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Religion and worldview in the work of Marie Muller-Lulofs, a pioneer in Dutch social work

Religie en levensbeschouwing in het werk van Marie Muller-Lulofs, een pionier in het Nederlandse social work

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ABSTRACT

Social workers nowadays are confronted with recurrent issues about religion and spirituality when in contact with diverse client groups. This was also the case in the beginning of the profession around 1900, in Europe as well as in the US. This study analyses the work of a Dutch pioneer in social work, Marie Muller-Lulofs (1854–1954) and presents the religious and worldview aspects of her reflections on social work. Her standard work *Van mensch tot mensch* (From person to person) of 1916 forms the basic text for theory-driven content analysis by applying the seven-dimension model of worldview of Ninian Smart: doctrine/philosophy, organisations, ethics, stories, experiences, rituals and materials. Results show that Muller-Lulofs makes a strong plea for a secular profession. Social-economic approaches are on the foreground. And yet, the methods, skills and professional attitudes she describes are substantially accounted for in religious and spiritual terms. This is mainly done by introducing narratives and metaphors derived from Christian and Buddhist traditions. It is concluded that Muller-Lulofs uses religion and spirituality in a non-dogmatic and non-prescriptive way, but as a source of inspiration to underpin the new profession. Her approach is relevant for current issues in social work in multicultural societies.

SAMENVATTING

Maatschappelijk werkers worden opnieuw geconfronteerd met vraagstukken over religie en spiritualiteit in hun contacten met diverse cliëntgroepen. Dit was ook het geval bij het ontstaan van het beroep rond 1900, zowel in Europa als de VS. In deze studie wordt het werk van een Nederlandse pionier in het maatschappelijk werk, Marie Muller-Lulofs (1854–1954) geanalyseerd. De religieuze en levensbeschouwelijke aspecten van haar reflecties op maatschappelijk werk worden gepresenteerd. Haar standaardwerk *Van mensch tot mensch* uit 1916 is de basistekst voor een inhoudsanalyse, aan de hand van het zeven dimensie-model van levensbeschouwingen van Ninian Smart: de doctrinaire, institutionele, ethische, narratieve, emotionele, rituele en materiële dimensies. De resultaten laten zien dat Muller-Lulofs pleit voor een seculier beroep. In haar analyse staat een sociaal-economische benadering voorop. De beschrijving van methoden, vaardigheden en professionele houdingen blijken te worden ondersteund door religieuze

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en spirituele termen. Dit gebeurt via verhalen en metaforen uit zowel de christelijke als de boeddhistische traditie. De conclusie luidt dat Muller-Lulofs religie en spiritualiteit gebruikt op een niet-dogmatische en niet-voorschrijvende manier, maar als inspiratiebron voor het nieuwe beroep. De bevindingen zijn relevant voor hedendaagse thema's in het maatschappelijk werk in multiculturele samenlevingen.

Introduction

The Western world is once again debating the integration of religion and professional social work (Canda & Furman, 2010; Praglin, 2004). Migration processes have made Western societies more pluralistic. Consequently, clients introduce multiple worldviews and different religions into the profession. Some professionals and scholars are suspicious and resist or avoid the religion issue (Bowpitt, 1998). Others argue for the legitimacy of religious content in the profession or even consider religious or spiritual diversity as the heart of social work. In their opinion, religion needs to be assessed in culturally sensitive ways and used as an intervention instrument (Canda & Furman, 2010; Furness & Gilligan, 2010a, 2010b; Hodge, 2005a, 2005b; Holloway, 2007; Holloway & Moss, 2010; Sheridan, 2009).

This debate is rooted in history: the intertwining between social work and religion has played a role right from the inception of the profession around 1900. In those days, *caritas*, offered by mainly religious institutions and individuals, transformed into professional social work. By studying the intertwining of social work and religion from a historical perspective we may learn more about contemporary aspects of their integration. Key reflections of a Dutch pioneer of social work, Marie Muller-Lulofs (1854–1954) will be analysed.

Marie Muller-Lulofs was an outstanding figure amidst the social work pioneers of her generation, such as Mary Richmond, Jane Addams (USA), Octavia Hill (UK) and Alice Salomon (Germany). They are regarded as foremothers who all contributed to the transformation of philanthropy into a profession (Agnew, 2004; Hering & Waaldijk, 2003; Jagt, 2008; Lees, 2004). Although they lived in different countries, there are striking similarities. They all started practising philanthropy as volunteers. Next, they developed methods for a new profession, founding institutions and schools for social work in their countries. They introduced social-scientific approaches that were exchanged in international visits and conferences (Hegar, 2008; Hering & Waaldijk, 2003). They motivated social legislation in their home countries. They were also inspired by religious and spiritual traditions.

Muller-Lulofs was founder of the first European School for Social Work in Amsterdam in 1899, just like Mary Richmond founded the first American School for Social Work in New York (Agnew, 2004; Linde, 2007; Waaldijk, Stel, & Laan, 1999). She established Dutch social work institutions, and wrote on topics about poor relief, child protection, women's rights, social housing policies and social law (Linde, 2007). Although she dealt with a society in which the Christian religion had a central position, she opted for a secular perspective in social work. For this reason, studying her work from the broad perspective of worldviews, including religious and secular views, may be relevant for understanding contemporary issues about personal worldviews and professional practice.

The present study aims at describing the role of worldviews in Muller-Lulofs' reflection on professional social work, and at describing how religious themes are presented in a secular way. Our main question is: What are religious and worldview aspects of Muller-Lulofs' reflections on social work? This question was addressed by analysing her influential book *Van mensch tot mensch* (From person to person), published in 1916. In this book, Muller-Lulofs collected her main publications and lectures, unfolding her reflections on philanthropy and social work as a profession. It is the first book on social work methods in the Netherlands (Jagt, 2008). As a whole, it is her intellectual legacy for future generations.

Historical and biographical context

To understand Muller-Lulofs' contribution to social work, we have to pay some attention to the social-historical circumstances and debates of her time. Social work as a profession was developed around 1900, after an era of industrialisation and urbanisation – Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* in 1867. This manifested itself in extreme poverty, unemployment and housing problems in American as well as Western European cities. Ideological views on poverty were discussed in public debates. A major issue was accountability. Were the poor to blame for their situation, or did societal circumstances cause their problems (Agnew, 2004)? Muller-Lulofs adhered to the political principles of social liberals, who considered poverty as a consequence of unfair distribution of wealth in society caused by excesses of the free-market economy (Bervoets, 1999).

Another issue was responsibility. Who was responsible for poor relief: churches, private organisations or the state? In this debate there were significant differences between the Western European and the American approaches. In the US, the Charity Organization Societies (COS) opposed state interference. At the same time, the Dutch equivalent of the COS, a national charity society (De Nederlandse Vereniging voor Armenzorg en Weldadigheid), argued for state responsibility for poor relief. A strong case was made against the traditional religious-charitable form of aid in favour of state initiative, although the religious blocks were not expected to give up their aid (Koenis, 1999). In Germany the Elberfelder system was developed, in which church visitors worked by order of civil authorities; this is an example of cooperation between the church and civil authorities (Waldijk, 1996). In the Dutch situation too, cooperation between three kinds of poor-relief organisations (church, private and state) was growing. In testing the desirability of a professional school for social work, Muller-Lulofs approached representatives of these organisations (Waldijk, 1996). She adhered to the new professional principles of social work (called 'scientific philanthropy') as developed in the UK, Germany and the US, such as investigation, registration, friendly visiting, cooperation and no exclusion on account of religion.

In order to understand Muller-Lulofs' reflections on the new profession, we have to consider some biographical information. Muller-Lulofs was born in a well-to-do Protestant family. Her father belonged to the Mennonite Anabaptist Church in the Netherlands (Doopsgezinde kerk), her mother to the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlands Hervormde kerk). Muller-Lulofs grew up in a mansion on one of the Amsterdam canals. After her marriage she lived in Utrecht and was part of the city's bourgeoisie. She never had a paid job, but started volunteering in Protestant caritas. She became increasingly disappointed in the dogmatic orientation of this philanthropy. As a result, she developed a critical attitude towards Christian confessional approaches and opposed the stringent conduct requirements that the poor had to meet as determined by this religious worldview. She thus opted for secular institutions and established eight of them in the areas of childcare, housing, unemployment, financial support and home care services.

It was in her sixties that Muller-Lulofs published her book, analysed in the present study. In private correspondence in the same period she describes herself as an agnostic (Bervoets, 1994). In terms of both biographical development and professional perspective, Muller-Lulofs might be an important model for contemporary social workers in their search for possible correlations between worldview and social work.

Method

Approaches in social work

In the field of social work, two main approaches to professionalised client practice are found in studies on the role of religion and spirituality: a competence-oriented and a content-oriented approach. Both aim to improve professional practice and 'identify religious and spiritual beliefs as potentially significant resources and targets for intervention' (Furness & Gilligan, 2010b, p. 2). In

the *competence*-oriented approach, descriptions of professional skills are in the foreground, such as self-awareness and reflexivity on personal religious and spiritual beliefs or the absence of them, or responsiveness to the strengths and needs that arise from beliefs of user groups (Canda & Furman, 2010; Furness & Gilligan, 2010a, 2010b; Hodge, 2005a, 2005b). In the *content*-oriented approach, essential features of worldviews as being important to the social-work profession are in the foreground. Swenson (2008) and Mathews (2009) discern characteristics shared by religions and religious groups, like individual experience of the sacred, mythology, rituals and ethos (codes of behaviour), as developed in a community. These approaches are useful towards understanding the phenomenon, but we need a more encompassing elaboration and a clearer definition of dimensions. Social work may benefit from a cross-disciplinary discussion between social-work and religion studies, as argued for by Praglin (2004) from the perspective of social work research and by Knitter (2010) from the perspective of religious studies. Religious studies offer frameworks for a sophisticated understanding of dimensions of religions. In the present study a cross-disciplinary connection will be made using the phenomenological framework of Smart (1996, 1989, 2008).

Worldview framework

The umbrella concept in Smarts' research is 'worldview'. It includes religious and spiritual as well as secular or political ideologies (Smart, 1989, 1996, 2008). Smart distinguishes seven dimensions of worldview: doctrines, rituals, experiences, stories, ethics, organisations and materials (Smart, 1989, 1996, 2008). These dimensions are applicable to the worldviews of a social group, a religion, a political party or an individual. The first dimension, *doctrine and philosophy*, refers to central ideas and beliefs: opinions about life after death, the spirit world, God, but also views on poverty in a specific society. The second dimension, *rituals* represents formal ceremonies or more informal rites and practices, such as meditation, prayer, making fire, chanting mantras, singing a national hymn and celebrating birthdays. The third dimension, *myth and narrative*, is the 'story side' of worldviews. Stories may be rooted in history. Stories about great founders of worldviews, such as Zarathustra, Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad and Marx, as well as creation narratives, belong in this dimension. The fourth dimension refers to *experience and emotion*. This dimension is felt when going through conversion or having feelings of belonging to a religious or political group. It is also present in the starting phase of many religions, for example, the visions of the prophet Muhammad. The fifth dimension is the *ethical and legal*. The ethical part is about norms, principles, duties and virtues of groups and individuals who are adherents of a specific ideology or religion, for example, the principle of non-violence for Mahatma Gandhi. The legal aspect of worldviews may be the sharia law for Muslims or legislation on poverty in a specific country. In the present study the legal aspect is coded in the doctrinal and philosophical dimension, because Muller-Lulofs elaborates on legislation in direct relation to her political opinions. The sixth dimension, the *social and institutional*, shows the religious, political or ideological movement as embodied in a group of people: a Christian community, a political party or a Jewish congregation. In the seventh dimension, the *material*, a worldview becomes visible in material entities – religious ones like holy cities or buildings, places like rivers or sacred mountains, or objects like a cross or a Christmas tree. Secular worldviews may be materialised into statues of national or ideological heroes, objects like mourning clothes or the small houses the poor live in.

In the present study, the seven-dimension model is used to interpret a historical text in search for possible connections between social work and the broad approach of worldview.

Data analysis

The data source, Muller-Lulofs' book *Van mensch tot mensch* (1916), includes chapters on what she herself calls negative and positive philanthropy, theory of the new profession, the role of women in social work, working methods (basic rules for practice), vocational training of professionals in schools for social work, professional behaviour and working with special client groups.

Table 1. Dimensions, categories and subcategories in Muller-Lulofs' work, absolute frequencies.

Dimension	Category	Subcategory	Subtotal per subcategory	Total per dimension
Doctrine/ philosophy	Philosophical and political opinions	Sociological-economic, political	500	933
		Women's issues	376	
		Religious	57	
Ethical	Normative ethics Virtue ethics	Religious opinions	153	770
		Norms/rights/obligations/rules	318	
		Virtues and vices of the philanthropist	228	
		Virtues and vices of the poor	71	
Social/ institutional	Institutes for social work	Civil institutions	312	749
		General opinions on institutes and Philanthropy	175	
		Private institutions	88	
		Churches	46	
		Street philanthropy	33	
		Christian institutions for social work	13	
		Amsterdam School for Social Work	82	
		Christian Bible	70	
		Buddhist tradition	45	
		Literary sources	39	
Mythic/narrative	School for social work Stories	Religious heroes	19	333
		Religious metaphors	104	
		Other metaphors	56	
		Biographic	16	
		Philanthropic	242	
		Secular	83	
Experience/ emotions	Experience of Muller-Lulofs	Christian	5	258
		Secular	23	
Material	Christian rituals	Festivals	23	27
		Secular rituals	4	

A systematic analysis of the content of the book was done in three phases. First, for the data selection process, fragments about religion and worldview were chosen, notes were made in the margins of the text and memos about similar concepts in the book were written and discussed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The outcome was that a more detailed analysis was needed to explore Muller-Lulofs' worldview in relation to social work. This led to theory-driven deductive coding for the second phase (Miles, Huberman, & Saldanã, 2014). Data were coded using Ninian Smarts' seven-dimension theory. The dimensions were refined and divided into categories and subcategories, as found in Muller-Lulofs' book (see Table 1). To create inter-rater reliability, decision rules on the categories and subcategories were discussed and decided in consensus meetings of the authors as well as in an expert meeting with theologians. The third phase was summative analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The frequency of the categories and subcategories as found was counted to explore usage, in this case the usage of aspects of religion and worldview in Muller-Lulofs' text. The counting was followed by descriptions and interpretations of the use of the categories and subcategories in relation to the research question.

In defining the unit of analysis, paragraphs as units were too broad, as they were difficult to classify into a single coding category. Focussing on words as units of analysis proved to be too detailed; a viable option was to code at the level of sentences. Sometimes sentences have been coded twice, especially long sentences. Double coding is understandable, because Smart emphasises that dimensions are related to each other; items in one dimension (divided into categories and subcategories) interact with items in other dimensions (Smart, 1996). The following example about the salary rights of women philanthropists is highly illustrative:

The more a woman, through (...) conscientious practice (...) proves that she, as far as zeal, perseverance and responsibility are concerned, equals other women, who in another area do well-paid women's work, the more responsible and important the work that is entrusted to her by private organisations, by municipalities and

the state will be; and the more people will realise that social work is no work for amateurs (...) and that these workers have the right to a salary. (Muller-Lulofs, p. 105)

This sentence contains an ethical dimension (virtue of the philanthropist: zeal, perseverance, responsibility), an institutional dimension (private organisations and municipalities that entrust social work) and finally doctrine and philosophy (political opinion, the right to a salary). By coding, counting and interpreting as described, Muller-Lulofs' reflections on the relation between religion, worldview and social work become understandable.

Results

In the work of Muller-Lulofs, the doctrinal/philosophical dimension was most accounted for, followed by the ethical and social-institutional, the mythic/narrative and the experience/emotional dimensions. The material and ritual dimensions were seldom found. [Figure 1](#) shows the results per dimension in absolute frequencies. Describing Muller-Lulofs' worldview content, this paragraph follows the order of importance of the dimensions.

Doctrine and philosophy

The dimension of doctrine and philosophy (30%) was found in the following three subcategories: social-economic and political opinions (often expressed in relation to legislation), women's issues and opinions on religion (see [Table 1](#)).

In social-economic analyses, Muller-Lulofs describes the life circumstances of lower social classes. She translates her political opinions into proposals for national laws and local social policy. Social work should prevent and resist economic causes of poverty and help the poor out. 'If we for a moment imagined the dangers the economically weak person is exposed to, (...) then we would connect him with a counsellor, a friend. This is what the philanthropist must become for that person' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 74). As a consequence, principles for professional practice are: support has to take account of the causes of poverty for a person or a family. At the same time: no support shall be given without an in-depth investigation of real needs. Also, self-help is in the foreground. In describing this social analysis, Muller-Lulofs refers to Mary Richmond, using her metaphor: social work is like 'a ladder that brings you up high'. Social-economic analyses also played an important role in the curriculum of the new School for Social Work.

Muller-Lulofs' view on the role of women in society is rather progressive for her time. Although she does not regard herself a feminist, she argues for paid jobs for women. She considers the domestic role as the most important task for women, but at the same time bourgeois women's arguments not to work outside the house are combatted. 'House slaves', they are called. Furthermore, female qualities

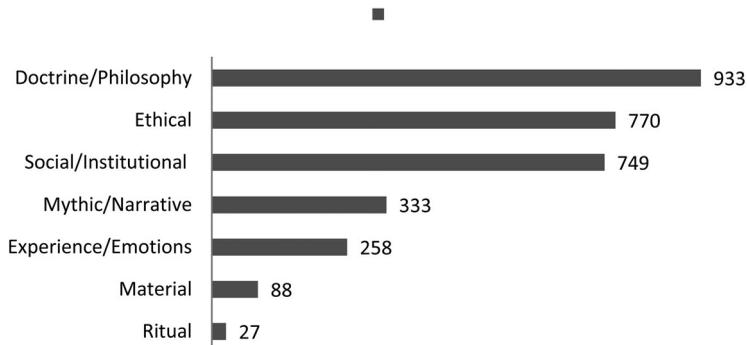


Figure 1. Distribution of dimensions, absolute frequencies.

such as tact, gentleness and perseverance make women extremely good at performing as philanthropists – in modern parlance, as social workers. Muller-Lulofs describes two types of philanthropists: the 'emotional philanthropist', more found among women, who are giving and loving but who risk self-sacrifice. The second type is the 'rational philanthropist', more found among men who work in a systematic way, following rules and having aims but who risk becoming rigid. The ideal philanthropist combines both aspects, feeling and thinking in a balanced professional way.

Finally, within the dimension of doctrine and philosophy the subcategory of religious opinions was found. In a critical overview of charity, Muller-Lulofs discusses motives and methods as found in Christian history. The most inspiring for her is the motive of brotherly love seen in early Christian communities and their method of the individual approach, 'a method which is nowadays considered as the best' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 30). Also inspiring in many ways is Church father Luther: 'with him begins a healthy method of philanthropy; he considers not only the church but also the state as responsible' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 33).

As a whole, the dogmatic/philosophical dimension is on the foreground in the reflections. Within this dimension, socio-economic and political opinions are by far more important than religious ones. First, Muller-Lulofs considers knowledge of social circumstances as a prerequisite of professionalism. Second, she pleads for a new role of women in society, especially in the profession of social work. Third, Muller-Lulofs claims poor relief as a secular, civil and professional field. Finally, concerning religious views, explicit dogmatic views are not found: no opinions of God, Jesus Christ, life after death and so on, yet Muller-Lulofs finds in Christian history motives and methods that she considers crucial to the profession.

Ethics

The ethical dimension (24%) includes normative and virtue ethics. The first category, normative ethics, contains the subcategory of norms, rights and obligations. These appear in concepts such as mistakes, faults and rights of the poor, and consequently obligations and responsibilities of the professionals. Mistakes of the poor, like the injustice done to a child who is forced by his father to go out begging, are considered in the context of their social position and upbringing. Some of Muller-Lulofs' basic rules for philanthropic methods have an ethical content: 'do not help people who can help themselves' for if a philanthropist takes over, the poor may stop following their own conscience and become dependent.

The second category, virtue ethics, contains virtues (good attitudes) and vices (bad attitudes) form the larger part of this dimension. Vices of the poor include lying, cheating, lethargy, scolding and weakness of will. Muller-Lulofs again describes these vices of the poor as the outcome of their life circumstances, and accordingly calls them class vices. Examples of the poor's virtues are willpower, feeling of honour, independence, pride and a sense of responsibility for their own situation.

Social work professionals have the responsibility to deal with the situation of the poor by using professional virtues. Yet philanthropists have class vices too: arrogance, lack of respect, miserliness and a patronising attitude towards the poor. These vices represent a biased attitude of the upper class towards the lower class. Virtues of a philanthropist include empathy, friendliness, temperance and cheerfulness. There are also religious-inspired virtues of philanthropists, like compassion and forgiveness, although the concept of religious virtues is not mentioned as such.

Perhaps there is no other work which evokes the spirits of both good and evil in a person more than philanthropy. It causes the most beautiful and holy feeling of compassion, heavenly love, and at the same time it causes the emergence of the coldest egoism, the most arrogant judgments, the most calculating virtue-in-disguise. (Muller-Lulofs, p. 55)

As a whole, in the ethical dimension professional virtues and vices are on the foreground. Muller-Lulofs starts by designing a new, professional ethics, describing undesirable attitudes (vices) and positive attitudes (virtues) of social workers, an advanced approach in her time. She subsequently includes some religious virtues and vices in the design.

Social-institutional aspects

The social/institutional dimension (24%) was represented through institutions for social work and the School for Social Work. The institutions are from various denominations: civil, private and Christian (including churches). Information about 'street philanthropy' and 'front-door philanthropy' was also labelled here, because it is a *non*-institutionalised form of philanthropy. The same holds true for remarks about philanthropic agencies in general, like: 'Every philanthropic agency must aim at making itself redundant' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 6). Such remarks are meant to be applicable to all institutions for social care.

Muller-Lulofs criticises confessional Christian philanthropy – be it churches or Christian philanthropic institutions – about being too strict in its selection of families or individuals that may receive relief:

The fact that belonging to one church or another, professing one doctrine or another, holds a connection with acquiring money or goods, which is indispensable to making a living, is a very hard test on the integrity of the poor (...). As everyone knows, the poor are generally no more virtuous than other people, (...) and for that reason, many of them cannot get help from the church. (p. 7)

When deacons of the church in the city of Utrecht had good reason to believe that the poor they helped used alcohol or begged, they stopped helping them. Private care also set requirements and excluded people because of their lifestyle. 'Exclusion is the rule, acceptance is an exception' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 165). Muller-Lulofs pleads for mildness rather than strictness.

The School for Social Work that Muller-Lulofs founded had a non-religious, secular identity. Students were educated in practical skills as well as in economics and sociology; the aim was to enable future social workers to analyse the life circumstances of the poor. Concerning religious and non-religious worldviews, the school offered a broad perspective. Teachers and students had different worldviews. 'Through this diversity, they will develop respect for everyone's honest beliefs, as different as they may be from their own opinions; they will try to develop their own worldview' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 106).

Muller-Lulofs does not criticise the faith-based orientation itself of organisations, unless it goes along with preconditions set for the poor. Likewise, she pleads for cooperation between institutions of various denominations.

Altogether, Muller-Lulofs claimed that poor relief was no longer the exclusive terrain of Christian institutes, like the churches. She held a strong plea for a professional field, implemented by new secular institutes, and her secular School for Social Work provided professional education with new methods independent of religious creed. At the same time, she advocated the view that respect for religious diversity is a central aspect of professionalism. This is taught in the School for Social Work and needs to be practised in all professionals institutions.

Myths and narratives

The mythic/narrative dimension (10%) was found in stories and metaphors. There were citations, paraphrased versions of stories, one sentence out of a story, and more indirect metaphorical allusions coming from the Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions and from literary sources.

The book starts with a biblical motto: 'Take the shoes off your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground'. This quotation about the vocation of Moses stems from the Bible's book of Exodus. The source is not mentioned though. Visiting the poor is like entering holy ground. Some readers may know the source of this quotation, others get the message anyway, without knowing the source. The motto is repeated several times, for example, when Muller-Lulofs explains that well-educated social workers are needed, because volunteers often work with the best intentions but with poor results: 'Not everyone takes the shoes off their feet, knowing that it was holy ground that they entered' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 89). According to the biblical story, God gave Moses a vocation to save his people from Egyptian oppression. Likewise, social work is seen as a vocation.

The metaphor of a holy vocation for the profession is used repeatedly. Other biblical texts are dealt with in the same way, using them without mentioning the source as illustrations for statements about philanthropy and the behaviour of a philanthropist.

Another example of a text whose source is not mentioned is presented in the context of the bad situation of the poor. Muller-Lulofs describes the Trusteeship Council, meeting families who live in hovels, like animals, their children neglected. Muller-Lulofs presents this as inherited poverty: alcoholism that predestines children of alcoholics to become criminal and mentally inferior. 'There are collective sins that hunt the children down unto the third and fourth generation' (p. 45). The text to which this alludes is Exodus 20: 5, the Ten Commandments.

A Buddhist story is also present in the text. Muller-Lulofs opens the first chapter of her book with the story of prince Gautama, who became Buddha. She applies it to her own work as philanthropist. 'I often wished myself in the place of prince Gautama' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 3), meaning that she had a deep wish to be as open as the prince was when seeing suffering. She uses this story as a call for sensitivity to the fate of the poor.

Suppose that you had seen nothing other than happiness and sunshine in the world, and then suddenly there was, like a ghostly appearance in front of you (...) an alcoholic's child, holding the hand of his father, hardly able to keep up with the burdensome ups-and-downs of his father's ways (...) or a beaten woman (...) – wouldn't you be like the Buddha, in silence and seclusion with sombre thoughts? Wouldn't you offer the sacrifice of money and peace and leave your safe wealthy life, to diminish (albeit only partially) the suffering of humanity? (Muller-Lulofs, p. 4)

Metaphors that allude to Christian and Buddhist traditions are also used: 'the devil of alcoholism' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 74), 'the great commandment of child raising' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 79), 'the poor as pariahs' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 67, 98), 'the divine spark in every human being' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 66), 'the highest vocation of philanthropy' (Muller-Lulofs, p. XII, 8, 26). The metaphors are used to increase philanthropists' sensitivity to the situation of the poor.

As a whole, Muller-Lulofs uses narratives derived from the Christian and Buddhist traditions to illustrate professionalism. Initially these narratives are used as a matter of course, without referring to the sources. Next, these narratives are presented to underpin basic attitudes of social workers.

Experiences and emotions

Muller-Lulofs shares her professional experiences and emotions with the reader (11%). One example is her report of a visit to an alcoholic, describing him as a loving father, never a lazy worker, but with drinking periods. She could not help him. There was melancholy, struggle and in the end the self-chosen death.

With him I unlearned to hold in contempt, from the height of my sphere of luxury and dutifulness, the unhappy who without any mercy are dropped and abandoned by society as mental lepers. (Muller-Lulofs, p. 175)

Another example is her visit to a recently widowed woman. She finds mother and daughter sewing. The mother tells her how several visitors, such as the schoolteacher, a church pastor and philanthropists from different institutions, advised her what to do. They were offering money for the education of the girl, a new house and so on. The last two philanthropists proposed to go and get meals from public kitchens for the poor. And then the widow said no. 'If I had lost my hands I would have had to accept (...) but I could not accept that proposal' (Muller-Lulofs, p. 127). Muller-Lulofs reflects upon this as a warning for all philanthropy – not to make people lose their pride and autonomy. She also criticises her own behaviour, because she herself had also brought food vouchers. After this story, she reflects on herself:

When I returned home alone, (...) I thought a lot. She had taught me much. I promised myself that I would never forget about an individual's uniqueness; never ever would I approach a poor person other than with the greatest possible respect, with utter caution. (Muller-Lulofs, p. 128)

As a whole, Muller-Lulofs shares professional experiences and accompanying emotions. Personal private emotions are rarely described. She first reflects on her emotions, like feelings of contempt towards the poor, then shows a willingness to learn from her experiences, which she considers as a prerequisite of professionalism.

The material and the ritual dimension

The material dimension (3%) was found in significant objects that illustrate the situation of the poor: a widow's mourning clothes, a house described as a hovel, a sewing machine to make a living. It was also found in objects that illustrate undesirable behaviour of a philanthropist: a silver handbag and a philanthropist's big hat that fills a small room. The objects provide vivid images, descriptive of unwanted behaviour.

Religious symbols are rarely found. Some rituals were named, such as Christmas festivities and birthday celebrations in child welfare homes. As a whole, the two dimensions are rarely found in the book. It is not her focus when describing proper professionalism.

Discussion

This study aimed to describe the extent to which Muller-Lulofs' reflections on the new social work profession were influenced by religious and secular worldviews. The results indicate that she criticises Christian philanthropy and describes social work as a secular profession, based on scientific approaches. Social-economic analyses, political views on legislation and the contribution of women to social work are her leading philosophical perspectives. The driving force behind the profession is not religion but the need to bring the poor into better life situations. On the basis of this philosophy she changes Christian philanthropy into a secular profession with professional ethics, methods (basic rules for behaviour) and the accompanying attitudes. These need to be educated in the School for Social Work. No confessionality, but professionalism, is the adage. Professional ethics instead of religious ethics and secular institutes instead of religious institutions have the future.

Religion is not completely banned from the descriptions of social work though. In developing professional attitudes, Muller-Lulofs underpins these in religious and spiritual terms, mainly by using narratives and metaphors derived from Christianity and Buddhism. Buddha's story illustrates compassion as a basic professional attitude. Biblical stories illustrate the depth of the profession: a vocation and entering holy ground. The fact that biblical stories are referred to in an implicit way indicates that Muller-Lulofs did not want to use religion in a dogmatic or prescriptive way, only as possible inspiration for professionalism.

Muller-Lulofs has been portrayed as a woman with a protestant Christian background, who became critical of Christian-based philanthropy and founded secular institutions (Bervoets, 1994, p. 199; Linde, 2007; Waaldijk, 1996). This portrayal is confirmed in the present study. Yet what's been missing in the picture until now is the way in which religion still plays a role in her underpinning of social work methods and professional attitudes – in a modest and non-dogmatic way at that. It further reveals how Buddhism is a source of inspiration. Buddhism was introduced in the Netherlands and Europe during her lifetime (Poorthuis & Saleminck, 2009). Biographical archive research may reveal more about the way in which she became familiar with Buddhism.

She was ahead of her times by emphasising the role of secular professional institutes. Interestingly, the schools for social work established after hers were Protestant and Catholic. Furthermore, secularisation in Dutch society did not really start before the 1950s.

She was also ahead of her times in considering two worldviews as inspiring for the profession: the Christian in which she was brought up and a new spiritual tradition that she had met with. This approach can be compared to what is nowadays called multiple religious belonging, where elements from one's own tradition are combined with elements of another faith's tradition (Phan, 2008). Again, further archive research is needed to explore this aspect of her biography.

The contribution of Muller-Lulofs' work to the actual debate on the role of religion and worldview in social work is twofold. She confirms the dangers of religious social work and rigid dogmatic and judgemental approaches. At the same time, she transcends suspicion and avoidance towards religion by underpinning professionalism with religious and spiritual aspects. In doing so, she shows how worldviews can inspire professionalism.

Smarts' model of worldview was used as method of analysis. The seven dimensions proved to be a useful framework by enabling characterisation of Muller-Lulofs' views on the social work profession. It also revealed some neglected aspects. In addition, Smarts' theory enabled a cross-disciplinary connection between religion studies and social work studies, providing a framework for discussing the content of worldviews in the field of social work. Intrinsic to the approach of this study is that, according to Smart's model, content is fragmented into separate aspects: dimensions and categories. As Smart argues, the dimensions are fundamentally interrelated. In our study this also is the case: for example, opinions were shown to influence ethics; experiences and emotions underpinned opinions and narratives underpinned Muller-Lulofs' worldview as a whole. In future research, the seven-dimension approach may be applied to study the worldview of other pioneers of social work and maybe even to contemporary social workers. Finally, this approach gives structure to actual discussions because it covers crucial contents of worldviews.

Muller-Lulofs' work may be a good example of the way in which contemporary professionals can handle diversity of religion, secularity and worldview, meeting clients in multicultural and multi-religious contexts. Following Muller-Lulofs' approach, professional competences in these settings include a non-avoiding, open approach that embraces a critical attitude towards exclusion on account of religious creed or lifestyle; not forcing one's own views on others while at the same time sharing one's own religious and spiritual inspiration; and lastly, developing a personal worldview through dialogue about others' worldviews – an endeavour quite fitting for our times, where religion is a burning issue.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Herma Tigchelaar, theologian (MA), has a professional background in social work education and religious studies.

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