

The Worker in the Helping Professions – a Unique Person, a Professional, a Worker?

A Reflection on the Personal Responsibility of the Social and Pastoral Worker Based on the Principles of Christian Ethics

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Introduction

In today's society (based on one's performance), the basic demands placed on man are efficiency, flexibility, competitiveness, availability, the ability to work, etc. To a large extent, society does not look at who one is. The key factor is (above all) the results of his or her actions, which can justify everything including him or her (as people). Considering that the specification of the results is significantly dependent on the 'flexible' methodology of its measurements, it must almost always be viewed with some reserve. When assessing the quality of work in the helping professions (that is the performance of, for example, the social or pastoral worker, whom we are particularly interested in throughout this discourse), this knowledge is of fundamental importance.

In the helping professions, human beings must be taken into account first; both the one to whom assistance is provided and the other providing assistance. While we can rightly call for measurable results or performance here, we cannot prefer quantity over quality in this case. It comes from the basic assumption of work ethics in the helping professions, which is respect for human dignity. It also includes a question about the ethical profile of a worker in the helping professions. If we follow the title of this article (the worker in the helping professions – a unique person, a professional, a worker) then we have to ask about the required level of moral consciousness and the moral practice of such a worker, about the moral integrity and hence about the character of his work.¹ Ideally, a worker in the helping professions is an advanced moral person, a professional and also a labourer who is not afraid of the required workload. It would be problematic if (from the position outlined above) only one of these aspects were taken into account, and the others would not be sufficiently reflected or even deliberately overlooked. It could not only reduce but also directly threaten both the quality of work and even the value of the worker (and also the value of one who should be helped).

As partly outlined, we want to focus on the possible or desirable ethical profile of a worker in the

¹ Here we follow the basic category of humanity, i.e., the ability of man to distinguish between good and evil, and an openness to good on the basis of virtues (in other words, the question of responsibility or the responsible behaviour). For a basic discernment of ethical concepts and their use, cf. Arno ANZENBACHER, *Úvod do etiky*, Praha: Zvon, 1994, pp. 13–18; Arno ANZENBACHER, *Úvod do filosofie*, Praha: SPN, 1991, p. 223; Arno ANZENBACHER, *Křesťanská sociální etika. Úvod a principy*, Brno: CDK, 2015, pp. 9–11.

helping professions (particularly social and pastoral workers²) from the standpoint of Christian ethics. This means paying attention to the social transformations that have an impact on the moral consciousness of man, as well as to the transformations of the paradigm of Christian ethics, which (to a great extent) correlate with social changes and ethical perception. Finally, we will try to construct a partial 'picture' of the ethical profile of a social and pastoral worker, or (in other words) we will try to present (as the title of this study suggests) a qualitative 'stabilisation tripod' of these workers, consisting of their required moral qualities, proficiency and diligence. We also want to note the possible negative consequences that could result from unilateral views on the overall profile of a social or pastoral worker. In this regard, we will pay special attention to the impulses contained in the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris laetitia* (2016).

1. Social Transformations – the Transformation of Moral Consciousness

Based on the general belief and experience that everything is moving in modern, or (precisely) in postmodern or hypermodern society³ it can be rightly assumed that there are also changes in the perception of reality, the transformation of moral consciousness. We can reasonably argue about what is the cause and effect of that.

One of the basic features of modern times is the promotion of individualism. We speak about the relentless relativism,⁴ the weakened ability of man to distinguish between good and evil.⁵ This ability is inherently a foundation of humanity, its manifestation, and it creates the prerequisite for the full development of human life and human dignity in society. The current emphasis on individuals and their rights (in disregarding the connotations that are associated with it – we will touch on some of them here) is undoubtedly a fundamental achievement of modern times. It is necessary to appreciate it. Lipovetsky reminds us (in this regard) that 'human rights have never been in such a mutual consensus as today, and that the values of tolerance and respect for neighbours have never been as intensive as they are today. They (these values) bring generous and strong resistance to unreasonable violence.'⁶

Ultimately, however, the generally respected freedoms and rights of an individual without a proper value anchoring are (in many cases) the preparatory phase for the realisation of overexposed individualism, which brings one into (mostly painfully experienced) isolation. It is often accompanied by work overload, stress, frustration from unfulfilled expectations or ambitions, distrust in interpersonal relationships, etc. The current 'individualist' (deprived of the support of the traditional reference frame) loses confidence in oneself, family, institutions and structures.⁷ He or she struggles for his or her own identity, and tends to be egoistic and cynical. He or she falls into hedonism and finally find himself or herself in anxiety and fear.⁸

Lipovetsky notes that we are in a situation where all institutional barriers (perceived by individuals as limiting) have fallen, and where there has been created a space for expressing personal desires and wishes, self-realisation and self-esteem. We find ourselves in a situation in which the

2 For a profile of a social and pastoral worker (and also their outcomes and goals) cf. Jindřich ŠRAJER, Vybrané podněty biskupských synod o rodině (2014, 2015) a postsynodální apoštolské exhortace *Amoris laetitia* (2016) pro pomáhající profese, *Caritas et veritas* 7/2017, pp. 218–228.

3 Cf. Gilles LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*, Praha: Prostor, 2013.

4 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 40.

5 Cf. Karel KOSÍK, *Poslední eseje*, Praha: FÚ AV ČR, 2004, p. 94.

6 LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba...*, p. 41.

7 Cf. Francis FUKUYAMA, *Velký rozvrat: lidská přirozenost a rekonstrukce společenského řádu*, Praha: Academia, 2006.

8 Cf. LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba...*, p. 29.

social sphere has become a mere expansion of the private sphere. The era of emptiness is taking place. But (according to him) it has nothing tragic or apocalyptic in itself.⁹ This is a historically unusual and extensive social expansion of consumer mentality. The empire of emptiness is characterised by the principle of charm and seductiveness:

The given ways of behaviour and life for individual social strata have disappeared. At the forefront, there are actions based on personal choice and responsibility. This is also the case of given firm standards and rules designed to seduce and enchant, focusing on the public sphere (highlighting the principles of transparency and communication) and on the area of private life (based on personal experience and opinion). Narcissus (the central character of the Era of Emptiness who is cool, flexible, mammonish and even anarchist) comes to the scene.¹⁰

However, (aware of the above characteristics) it is not possible to fully agree with the thesis about the moral decay of society and the immoral behaviour of selfish individuals (who decide according to their own interests only).¹¹ More accurately, a new perception or outlook on ethics and its demands should be talked about. Contemporary morality needs to be understood as 'a painless morality dependent on a free choice and based on feelings (rather than on duties or sanctions) and adapted to the new values of individualistic independence.'¹² It is also possible to emphasise the current need for ethical and deontological principles, especially in areas that are threatened by scientific and technological development and political interests.¹³

In order to adequately capture what is happening in the field of the moral consciousness transformation, it is reasonable to proceed to further specification of Gilles Lipovetsky. The postmodernist phase (according to him) moves into the so-called hypermodern. It is the third phase of consumption: hyper-consumption. It is accompanied by hypernarcissism, an excessive admiration for oneself. Hypernarcissism is expressed 'in the form of Narcissus, who presents himself as a mature, responsible, disciplined, powerful and adaptable individual (...) who distances himself from the mammonish and anarchist Narcissus of the postmodern era.'¹⁴ The above-mentioned shift also conceals some paradox and inconsistency:

The more the responsible behaviour spreads in society, the more irresponsibility increases. Hypermodern individuals are both more informed and less structured, more mature and more unstable, less ideological and more influenced by fashion trends, more open and more influenced, more critical and more superficial, more sceptical and naïve at the same time.¹⁵

The essential feature of the hypermodern trend is not immorality, but increased individual responsibility. A strong adversary remains, though, being indulgence, a consumer mentality, but

9 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22.

10 LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba...*, p. 24.

11 According to Václav Havel, even a demoralised society does not live without morality. Cf. © Václav HAVEL, New Year's speech, 1st January, 2001 (on-line), available at: [https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Novoro%C4%8Dn%C3%AD_projev_prezidenta_republiky_V%C3%A1clava_Havla_\(2001\)](https://cs.wikisource.org/wiki/Novoro%C4%8Dn%C3%AD_projev_prezidenta_republiky_V%C3%A1clava_Havla_(2001)), cited 3rd November 2017.

12 LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba*, p. 41. Cf. also Gilles LIPOVETSKY, *Soumrak povinnosti. Bezbolestná etika nových demokratických časů*, Praha: Prostor, 2011, pp. 11–26.

13 Cf. LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba...*, p. 41.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

also anxiety.¹⁶ In the life of a hypermodern person, there are issues that prevail – fears of everyday life, of one's own body (concerns connected with one's health), of society, and of human relationships which he or she sees as aggressive.¹⁷ All of these aspects are undoubtedly necessary to reflect upon in order to understand the role of the worker in the helping professions, which we see primarily from an ethical point of view.

Postmodern, or more precisely, hypermodern morality has its very specific features, which are (to a large extent) a reflection of the outlined hypermodern culture. Naturally, the preferred requirement of individual responsibility follows. Compared to Christian tradition, however, this responsibility has new or rather 'limited' relationship frames, which (at the same time) create a basis for its above-mentioned paradox. Also, contemporary Christian theology (respectively Catholic ethics) places responsibility at the centre of its paradigm restored by the Second Vatican Council. The question is to what extent this shared accent of hypermodern culture and Christian ethics is identical in its content and practical meaning. For this reason, it will still be necessary to clarify what responsibility means in Christian theology and to offer a certain comparison with its currently widespread concept.

2. The Changes in the Ethical Paradigm of Christian Ethics – the Requirement of Responsibility

Responsibility has been on the rise in recent decades not only in theological but also in moral philosophy discourse; it becomes a 'key concept' of ethics.¹⁸ The notion of responsibility presupposes a decision on the basis of free will, a decision that is connected with a particular person. A person should be able to take responsibility for his/her own actions, not towards everyone but to a relevant person, for example, on the basis of a dependent relationship (family or professional relations) or according to predetermined fixed rules towards the institution.¹⁹ In the latter case, it is primarily through a court that the 'taking responsibility' of his or her actions is required in the full sense of that word. The ethical notion of responsibility was designed precisely as analogous with the legal concept of responsibility.²⁰ Theological ethics also speaks about responsibility towards God, who is the Creator and the ultimate judge of man. One must be able to take responsibility for all of his or her life in the spirit of the apostle Paul's words: 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.' (2 Cor 5:10). This consciousness is supposed to become a horizon of man's life.²¹

Although 'responsibility in the sense of taking responsibility is the subject of Christian theology from the very beginning',²² there are visible developmental phases accompanied by various mental accents and influences. The crucial issue (that Christian theology repeatedly puts forward, or has

16 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 42f.

17 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 29.

18 Cf., for example, Hans JONAS, *Das Prinzip Verantwortung. Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1979; Emmanuel LEVINAS, *Die Spur des Anderen. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Sozialphilosophie*, Freiburg/Br./München: Verlag Karl Alber, 1992³; Josef RÖMELT, *Theologie der Verantwortung. Zur theologischen Auseinandersetzung mit einem philosophischen Prinzip*, Innsbruck: Resch Verlag, 1991; Konrad HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik. Für Schule und Erwachsenenbildung*, Regensburg: Pustet, 2009.

19 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 15.

20 Cf. *ibid.*; cf. also Wolfgang HUBER, *Von der Freiheit. Christliche Perspektiven für eine solidarische Welt*, München: C. H. Beck, 2012, pp. 73–75.

21 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 15.

22 Cf. Wolfgang HUBER, *Etika. Základní otázky života*, Praha: Vyšehrad, 2016, p. 103.

to ask) is how much its testimony or attitudes correlate with biblical testimonies, that is, what God says about himself and man.

In the biblical sense, man is a free being, created by God. As God's image (Gen 1:27), he or she is given the ability to recognise good and evil and act according to it (cf. Ex 23:2). He or she is entrusted (as a landlord) to look over the work of creation (cf. Gen 1:26). A man of the Old Testament does not understand himself or herself as an autonomous individual. His or her life is determined by the relationship with God and responsibility to God and to the community to which he or she belongs. In this relationship, he or she also finds his or her life perspective. He or she fulfils it with responsibility, a voluntary answer to God's offer.²³

The writings of the New Testament, especially those by the Apostle Paul, contain – along with comments on the validity of the basic commandments of the Old Testament and the challenges given by Jesus – appeals for forming one's own ethical judgment, for fulfilling creative responsibility before God. To man (to a Christian), it is not clearly determined in advance what God's will is, that is, good, pleasing to God and perfect (cf. Rom 12:2). He or she does not have a predetermined kind of 'order' or even a manual of behaviour showing how he or she should behave in individual life situations. Man is not seen here as a puppet in God's hands, as the blind executor of God's instructions, the directives of the law. Far more likely, Christians are encouraged to examine or perhaps even judge the facts themselves (Rom 12:2, Phil 1:10, 4:8, 1Thess 5:21, Luke 12:56f, Acts 4:19).²⁴ In the midst of (by the sin influenced) world, they should (through God's grace) examine everything, judge, and critically distinguish what is truly human, because that is what makes them similar to God, and subsequently, they act according to it.²⁵

In the biblical tradition, the increasingly upheld emphasis on man's personal responsibility before God and before the community (to which he or she belongs) is accompanied by awareness of the finality of earthly existence, the fallibility of man, the limitation of human existence, and the formation of the world, along with hope and trust in God's goodness. God involves a person in his goodness, even if he or she fails generally or if he or she fails to correct the problematic reality. These accents basically specify the limits of human responsibility, complemented by the question of the person's attribution to the action, respectively his or her authorship. It is precisely the question of the extent of human responsibility (more precisely expressed with the question asking about boundaries beyond which the actions or the consequences that follow cannot be attributed to the originator) that is interesting in the moral-theological tradition.²⁶

It is thanks to the Church Fathers of antiquity that the authorship was not only related to the reality of the action, but also – and sometimes even almost exclusively – to the intentionality of the acting subject, to intentions associated with it by the actor.²⁷ Here, as already mentioned, there is a distinction between ethical and legal blame (for which the result was crucial). This distinction becomes fundamental to the discipline of penance, especially in the early Middle Ages.²⁸

Since the peak of the Middle Ages, the moral and theological tradition has been improving (with

23 Cf. Jindřich ŠRAJER, *Suicidium, sebeobětování, nebo mučednictví?* Praha: Triton, 2009, pp. 95–96.

24 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, pp. 39–40; further also Heinz E. TÖDT, *Perspektiven theologischer Ethik*, München: Kaiser, 1988, 46f.

25 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 40; cf. also Joseph RATZINGER, *Obnova morální teologie: Perspektivy 2. Vatikánského koncilu a encykliky Veritatis splendor*, *Communio* 3/2006, p. 307.

26 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, pp. 16, 40–41.

27 Cf. *ibid.* p. 16; cf. also Michael MÜLLER, *Ethik und Recht in der Lehre von der Verantwortlichkeit. Ein Längsschnitt durch die Geschichte der katholischen Moraltheologie*, Regensburg: Josef Habbel, 1932, zejm. pp. 15–32.

28 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 16; cf. also MÜLLER, *Ethik und Recht in der Lehre von der Verantwortlichkeit...*, pp. 33–71.

regard to pastoral practice) the doctrine about obstacles to human action. It is a matter of limited freedom of intention and will.²⁹ Under the influence of the almost legal nature of the neo-scholastic fundamental theology and dogmatics, moral theology has moved into solid legal and casuistic thinking.³⁰ The critical role of motivation and the circumstances of the action do not have the key role in the evaluation of the act; it is almost exclusively the factual basis of the act. Responsibility is presented as a manifestation of (sometimes almost blind) obedience to authority and law. At the beginning of the 20th century, moral theologians appeared who, especially in intense confrontation with personal philosophy and from the point of view of the newly discovered responsorial structure of the biblical ethos (when human action is the answer to God's demand for love) begin (in moral theological discourse) to support the notion of responsibility as a central category.³¹ Last but not least, it is also despair over the consequences of an 'obedient' responsibility that causes the fundamental transformation of the theological and ethical paradigm.

Perhaps most clearly, the above-mentioned transformation of the moral-theological paradigm is shown in the thinking of the moral theologian Bernhard Häring (1912-1998). Based on life experiences from the Second World War, he states:

However, I have experienced (unfortunately) even the most absurd obedience of Christians towards the criminal regime. And it has radically manifested itself in my thinking and acting in moral theology. After the war, I returned to moral theology with a firm commitment to teach it according to this experience. Its core is not obedience, but willingness and courage to be responsible. And I believe I have remained faithful to this determination, certainly not to the detriment of true obedience (namely responsible obedience) associated with freedom and critical thinking.³²

The notion of personal responsibility promoted in the moral-theological discourse of the first half of the 20th century (which was biblically proven and inspired by personal philosophy) is later found in the theology of the magisterium. In the document *Optatam totius*, the Second Vatican Council encourages the improvement of moral theology, through its scientific form being fed more with the teachings of Sacred Scripture, and to illuminate the majesty of the vocation of the faithful in Christ and their duty to bring benefit (in love) for the life of the world.³³ Looking at theological ethics, the theological and ethical discourse (after fifty years since the Council took place) does not seem to have been fulfilled as expected by the Council Fathers.³⁴ It might even be possible to speak (to some extent) about the paradigm of the post-war magisterium and the fact that it does not fully estimate the individual's personal responsible freedom. In its statements, there can still be 'traced' a certain pre-conciliar explicit expression about distrust towards this

29 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 17; cf. also MÜLLER, *Ethik und Recht* (Anm. 8), 118–240; Joseph KLEIN, *Kanonistische und moraltheologische Normierung in der katholischen Theologie*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1949, 84–100. For the current view of this teaching, cf. Karl-Heinz PESCHKE, *Christliche Ethik. Grundlegungen der Moraltheologie*, Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 1997, pp. 270–280.

30 Cf. Peter HÜNERMANN, *Gaudium et spes* včera a dnes: Kontrastní aktualizace znamení času neboli situace člověka v dnešním světě, in Jindřich ŠRAJER, Lucie KOLÁŘOVÁ, *Gaudium et spes* padesát let poté, Brno: CDK, 2015, pp. 68–106, specifically p. 103.

31 Cf. HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 17.

32 Bernhard HÄRING, *Meine Erfahrung mit der Kirche* (Anm. 6), p. 35, cited according to HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 18.

33 Cf. *Optatam totius*, Dekret o výchově ke kněžství, in Dokumenty 2. vatikánského koncilu, Praha: Zvon, 1995, article no 16.

34 Cf. Joseph RATZINGER, *Obnova morální teologie: Perspektivy 2. vatikánského koncilu a encykliky Veritatis splendor*, Communio 3/2006, pp. 303–313; cf. also Jindřich ŠRAJER, Boží láska jako základní zdroj etických inspirací aneb podoba pokoncilní morální teologie, na pozadí výpovědí encykliky papeže Benedikta XVI. „*Deus caritas est.*“, in František ŠTĚCH – Roman MÍČKA, *Církev a společnost. Karlovi Skalickému k 80. narozeninám*, České Budějovice: Jihočeská univerzita v Českých Budějovicích, Teologická fakulta, 2014, pp. 99–110.

kind of freedom. The priority does not seem to be the responsible obedience or courage for responsibility, but mere obedience. How else can be understood the primary emphasis being placed on the objective validity of the moral law without (at the same time) taking into account the often problematic and complicated reality in which individuals are often found? Thus, in many cases, they are left (by the Church) to their own destiny without proper orientation and support for their daily personal responsible decision-making (which is led by an effort to live an honest moral Christian life).

The pontificate of Pope Francis and especially his systematically presented attitudes in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* seem to be embodying a conciliar and evangelical call for responsible freedom. The Pope primarily emphasises that ‘the category “responsibility” is the most suited for Christian ethics. This category can (in the best way) help Christian ethics to be understood as a response to God’s demand for love. This responsorial structure is what should form the core of any moral decision.’³⁵ At present, however, the pope’s accents paradoxically evoke a lot of controversy, which probably only confirms the above-mentioned suspicion that the call formulated by the Council has not yet fully found a response in the paradigm of Christian ethics. Some fear that the pope’s accents will become adapted to the above-described problematic understanding of responsibility in postmodern society. However, with a proper study and analysis of Pope Francis’s positions, this fear will not be justified. The pope’s effort is to approach the particular person in the spirit of the Gospel, to support his or her responsible freedom in the context of the living reality of the 21st century. In the case of our thinking about the ethical profile of the social and pastoral worker (from the point of view of Christian ethics), and respectively about his or her tasks and responsibilities, the ideas of Pope Francis presented in *Amoris laetitia* are (in this respect) more than interesting and inspirational.

3. The Personal Responsibility of a Worker in the Helping Professions – Guiding and Distinctions – The Impulses of *Amoris Laetitia*

The ideas and inspiration contained in *Amoris laetitia* can serve us in order to build a partial ‘picture’ of the ethically relevant profile of the social and pastoral worker. On this basis, it is possible to present a qualitative ‘stabilisation tripod’ of these workers, which consists of their moral qualities, professional proficiency (professionalism) and diligence. At the same time, the ideas and inspiration contained in the document may also draw attention to the possible negative consequences that might result from unilateral or unbalanced views of the overall profile of those workers.

The basic characteristic of a social and pastoral worker is or should be a complex approach to the client, to the person in need. This requirement involves the assumption that these workers are able to perceive, analyse and evaluate the context of the human story. They can distinguish between its individual planes and interactions. It is not just about the solution to a particular acute problem, but it is rather about the ability of the worker to understand man (the client) in his or her life situation. This ability involves the complementarity of a human and professional approach that determines the quality of social and pastoral work.

By specifying the tasks and responsibilities of the social and pastoral worker, we come to the question of the importance of his or her moral qualities. This does not seem to be primarily a question of knowledge of ethical theories, standards, and solutions to ethical dilemmas (especially menti-

35 HILPERT, *Zentrale Fragen christlicher Ethik...*, p. 17.

oned in connection with ethics in social work) but the issue of the moral quality of an individual – the social and pastoral worker – as a person who is able to live ethically, to act and decide, to live responsibly his or her life, to make responsible decisions. It is necessarily related to the openness for the search for good, for the search for the best (in a given situation) – the virtue.

Virtue includes the courage to take responsibility, the willingness to be close to a person in need, not to hide behind a strict application of the ethical norm or the law, behind the institution of the Church,³⁶ or behind some set criteria or standards of a helping organisation. A personal engagement of a pastoral and social worker with a particular person or a client (and his or her possibilities and problems) excludes the chance of ‘considering only whether the person’s conduct corresponds or does not correspond to any law or general norm.’³⁷ It would be, as Pope Francis reminds us, both simplifying and (at the same time) inadequate with regards to the perspective of man.³⁸ It would be a prominent and superficial assessment of the case:³⁹ cold bureaucratic morals.⁴⁰ Sensitivity to man, a willingness to listen to a particular life story and a sincere desire (respectively the courage to enter into the drama of people), to understand their view of the matter, to help them live better and to know their place in society or in the Church – those are expressions of the basic ethical competence of the pastoral and social worker.⁴¹

The mentioned competence of social and pastoral workers also includes the basic requirement to take into account the conscience of man, the client, and his or her ability to distinguish. This includes, among other things, the readiness to patiently guide the client on the path of growth. Relevant here is the reflection of tension between fullness and limitations. It’s not just about being able to carry this tension, but (at the same time) not to hinder the development by wanting everything right now. ‘To work in a long-term horizon, without the obsession with immediate results,’⁴² means (for Pope Francis) to perceive the dynamics and complexity of the process of shaping a person towards the ideal that opens up as an achievable prospect. Adequate, realistic and creative thinking (when working with specific people) is the competence which helps to mediate the understanding of their life situation to these people in confrontation with the requirements of the law or the ethical norm.

Respecting the process of maturation for each person, however, involves not only the knowledge of his or her particular living conditions, the degree of knowledge or understanding of the objective requirements of the law, but also the so-called law of gradualism.⁴³ Specific cases require a different level of responsibility to be taken into account. Pope Francis reminds us that ‘the consequences or the effects of one standard may not necessarily always be the same.’⁴⁴ Similarly, there may be ‘the circumstances that limit the decision-making ability.’⁴⁵ A person may well know the standard,

36 Cf. FRANCIS, *Amoris laetitia* (hereinafter AL), *Radost z lásky*. Posynodální apoštolská exhortace o lásce v rodině, Praha: Paulínky, 2016, 305.

37 AL, 304.

38 Cf. AL, 305.

39 Cf. AL, 305.

40 Cf. *ibid.*, 312.

41 Cf. *ibid.*, 312.

42 FRANCIS, *Evangelii gaudium* (hereinafter EG), *Radost z evangelia*. Apoštolská exhortace o hlásání evangelia v dnešním světě. Praha: Paulínky, 2014, 223.

43 Cf. AL, 295. The law of gradualism was first formulated by Pope John Paul II. Cf. *Familiaris consortio*. Apoštolská adhortace, Praha: Zvon, 1992, article 34.

44 AL, 300.

45 *Ibid.* Referring to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis recalls that ‘attribution and responsibility for some action can be reduced and even suppressed by ignorance, distraction, violence, fear, habits, unbridled passions and by other psychological or social factors’. These, according to him, also belong there: ‘emotional immaturity, strength of acquired habits, anxiety, or other psychological or social factors’. *Ibid.*, 302, further KKC, 1735, 2352.

but may have great difficulty in understanding the values of a given moral standard, 'or he or she may find himself or herself in specific conditions that do not allow him or her to act differently and make other decisions without the adding of a new guilt'.⁴⁶ Emphasis is placed not only on the ideal, but also on the attenuating circumstances. In specific cases, this may mean that the situation under consideration does not have to correspond to the general requirement of the law or the gospel, but (under the given circumstances) it represents the maximum that one is capable of. It does not, however, take away the possibility to be open to the new phases of growth and the new decisions that will enable the person concerned to achieve the desired ideal.⁴⁷ Unreasonable or even unacceptable in this logic are hard and rash trials, the final condemnation of man.⁴⁸

These selected requirements and demands for pastoral and social workers (who are expected not to seek personal or social shelters to keep them away from human drama) also have ambivalence and limitations. While a social or pastoral worker may (in his or her personal commitment, diligence and willingness adequately assist the client) get into complications⁴⁹ (for example, in connection with ethical dilemmas), he or she can also experience the power of tenderness in touch with the particular existence of others⁵⁰ and discover the meaning of his or her work. Furthermore, their appreciated willingness and commitment must be characterised by professionalism in the sense that they are aware of the risks of such engagement. If their own role, their physical and mental limits (in the process of helping others) are inadequately taken into account, the workers concerned may experience, for example, burnout syndrome. Another problem is the situation where a social worker is under the authority of an administration that does not give him or her sufficient capacity to work with the client. In this situation, it is undeniably necessary to ask whether this is a consequence of a bad set-up of the system (i.e., an external obstacle which is possible to eliminate by legitimate ways) or it is a welcomed excuse for a social worker giving him or her a chance not to deal with problem cases.

Conclusion

We have attempted to build a partial 'picture' of the ethical profile of a worker in helping professions, namely a social and pastoral worker who is determined by the accepting of personal responsibility. We have based our thoughts on the positions of Christian ethics, especially on the ideas contained in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* by Pope Francis. We did not avoid the reflection of the assumption of responsibility in the Christian tradition as well as in the contemporary discourse of post-modern or post-moral society.

The present society, with its generally shared ethical paradigm, emphasises responsibility, but it is (in its content and conception) a different responsibility than the current post-conciliar Christian ethics embodied in Pope Francis' attitude. While the hypermodern society favours the personal interests of an individual and responsibility is more a matter of emotion than reason (respectively obedience), Christian ethics calls for responsibility for others, especially for the most needy. It emphasises the role of conscience, which is not necessary only to respect but also to shape. All of this has a clear relationship framework that defines the level of human responsibility. In the secular area, these relationship frames are largely absent. That means the

46 Ibid., 301.

47 Cf. AL, 303.

48 Cf. AL, 308, 296.

49 Ibid, 308.

50 Cf. ibid, 308.

greater risk of a diversion from responsibility that seeks not only oneself and its interests, but also the needs of the other, without neglecting the justified needs and limits of this person. In other words, the unprejudiced understanding of responsibility, respectively misunderstanding its content may lead to formalism and legalism in the helping professions, or, conversely, the responsibility may become overwhelming for its intangibility. The same danger, however, is latently present even to those who refer to the principles of Christian ethics, as also illustrated by its historical development. Last but not least, there is also the danger of comfort that the widespread mentality of the consumer society brings.

In the helping professions, there should (in the first place) be taken into account one's own life story, his or her expectations and fears. It is the task of the workers in the helping professions to discover, cultivate, or correct them, as well as help them eliminate or at least reduce the fears and problems that their lives bring, and help them grow towards the desired ideal.

The Worker in the Helping Professions – a Unique Person, a Professional, a Worker?

A Reflection on the Personal Responsibility of the Social and Pastoral Worker Based on the Principles of Christian Ethics

Abstract

The presented work is called 'The employee in the helping professions – a unique person, a professional, a worker?' The Social and Pastoral Worker: A Reflection of Self-Responsibility Based on the Principles of Christian Ethics offers a partial 'picture' of the ethically demanded profile of a worker in helping professions, namely of a social and pastoral worker, based on the reflection of social changes and with those associated changes in the human moral consciousness in postmodern or hypermodern society, and the concept of responsibility in the tradition of Christian ethics, particularly embodied in the ideas of Pope Francis and his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (2016).

Keywords: helping professions, social worker, pastoral worker, responsibility, Christian ethics, post moralist ethics, Pope Francis, *Amoris laetitia*.

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