The Minister and the Thomistic Social Worker

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THOMISTIC social workers are seldom found in distinctively Protestant social work agencies. They do practice, however, in non-sectarian and governmentally sponsored agencies. These agencies frequently employ Roman Catholics, and Thomistic social work is predominantly the philosophy of the Roman Catholic social worker. Of course, Thomistic workers are also found in Roman Catholic agencies.

Although the Protestant minister may seldom have an opportunity to work closely with Roman Catholic social agencies, he may, nevertheless, wish to know the nature of Thomistic social work in order that he may speak and act intelligently in the few instances where the opportunity might give him the advantage. Thus, from a practical point of view, the minister should be encouraged to have a fundamental understanding of Thomistic social work.

The minister, also, ought to be acquainted with Thomistic social work because it is providing today an important challenge, religiously based, to other viewpoints on the current scene. Probably it is fair to say that the dominant outlook of social workers today is psychoanalytic or Freudian. The original teachings of Sigmund Freud may no longer hold their enchanting spell over the minds of social workers, but in modified form (the variations are notably significant) psychoanalysis is the basic and undergirding philosophy of social work. As a minor thread running through the fabric of social work is the so-called functional philosophy of social work. Functionalism is a result of the teachings of Otto Rank and the faculty of the School of Social Work of the University of Pennsylvania. This outlook holds five chief concepts. These are (1) will, (2) counter-will, (3) separation, (4) creativity, and (5) the present. These concepts mark the functional worker off from the psychoanalytically oriented worker. Of course, there are social workers who hold to no partisan point of view. They may seek to combine the insights of several systems or, in fact, they may claim to recognize a "scientific" base upon sociology or general psychology.

In the present period, however, it is Thomistic social work which presents the primary challenge and opportunity to the social worker who is seeking a religiously based theory of social work. Already a systematic development of Thomistic social work has occurred and year by year new rooms are being added to the edifice. There is no similarly vital and comprehensive movement in philosophy among Protestant or Jewish social workers. From the standpoint of the minister's interest in theology and philosophy, therefore, Thomistic social work is basically important today.

The Thomastic worker looks primarily to the scholastic teaching of the thirteenth century, especially the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, as the most complete and consistent system of interpreting human nature and behavior. This body of principles has in these latter years been interpreted and applied to contemporary life by such Thomists as Etienne Gilson in France and Jacques Maritain in the United States. There is a sense in which it is proper to speak of the philosophic movement as being Neo-Thomism in its current form, since each interpreter of Thomas Aquinas has added something to the original deposit.

Thomism, as it relates to social work, may be analyzed under the following categories: (1) The Nature of the Per-

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son. (2) The Nature of Emotion. (3) Applications to Social Casework.

1. The Nature of the Person

According to the Thomistic outlook, man is an individual, an incommunicable substance who results from a union of physical matter, or "body," with an animating vitality called "soul" or "mind." The resulting union of the two fundamental components in human nature results in a single nature which is autonomous in itself. That is, the essential nature of the person cannot be given away or shared with other natures. It is indeed "incommunicable." It is capable of integrating and directing its own vitality in ways that are absolutely unique. No other person or thing can be said to be identical with the individual person. Even taking the two elements of the integrated self separately (only a theoretical possibility) it is clear that each mind or soul is particularized and that each body is a singular and unique existence.

The single nature which composes the person is primarily rational. This is the basic characteristic of the mind, although "soul" intends an even larger meaning. But, at any rate, the self is rational. Rationality implies that every normal person is responsible for the initiation and conduct of his own activities.

Not only is the self rational, it is also, as the philosophers say, "sensitive." Thomas Aquinas speaks of the "sensitive appetite" as a designate for desires, impulses, deprivations and satisfactions. The sensitive elements, according to Thomistic theory, arise from a lower, organic order in the personality. Rational activity, on the other hand, is characteristic of the higher, spiritual order. The sensitive elements in the personal makeup are not completely divorced from the rational nature, and in fact, under certain conditions, are subject to rational principles. The appetites in coordination with the higher powers create not only the harmonious self but the mature and effective person. Pleasure and pain comprise an essential duality of the sensitive appetite.

Thus, the nature of the person consists not only of the body and mind but also of reason and feeling. In addition to these components, the self possesses the ability to turn its attention toward itself, to contemplate the basic harmony or disharmony of the personality, and to judge the relation in harmony between the self and the external order of things. Man as a creature who experiences pleasure and pain and seeks satisfactory adjustments with his environment is not fully man. Man in his complete meaningfulness is able, in addition, to be conscious of himself as a subject of the sensitive appetite, as a creature who seeks social adjustment and as a person who is able to contemplate the several ingredients in his makeup. This plus element in man's makeup entitles him to the appellation of man. It also points to the meaning of "soul."

The soul of the person in action is primarily guided by what may be called the practical intellect or conscience. Conscience implies the application of reasoning processes to specific kinds of behavior, principally those in which there may be said to be moral aspects. Conscience is not a product of pure reasoning or of empirical knowledge. Rather, it is a quality derived from the essential self as it seeks to establish and act on guides or principles to practical behavior.

Conscience, as Thomas Aquinas indicated, is a witness to what a person has or has not done. Thus, conscience makes it impossible for the person consciously to deny having or not having done a particular act. Conscience operates in other ways. It is evident when a person knows that he has or has not done that which he feels called upon to do. Conscience also is present when the individual makes a judgment that something which was or was not done was based on its conformity with the total-

ity of human nature. Finally, conscience is operative when conduct is evaluated as having been well or poorly done. Conscience may be influenced by factors external to the self yet, fundamentally, it exists as a quality of the mind's awareness of the essential order and rightness of human conduct. Guilt can be understood only in a context of the individual understanding through conscience the nature of the self and its expressions. Guilt can only be self-induced. It can never be socially applied to the individual.

Thus, the person is a unified complex of variable elements. The self (in terms of "will") seeks to maintain the proper harmony or balance between the composing elements in order that the individual may live and act in accordance with the requirements of his own inner harmony and in constructive expression and association with his environment.

2. The Nature of Emotion

The importance of the rational powers of the person cannot be overestimated in accounting for Thomistic philosophy, yet a full accounting of the nature of man will lay stress upon the impelling character of the basic appetites. On the whole, the intellectual nature of man calls for discrimination. The natural appetites, however, incline the person to reach out for any extrinsic value that has the possibility of being united with it. The appetites at times originate in the exercise of bodily organs and in verifiable instances influence bodily operations. The appetites are extremely powerful even to the point of minimizing the rational component in man. "Emotion" is usually the term which is applied in our time to the natural appetites.

Thomas Aquinas believed that the emotions of man have their basis in a single generative power that is divided into two definite components. These have been termed the "concupiscible" and the "irascible." The concupiscible components are those by which man "is simply inclined to seek what is suitable according to his senses, and to flee from what is hurtful. In other words, the concupiscible components urge the person in the direction of every value which is capable of providing sensual pleasure or satisfaction and away from those values which are likely to cause sensual pain or dissatisfaction. According to Thomistic thinking there are six possible expressions of concupiscible emotion: love, desire, joy or delight, hatred, aversion or abhorrence, and sadness.

The concupiscible elements in man's emotions are balanced to a degree by the irascible powers. The irascible components possess a power to resist negative forces which might bring harm to the person. The Latin **irasci** means "to be angry." Thomas Aquinas used this term to designate those elements within the individual's makeup which motivate him in relation to values that can be obtained or avoided only with difficulty or danger. These are the resistive emotions of man. They seek to overcome and rise above whatever detractions may stand in the way of the expression of the concupiscible powers. The expressions of the irascible powers are: hope, despair, daring, fear, and anger.

A highly simplified example of the operation of these emotions can be seen in the example of a parent who severely punishes his child. The child's behavior, no matter what its basic morality may be, creates feelings of insult or injury on the part of the parent. These feelings are expressed in anger. Anger is an irascible emotion. It leads to a wish for resistance and revenge. Punishment is an expression of this emotion and provides an outlet for the parent unless the higher principle of rationality intervenes. If anger is acted upon it subsides and the parent then feels positive emotions of satisfaction and even joy.

Moral elements are implied in every emotional expression, although emotions by themselves may be said to be

amoral. The emotions, whether concupisible or irascible, incline the person not only to feeling but to action. The rational powers of the self are more reflective and discriminating and generally are an arbiter and implementer of emotions. Emotions (in line with psychoanalytic theory), may be consciously or unconsciously operative. In the normal person the sensitive powers are, to a considerable degree, under the control of the higher powers of reason and will. Yet, on occasion the sensitive appetites are the controlling and decisive elements in conduct even in the normal person.

Thus, the person, emotionally speaking, is composed of a generic and vital principle which expresses itself in two different ways: concupiscibly, irascibly. The emotional nature of man stands in contradistinction to the rational elements. Both the emotional and rational components are complexly interrelated to the physical or bodily aspects of man's nature.

3. Applications to Social Casework

The Thomist philosophy outlined to this point is not distinctively the product or possession of social work. Actually Thomism (or Neo-Thomism) comprises an effort to rationalize and harmonize the entire range of human experience with the requirements of nature and the human mind. The application of the theory to social work in part can be anticipated from a description of the theory. Yet it may be well, briefly, to note some of the social work derivations.

The social worker of the Thomistic outlook views every person as unique—different from every other person. The worker understands the uniqueness of the individual in terms of such factors as the conscious and unconscious processes which are operative in human experience. He is inclined to believe that professional service can only or best be given on an individualized basis through direct, personal relation with the client.

The Thomistic worker also recognizes that the client who seeks the assistance of the worker is on one score or another dissatisfied with his own ability to manage his situation. He consciously desires to change that situation and perhaps to change himself. The client's knowledge of his own inadequacy is an expression of his awareness of the complex nature of his own makeup. Whether the client uses the Thomistic terminology or not he is expressing difficulties which arise as a result of the imbalance or disharmony between the varying elements of his person. While he may disguise his concern about himself by looking for an external or objective principle of a universal character, he is basically seeking to face himself. Social casework, then, is a process in which the individual searches for self-identity, for self-understanding.

In order for the client to achieve understanding he must be in a position to evaluate both the rational and the emotional components of his problem and to fit them together in an interpretive philosophy which makes sense of them. The far reaches of philosophy, therefore, are not impractical in an effort to meet the existential situation. Both theory and practice go together. As the client applies rational analysis to himself he derives an awareness of the basis for his conduct and is able to formulate for himself a plan of action by which he will be able to establish a more creative and harmonious life, both for himself as a person and for himself in his relations to others in his environment. The significance of reason for the client and the social worker obviously cannot be overestimated. The primary clues to self help lie not in moralisms or in the free expression of emotions but in the cool and sound analyses derived from the practice of reasoning.

The client may profess a clear and open ability to understand himself. If

he does, the social worker has a relatively easy opportunity through his leadership to offer quicker and perhaps more lasting assistance. On the other hand, many clients have virtually no understanding of themselves, in terms of Thomistic philosophy, and present confused and contradictory accounts of themselves and their situation. In the latter case, the task of the social worker is not easy. He is called upon to assist the client in developing rational clarity regarding himself. This calls for a patient and detailed accounting of the various features of the client's makeup and problem. When clarity in self-understanding is achieved, the client's powers to deal with his own situation are released and enhanced. The client who reaches this level of self-understanding may be able not only to solve a particular problem (which has brought him to the social agency) but to carry over such understanding into the solution of later problems. The goal of Thomistic social casework, therefore, is to develop self-understanding through the application of rational processes to the end that the client will be able to manage his own life without the assistance of other persons.

The Freudian and Rankian social workers may not claim to be guided by a religious philosophy and, in fact, in many instances they openly disavow any religious motivation. The Thomistic worker, on the other hand, is consciously assertive of his reliance upon a religiously inspired social work philosophy. Although he may speak of it as Thomistic, he implies that Thomas Aquinas was the most able exponent of a rational philosophy based upon Christian presuppositions. In this sense, the Thomistic worker is avowedly a Christian social worker. He believes firmly that a Christian philosophy of social work is not only possible and desirable; he asserts that it exists and that it is more satisfactory than any other known to the profession.

The minister needs to know the nature of Thomistic social work because he may on occasion cooperate with such workers. He also may be challenged thereby in his own efforts to develop a more adequate understanding of the nature of the human person and the assisting processes which are available in one kind of social work.