

POINT OF VIEW

DEAR REV. FATHER,

As a social worker within sight of retirement I was glad to know from Miss Wells' letter in your May number that some modern students of social science are taught about the importance of establishing friendly relationships with their clients.

The word 'friend', one of the oldest in our language, is defined in the Oxford dictionary as 'one joined to another in intimacy and mutual benevolence apart from sexual or family love'. Friendship exists at various levels of intimacy; the genuine friendships formed between colleagues, for example, may not extend beyond working hours. Sometimes the intimacy between friends is so great and so perfectly balanced that each in turn assists the other in times of difficulty and the joy of each is enhanced because it is shared in friendship. A friendship may be no less real, however, when one lacks all capacity to understand or sympathize with the needs of the other.

The friendship given by the social worker to her clients is, in the first place, the warm regard of one human being for another and the respect born of an appreciation of the value of human personality. The social worker will find that her relationship to her clients is somewhat similar to that of a doctor to his patients or a priest to his parishioners. The more she develops her capacity to act as mother substitute and confidante, the less she may find consolation for herself.

Examples of Christian friendship are by no means lacking in the classics of spiritual literature. In the Gospels we find examples of perfect friendship, our Lord's friendship with Martha and Mary as well as with their brother Lazarus. We see, too, the imperfect friendships of the Apostles who quarrelled about who should have the best posts in the new kingdom of Israel which they expected Christ to establish. Many examples of Christian friendship are to be found in the lives of the saints, and E. I. Watkin has written of some of the less well known saintly friendships and has given an interesting exposition of spiritual friendship in his recent book *Neglected Saints*. A study of *The Ancrene Rewle*, recently translated by Miss Sala, makes it evident that even the medieval anchoress was not expected to be entirely friendless and much guidance can be found in the writings of the English mystics in regard to Christian friendship and the laws by which it is governed.

Miss Wells might like to know of the Guild of Catholic Professional Social Workers, which exists to unite the Catholic members of the profession and to give them the knowledge, encouragement and friendship that is so necessary to Catholic workers in this field of activity.

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