisis throughout his life. Authors like Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Irenaeus of Lyons and others elaborated anthropological concept of a Person and Hypostasis. During the period of Ecumenical Church Councils (till the 7th cent.) the notion of “mutuality” (perihoresis in Greek, from the word “going in circle”) was born, which describes human capacity to enter the dynamic process of the social context of mutuality.

Few words should be said about anthropocentric nature of the Biblical revelation. A man is not seen as a particular fragment or part of something bigger because; he was installed in the center of the created world, and discourse about existence and fate of the world witnesses the individual stand of each person. The goal and purpose of each man is described as his telos, in Patristic anthropology it means certain steps in one’s spiritual growth which everyone marginalized or being in crisis is capable to make. Stepping in in this process requires precise and well-founded methodology for activation of the client’s anthropological resource for his/her own wellbeing. Analysis of the clients’ situation requires adequate anthropological knowledge which is described as organon operated by Caritative social worker.

Also in the context of the current Social work development due attention must be paid to both ancient roots of Caritative social work and proper understanding of what the well-known British mathematician and philosopher, spokesman for the 20th century science revolution Alfred North Whitehead has said about the culture of innovations: “Innovations are not born in times when they are discussed and when someone seeks for them and tries to implement. Like empires they are long gone, but they resurrect again today as a necessity. Innovative ideas always have travelled from ancient past when people have definitely forgotten them. Seek for innovative ideas in thousand-years ancient, I should say, in antique experience, where they are. You must single them out and adapt to the current age.” (Whitehead, 1925, 320.) The same reasoning was supported by system analyst Emmanuel Wallerstein.

This is exactly what Latvian Christian academy did in 1993 when the Caritative social work education was launched on two pillars of knowledge:

1. Judeo-Christian anthropological concept of man and help to marginalized persons,
2. The concept of man’s social stand related to human dignity as a spiritual issue – the concept accepted by founders of European Union (Robert Schuman and others, see: EU Charter of Human Rights).

Theoretical and scientific foundations of the concept of the Caritative social work were laid during first ten years of the profession development. The progress was burdened by inertia of the Soviet regime and Latvian isolation wherefore specialists didn’t know much about neither Judeo-Christian concept of man, nor the intent of the European Union founders to promote cohesive and inclusive society in European countries. Consequently, the initiative of Latvian Christian Academy to launch Caritative social work was met with atheism-based objections (examples may be given by the author). The author was surprised by reflections like: “Isn’t so that Caritative social worker works like pastor in the Church?” Also, specialists claimed

that Social work should be based solely on humanist traditions. The author invited partners to return to dialogue as a dominating authority when common, mutually enriching development path must be taken rather than one truth imposed by force. Democratic society presupposes multi-sided dialogue, whereas conflict-provoking attitudes destroys diversity of opinions in essence. The dialogue-open communication was initiated by DrHC of Latvian Christian academy Mrs. Aija Barča, Chairwoman of the Social and Employment Matters Committee (Latvian Parliament). Due to her competence high quality professional implications of Caritative social work were recognized as analogous to the customary model of Social work supported by the College of Social Work “Attīstība” (“Development”). We were pleased that professional conference finally accepted general conjunctive decision that professional field of a Social worker should not be fragmented by separate standards, and that both Social work and Caritative social work professions may mutually enrich each other. It should be noted that both Universities providing education in Social work – “Attīstība” and Latvian Christian academy – started their work in the same year.

As noted before, Caritative social work has been the eldest Social work profession due to its rich history and currently it develops as diverse models in European welfare states under different titles: nursing (*Charity sisters with theology-based knowledge*), caritative counselor, pastoral counselor (*with necessary knowledge for professional Social work*), prison chaplain (*with necessary knowledge for professional Social work*) etc. In the United States of America Caritative social work is called “Christian social work”, however, our understanding of Caritative social work doesn’t match the American one for its clearly manifested Protestant perspective. We insist that Caritative social work has grown out of the Patristic ontological anthropology.

Historical roots of Caritative social work are diverse (see Fig. 1).

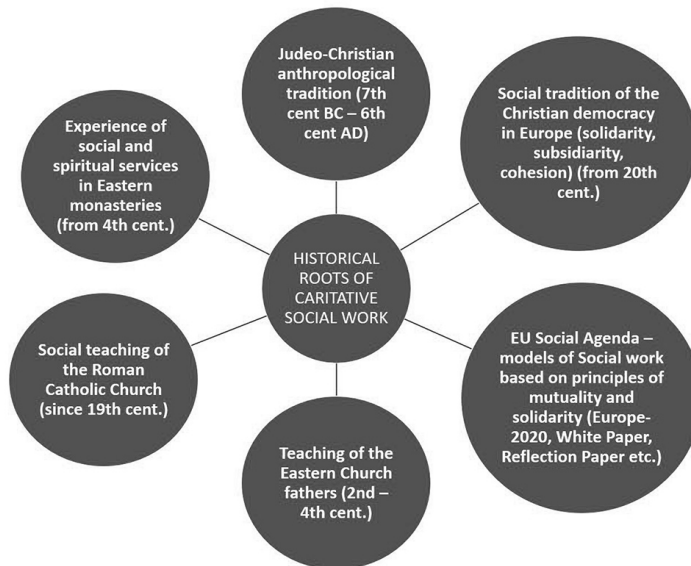


Fig. 1. Historical roots of Caritative social work.

(Source: The author.)

Caritative social work has well-elaborated scientific and theoretical foundation. They are the following:

1. Professional activity based on interdisciplinary approach (Moral Theology, Systematic Theology, Psychology, Epistemology, Sociology, Social work as professional activity based on academic knowledge etc.),
2. Activity based on precise competence in Patristic anthropology,
3. Practical activity based on knowledge about differences between a person and personality, and a knowledge about telos (goal with an effect) and knowledge about praxis (goal as a fact),
4. Practical activity based on knowledge of Ethics and Social sciences.

By making first steps in the Caritative social work development Latvian Christian academy wanted to put strong emphasis on the concept of Social care as the highest form of social phenomena, and self-understanding of a person and social ontology elaborated by existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger (De Jesus Silva, Vieira de Oliveira, Radunz, 2009; Danielle Conque, 2016; McNicollis, 1998) which surely corresponds to the Judeo-Christian stand, and deserves due attitude also today. However, objectives of Social care implementation in Latvia were formulated differently on political level by separating it from the Social worker profession, therefore promotion of the of M.Heidegger's phenomenology within the context of Social work is a future task.

Caritative social work is not a science to safeguard general social welfare (*see*: Kīslings, 2000; Hirst, 1994; Schnapper, 2009; Schnapper, Bordes-Benayon, Raphael, 2010). Social work is a changing and developing profession. It is obvious that, although both principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to Social work profession, they are insufficient due to their simplified view on human relationships. As we know Social worker should treat his/her clients neutrally, however, for Caritative social worker it is unthinkable – just because the client is his peer, neighbour whose resources for further spiritual life should be activated. This goal can't be achieved following neutral and impersonal attitude. For this goal methodology of cohesive mutuality is needed along with the context of identity where the specialist sees himself/herself in the situation of the other (“walks in his/her shoes,” as saying goes).

It is more often that notions “mutuality”, “identity”, “spiritual changes” are used in the context of Social work. The author was pleased to hear that in debates in EU decision-making think-tank groups after the Meeting in Rome (2017) the following Social work definition was used, namely, the current Social work was described as a specific profession which analyses and promotes changes within a person urging social and spiritual changes in one's life, by relating problem solving with a family and other contexts of mutuality and identity. This working definition precisely describes the field of professional activity carried out by Caritative social worker.

Both Bachelor and Master program students at Latvian Christian Academy attend volumous courses in anthropology along with basic knowledge necessary for the Social work professional competence. These courses secure competence in proper understanding of spiritual, psychical and physical wholeness of man within the context of social changes and mutuality.

The main method used by Caritative social worker is that of Caritative and Social cohesion. “Caritative cohesion,” as it is stated in the EC document “EC Social Agenda – Creating Synergies, 2014-2041”, “is a societal duty because it promotes social position and progress of the marginal people” (see: EU Social Agenda). Latvian attitude to this innovative Social work form differs from that in other EU countries because Caritative social workers are not always employed as Social workers. Executive legislation should be improved for the benefit of Caritative social worker as provider of social services. We take it as misunderstanding that among providers of social services Caritative social worker is not mentioned side-by-side with a Social worker.

On the one hand, majority of Social workers stand on the concept of secular humanism. Surely, we have nothing against it, although secular humanism has proclaimed human rights on happiness while rejecting any source of power above man and his nature. Nevertheless, this imperative is not logical. Paul Kurtz, the author of “Manifesto of Secular Humanism”, has defined ontological relativism and primacy of material well-being of people. The 3rd Manifesto of Secular Humanism (containing 6 thesis) was published in 2003, where P.Kurtz points out: “Humanism undergoes risk to stay as an interesting intellectual movement meant for limited number of scientists – philosophers executing little if any impact on practical life, because in eupraxsophia [Kurtz’s term] should encompass both practice and theory, whereas humanism is only a movement of ideas.” (Куртц, 2000.) Also, it is probably not known to all that Judeo-Christian anthropology in its essence and contents is actually a socially active position rather than mere “movement of ideas”, and it is oriented towards cohesion of society, i.e., inclusion of people, respect to people and their dignity, healing of marginalization, therefore nothing should be remarked. It is true that relations between the secular humanism and Judeo-Christian revelation always have enjoyed certain level of dialogue. If secular humanism turns away from its roots, it will turn into atheistic ideology and some kind of “religion” itself. And vice versa, where turning away from secular humanism happens, there is a danger to give birth to fanaticism and fundamentalism.

Unfortunately, further development of Social work profession in Latvia suffers from weariness. Weariness is called *akedia* in Greek and it is close to the burn-out syndrome when people are suppressed by fatigue and unwillingness to bring something new in their work routine. Actually, we should make crucial decision: do we want to lift the wholeness of the profession out of its historical roots and to work supportively and adequately for the benefit of the profession?

Sure, Social work profession is informed about Social and Cultural anthropology. Caritative social work implements its competence, but parallel to that turns to Judeo-Christian and Patristic anthropology which is ontological in its essence and differs from anthropology as mere social science. Patristic anthropology is meant for all humanity, it addresses all nations, it is not an anthropology as ethnology but rather pays attention to what is man in his/her essence. Caritative social work is both epistemologically and ontologically innovative approach to man in any social system and culture which works for better understanding of relations between a man and society. It describes man as both spiritual, psychic and physical being within social context, potentially capable to grow as personality or, vice versa, to stay on the level of individual or mere person as a statistic unit (Хоружий, 1998).

Several analysts of Social work profession speak for the anthropological approach in Social work across Europe (in France, Great Britain, Belgium, also in the

USA) (Beabout, 2003; Musil, 2006). The modern offer is anthropologically oriented Social work. Both anthropological and theological “technologies” exist along with more wide-spread social and information technologies, and their application can’t be rated as unwise. Both phenomena and professions in humanitaries and social sphere are more interrelated rather than excluded due to the question how to activate both social and spiritual resources holistically. Caritative social work rejects the vogue concept “spirituality” and operates with the notion of “spiritual practice in man’s life”. This practice envisages concrete help to a client in his fight against the so-called psychic pathologies (deviances or, using the Patristic term, passions) aimed at guiding the client



***Figure 2. Rector of Latvian Christian academy
prof. Skaidrīte Gūtmane attending the audience with
Pope Francis, Vatican, June 4, 2017.***

(Source: Vatican Press Photo.)

out from different levels of pathologies (passions) and crisis. (Analysis of psychic pathologies or passions and related question of activation of spiritual resources deserve another treatise.)

Current discussions about welfare reforms and effectivity of them in Europe are related to discussions about foundations of human freedom and personality. Adequate understanding of those “foundations” is described as guarantee for effective welfare reforms (Beabout, G., 2003). For this reason, EC has welcomed partnership of Latvian Christian academy in several decision-making European organizations which promote holistic approach to man in society on higher political level (Semaines Sociales de France, EZA (European Center for Workers’ Questions), IDC (International Diaconate Center), EESC (European Economic and Social Committee).

We are thankful to International Diaconate Center (Germany) and President Klaus Kiessling for the unique privilege to attend the audience with Pope Francis in His Apostolic palace, Vatican, in June 4, 2017 (*see*: Fig. 2). In His address to permanent deacons of the Roman Catholic Church and caritative social workers His

Eminency said: "Social workers need interdisciplinary knowledge with clear focus on both spiritual and ethical aspects. No-one will ever be able to solve social problems while spiritual needs will be ignored, because man is an ontologically spiritual entity."

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Beabout G.R. (2003) *The Role of Christian Anthropology in Welfare Reform*. Acton Institute Policy Forum, Vol. 4. [cited 12.09.2018.] Available: <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/social-justice/the-role-of-christian-anthropology-in-welfare-reform.html>).

Danielle Conque A. (2016). *The Parth Not Taken: Martin Heidegger & a Politics of Care*. Louisiana State University, LSU Digital Commons, 248 p. [cited on 12.09.2018.] Available: www.digitalcommons.edu.

De Jesus Silva I., Vieira de Oliveira M., Radunz V. (2009) *Care, self-care and caring for yourself: a paradigmatic understanding thought for nursing care*. Rev. Esc. Enferm USP, Vol. 43(3), p. 46-84. [cited on 10.09.2018.] Available: www.pdf.s.semanticscholar.org.

EU Charter of Human Rights. [cited on 13.2018.] Available: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/charterpedia/article/1-human-dignity>.

EU Social Agenda [cited 12.09.2018.] Available: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=737&langId=en&pubId=7755&type=1&furtherPubs=agenda>.

Hirst P. (1994) *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 222 p.

Kīslings K. (2001) *Jūs sveicina mīlestība: Raksti par diakonisku kultūru*. [Love greets you: On deaconal culture.] Jūrmala: Latvijas Kristīgā akadēmija, 240 lpp.

McNicollis C.F. (1998). *Self-understanding and the Care for Being: Heidegger's Ethical Thought*. McMaster University, 235 p. [cited on 12.09.2018.] Available: www.macsphere.mcmaster.ca.

Musil L. (2006) *Coping with Dilemmas: Working Conditions and Interactions of Social Workers with their Clients*. In: *Institut für vergleichende Sozialarbeitswissenschaft und interkulturelle / internationale Sozialarbeit (ISIS)*, 129 S.

Schnapper D. (2009) *Providential Democracy: An Essay on Contemporary Equality*. New Jersey: Transaction Publ., 234 p.

Schnapper D., Bordes-Benayon Ch., Raphael F. (2010) *Jewish Citizenship in France: The Temptation of Being among One's Own*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publ., 140 p.

Whitehead A.N. (1925) *Science and the Modern World*. N.Y.: Macmillan Company, 560 p.

Sociālo pakalpojumu un sociālās palīdzības likums. [Law of Social services and Social assistance.] [cited on 12.09.2018.] Available: <https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=68488>.

Куртц П. (2000) *Мужество стать: Добродетели гуманизма*. [Daring to become: Virtues of Humanism.] Москва, 150 с.

Хоружий С. (1998) *К феноменологии аскезы*. [Phenomenology of Ascetics.] Москва, 208 с.

Karitatīvais sociālais darbs kā inovācija no senatnes

Kopsavilkums

Raksts aplūko karitatīvā sociālā darbinieka profesiju, tās tapšanu un leģitīmo statusu Latvijā, kā arī profesijas vēsturiskās saknes un metodoloģiju. Šī koncepcija ir balstīta jūdu-kristiešu antropoloģiskajā paradigmā un tā atspoguļo Eiropas vadlīnijas sociālā darba attīstībai, ko devuši Eiropas Savienības koncepcijas tēvi, rakstot par cilvēka cieņu kā garīgu subjektu. Mūsdienās vairāki sociālā darba pētnieki visā Eiropā runā par antropoloģiskās pieejas nepieciešamību sociālajā darbā, jo gan antropoloģiskās, gan teoloģiskās “tehnoloģijas” darbojas līdzās plaši izplatītajām informācijas tehnoloģijām, un tās nenovērtēt būtu kļūda. Humanitāro zinātņu un sociālās sfēras parādības un profesijas ir cieši saistītas, jo sociālā darba uzdevums ir aktivēt cilvēka (klienta) sociālos un garīgos resursus. - Tajā pašā laikā karitatīvā sociālā darba koncepcija noraida izplūduša, nekonkrēta “garīguma” jēdzienu un operē ar jēdzienu “cilvēka garīgā prakse”, jo tā paredz konkrētu palīdzību cīņā pret t.s. patoloģiskajām kaislībām (lietojot terminu no patristiskās antropoloģijas, kaislībām).

Atslēgas vārdi: karitatīvais sociālais darbs, patristikas ontoloģiskā antropoloģija, kohēzija.



Skaidrīte Gūtmane

Dr.philol., prof., Rector of Latvian Christian Academy, Director of Interdisciplinary Research Institute at Latvian Christian academy.

Dr.philol., prof., Latvijas Kristīgās akadēmijas rektore, Starpdisciplinārās Pētniecības institūta direktore Latvijas Kristīgajā akadēmijā.

E-mail: rektore@kra.lv