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Andrej KOSTELNÍK

Editorial

Dear Colleagues.

We are pleased to present the latest issue of our journal. In the individual studies the authors present their findings in the fields of history, theology, social work and psychology. First study analyses the relationship between the sacrament of repentance and spiritual guidance in the Orthodox tradition, seeking to clarify their respective boundaries and competences. The authors of second article deal with the area of prosocial tendencies in future helping professionals who are preparing for the profession of social worker and nurse. In their research focused on identifying prosocial tendencies in students from the perspective of their field of study, age and employment. The next study analyses the precondition for a concept of spiritual guidance that seeks to implement the system of social counselling as well as the possibilities of its application within the professional training of future social workers. The family needs to be ensured, including by the state, that it is functional and more intensive creation of instruments of social support for the family. The authors of fourth article explore the potential of Gospel messages as a source of inspiration for ethical values in the social work profession. They analyze the relationship between Christian principles and the ethical standards found in the Slovak Code of Ethics for Social Workers. The next study examines the theological concepts of free choice in Eastern Orthodox theology. The differences between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian teachings on the relationship between free will and predestination in the matter of human salvation are revealed. Author of following article tries to explain that the religiosity of a person is much more complicated and multifaceted than it seems from the outside. Physiological and psychological needs, intelligence and the environment have an impact on human religiosity. Religion is focused on the inner world of a person, on its religious experience, which is of great importance for the emergence of the psychology of religion. The last study presents a look into spiritual life of man. The author here introduces that salvation is not automatic. Man must first understand his state of sinfulness and separation from God. Only then can he embark on the path to salvation. God, in his Church, offers man many means of support on this difficult path. Finally, we bring you a report on an international scientific conference on Byzantine studies.

We believe that the studies in this issue will enrich your intellectual perspectives with new knowledge and use in your creative scientific and academic work.

Pavol Kochan (editor)

THE QUESTION OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE

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INTRODUCTION

The topics of repentance and spiritual guidance occupy a central place in contemporary theological and ecclesial discourse, for within them the entire endeavour of the believing Christian to live an authentically Orthodox spiritual life is concentrated. The Church exhibits a marked sensitivity to these issues, as we daily encounter both the positive – and, regrettably, the negative – outcomes of ill-considered spiritual direction carried out in the sacrament of repentance. Consequently, instead of fostering the healthy spiritual formation of the Christian personality through the Church's liturgical and worship life, which shapes the believer's overall spiritual life, we often witness unhealthy situations that deform it. We are aware, of course, that the negative repercussions for the spiritual life – and thus for the ongoing spiritual maturation of the Christian – resulting from the improper practice of spiritual guidance within the sacrament of repentance are, at first glance, difficult to discern. [4] Yet this is no reason to underestimate or overlook the issue. Accordingly, based on sound theological, biblical, and patristic teaching in harmony with the original liturgical praxis, the following pages seek to outline the essence, method, significance, and further determinants of authentic spiritual guidance for the Orthodox Christian in the context of the sacrament of repentance.

THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE AND SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Our topic is indeed compelling; yet a direct, objective, and candid engagement with it can readily elicit disagreement, rejection, and even condemnation from some quarters. Many assume that within the ecclesial and spiritual "sphere" everything is wholly good and positive, and that it is therefore improper to scrutinize, much less critique, the "details" of the sacrament of repentance. Confession – and especially spiritual guidance – is often mistakenly deemed an impenetrable "taboo," and the relationship between penitent and confessor is viewed not only as a churchly mystery (which, to be sure, it is) but

also as shrouded in an aura of secrecy, mystical exoticism, and even metaphysical overtones. [5] That the sacrament of repentance yields positive results is natural and expected: such fruits pertain primarily to its spiritual and soteriological dimension and then radiate into the depth and breadth of the believer's life. By contrast, the emergence of negative outcomes – particularly those with tragic consequences – is unacceptable and intolerable in view of the sacrament's soteriological character; in other words, it is impermissible for any sacrament, repentance included, to occasion situations that leave harmful traces in a Christian's life.

What, then, is meant by the *spiritual guidance* of the believer? Spiritual guidance is oriented toward assisting the Christian in fulfilling God's will. The spiritual father (confessor) should possess a measure of spiritual experience and be able to foster and deepen the believer's communion with God. He offers counsel, encouragement, motivation, and inspiration; he can discern what is beneficial for the believer's spiritual life and thus support the latter's overall growth and perfection. [2] Consequently, the guided believer cultivates the conviction that everything entwined within this highly confidential relationship carries reliability and security. Provided these dynamics are enacted in love, reverence, and the freedom of the Gospel, no difficulties should arise. Difficulties do arise, however, when spiritual counsel shifts from the realm of freedom toward undue glorification – at times even being elevated to the status of indisputable divine commandments that must be obeyed without question. The problem intensifies whenever total subordination and obedience are demanded of the believer in a manner that conflicts with personal freedom. At precisely this juncture in our research, we must note a serious misunderstanding: the truly mystical reality of the sacrament of repentance is being conflated with the individualized character of spiritual direction – that is, the objective, charismatic sacrament is confused with a subjective, personal process. [6] We consider it, at the very least, spiritually dangerous to place a human, subjective element on a par with the authority of God's commandments – or even to compare them at all.

THE NEED TO DISTINGUISH THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE FROM SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

At this juncture our topic must be delineated on two distinct levels:

(a) the objective – ontological and charismatic – level, which encompasses the sacrament of repentance. This sacrament possesses not only a charismatic dimension but, above all, an ontological and soteriological character expressed through a defined liturgical rite with specific prayers as prescribed by ecclesial practice;

(b) the subjective – human – level, to which spiritual guidance properly belongs. Spiritual guidance is not governed by any set ritual; it is subjective and individual, immediately dependent on two persons – the spiritual father (confessor) and the spiritual child (believer) – who must “co-operate.” Moreover, it lacks both a mystical and a soteriological character.

On the first level, the ontological and charismatic element derives from the divine economy – specifically the Trinitarian and Christological nature of the sacraments celebrated in the name of Christ’s death and resurrection. From this Christocentric reality each sacrament draws its power, imparting divine grace to the believer. [3] On the second level, an unmistakably anthropocentric element is evident: the soundness or unsoundness of spiritual direction is conditioned by numerous subjective factors. With regard to spiritual guidance in the context of the sacrament of repentance, we consider to state that any special prominence – or for some, the supposed “exceptionality” – of the sacrament does **not** arise from the sacrament itself (for there is no intrinsic reason for such an emphasis), but rather from the external addition of spiritual direction. Strictly speaking, the sacrament of repentance need not include *spiritual guidance* at all; the latter should occur at a separate time and under different conditions. It is therefore a grave error to assume that the essence or spiritual depth of the sacrament resides in spiritual guidance – a secondary, subjective, and, for some, even “psychological” element. Many have endured the bitter experience of lengthy, empty, and spiritless meetings in which attention is focused primarily on guidance and counsel rather than on the sacrament’s ontological and charismatic reality. Hence the faithful seldom taste the joy and beauty of the sacrament of repentance in its ecclesial-liturgical dimension, as they do in other sacraments. The essence of the sacrament and the forgiveness of sins do not consist in a personal conversation aimed at subjective assessment and the issuing of “right” advice; rather, they are a matter of God’s grace and of the Church’s philanthropy toward the sinner. [9] Dialogue is indeed important, yet it must never assume an authoritative or determinative character. In accord with ecclesial order, the

believer – conscious of personal spiritual need and the continual striving for perfection – turns to the local ecclesial community and its priest (or bishop), who is by office the believer’s “natural” spiritual father, in order to confess and obtain forgiveness of sins.

Spiritual guidance, as follows from the words above, is something that lies outside the framework of sacrament of repentance: it may, but need not, accompany the sacrament. Within the sphere of guidance, the Church grants the freedom to choose a spiritual father, confessor, or *starets* – the one who directs another Christian. According to Orthodox tradition this need not be a priest; in many cases the spiritual father is an experienced *starets* or monk. We may thus distinguish two realities: the charismatic mediation of the sacrament of repentance, and, separately, the broader spiritual needs and guidance involving conversation and counsel. Consequently, the priest who administers the sacrament may be a different person from the one who provides ongoing spiritual direction; the believer is free to choose a spiritual father irrespective of the priest to whom he or she confesses. Should the same priest serve in both capacities, he must possess the spiritual discernment to distinguish the two acts: when celebrating the sacrament, he must observe the Church’s liturgical order and canons, whereas when advising and guiding he must make clear that what transpires is a distinct activity outside the sacrament, one in which human weaknesses and shortcomings may surface – shortcomings that are irrelevant to the sacramental reality itself. The first reality – the sacrament – is ecclesially instituted and spiritually absolute; the second reality – pedagogical guidance – is relative, open to *oikonomia*, and conditioned by various external and internal factors in both the believer and the priest. [11] We may say, then, that the sacrament of repentance is marked by absoluteness and permanence with respect to divine grace, whereas spiritual guidance is characterized by relativity and an individualized approach.

A HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SACRAMENTAL LIFE

We shall now consider the issue under discussion from a historical-theological point of view, specifically through the lens of Orthodox ecclesial tradition. At the outset it must be acknowledged that matters of repentance, confession, spiritual direction, and, in fact, the entire sacramental life of the Church are not static, immutable, or monolithic; rather, they have been

continuously shaped and developed. [1] Until the fourteenth century, Orthodox theology concentrated upon the unique and pre-eminent mystery of our salvation, whose centre was the Holy Eucharist. [7] All else – individual services, rites, acts, catechesis, pastoral work, and the whole of spiritual life, including repentance – stood in an immediate relationship to the Divine Liturgy and the Eucharistic mystery. [2] Only from the fourteenth century onward, under the influence of the spirit and theology of the West, did the Orthodox Church unfortunately begin to speak of “seven” basic, distinct, and autonomous sacraments. This development brought with it questions of evaluation – “primary” versus “secondary” mysteries – and of how the sacraments relate to and condition one another. [3]

In contemporary Orthodox settings one often encounters the conviction that baptism is inconceivable without chrismation, or that participation in the Eucharist is unimaginable without prior “obligatory” confession (although recent years have witnessed a return to the Church’s original tradition of frequent Communion). A broader view of sacramental life reveals further anomalies: the sacrament of marriage is not an impediment to ordination, but only to the two lower ranks (deacon and presbyter), whereas for the episcopal office marriage paradoxically constitutes a serious obstacle. Such examples expose unusual criteria by which the sacraments are “valued” and “assessed” – at the very least, a non-standard manner of regarding one mystery in relation to another. Our purpose in citing these anomalies is not to criticize current practice per se, but to underscore that the present situation is not the product of a purely internal development of Orthodox theology and tradition; rather, it reflects Western, non-Orthodox modes of thought that have entered the Church. [5] The division and “parcelling out” of the single, universal mystery of salvation into seven separate sacraments, each assigned specific spiritual “values,” strongly recalls scholastic theology. It must be understood that this situation represents a departure from the original biblical and patristic theology.

Any restoration and return to the patristic heritage must begin with a re-evaluation of our understanding of spiritual life. It is theologically untenable to endorse the fragmentation of the one mystery of salvation or to claim that each sacrament represents merely a “part” or “segment” of salvation. From the perspective of the early Church and authentic Orthodox theology, every sacrament is not a fraction but the whole – culmination, fullness, and

absoluteness. Sacraments cannot be understood in isolation, as though each possessed its own discrete “value”; otherwise, human salvation would emerge as the “sum” or “aggregate” of separate elements – an approach disturbingly reminiscent of accumulating points or credits. In the original spiritual and liturgical practice of the early Church each sacrament was regarded as a concrete path, a particular mode of participation in divine grace and thus in the one, indivisible mystery of human salvation in Christ, which culminates in the Holy Eucharist. The person who is baptized thereby participates “automatically” in the indivisible mystery of salvation – and the same holds for every other sacrament. Participation in one sacrament is participation in the whole mystery of salvation. [7] Significantly, in keeping with original Orthodox experience and tradition, there are believers who never receive certain of the “seven” sacraments – for example, celibate clergy and monastics do not receive the sacrament of marriage, and the laity do not receive ordination – yet this entails no “loss,” “defect,” or “diminution” of their share in the mystery of salvation, nor does it imply any ecclesial irregularity. Sadly, contemporary pastoral practice often treats sacramental life as a sequential, step-by-step progression from one sacrament to the next. We should remember the remarkable, indeed unique, tradition of eremitic and ascetical monasticism: many venerable saints spent decades, even lifetimes, in seclusion without confession, without attendance at the Divine Liturgy, and only rarely receiving the Eucharist. How should we judge them today? We would exclude them from communion. Orthodox spirituality requires different criteria – qualitative rather than quantitative; not the number of sacraments received, but the one mystery that culminates in the Eucharist. To put it once again, spiritual life must be viewed through the prism of the unique mystery of salvation in Christ as a unity and totality, not as discrete, separated parts. Salvation is mediated not only through seven sacraments that cleanse and sanctify humanity, but also through every Gospel deed, every act of diakonia, every service, and every genuine spiritual experience. [3]

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND ITS PLACE WITHIN THE SPIRITUAL TRADITION

The foregoing makes it clear that the entire sacramental life of the Christian culminates in the Holy Eucharist. All other sacraments converge upon the Eucharist, which stands at the centre of human existence. Within this framework

the purpose of the sacrament of repentance is precise: to prepare the believer for a worthy and responsible approach to the Eucharist. [1] Repentance – confession included – finds its rationale only when the penitent actually comes to partake of the Eucharist. Hence attempts to enhance the “prestige” or “weight” of repentance by adding a consultative, pedagogical-psychological component are neither appropriate nor necessary. Spiritual direction, which may assume a specifically advisory character, has its rightful place in the Christian’s overall spiritual life, yet at this juncture it remains a secondary matter. A frequently observed – and documented – problem lies in the arbitrariness of the spiritual father. Every case is undeniably personal, unique, and unrepeatable; nevertheless, anyone who directs and advises others often, perhaps unwittingly, speaks from a purely subjective vantage, introducing personal opinions and attitudes. Worse still, this occurs not only in abstract theological questions but in highly sensitive areas of daily life: marriage, child-rearing, and the confrontation of diverse problems and hardships. When a spiritual father adopts an insensitive or – even unintentionally – erroneous stance in such matters, how can one reconcile this with the sacrament of repentance and its soteriological import?

One source of the confusion and conflation of the sacrament of repentance with spiritual direction is monastic practice, in which the less-experienced monk continually “opens his thoughts” to a more experienced elder who guides him. The elder entrusted with such direction was not necessarily ordained. This practice was integral to monastic life and discipline, founded upon thorough obedience and the renunciation of self-will. According to the Byzantine monastic *typikon* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, monks were forbidden to attend – or abstain from – the Holy Eucharist on their own initiative without the igumen’s or spiritual father’s permission. Historically, this had a decisive impact on the sacrament of repentance. During periods of spiritual decline – evident, for instance, in the canons of the Quinisext Council in Trullo (Constantinople, 691) – and at a time when the clergy had forfeited moral and spiritual authority, monasteries became the sole centres of spiritual guidance and monks the only spiritual advisers available to lay Christians. [8] Thus, two distinct realities – the sacrament of repentance and spiritual direction – merged into a single act, and spiritual direction was absorbed into the sacrament. This historical development has contributed substantially to the unhealthy situation we face today. The need for pastoral and spiritual guidance in the Church is

beyond dispute, but such guidance must take place outside the sacrament of repentance. Church tradition bears witness to the sacrament of repentance and, separately, to other times and conditions suited to pastoral and spiritual conversation or counsel – arrangements that enable the spiritual father, when necessary, to seek advice or assistance from a bishop, another priest, or the broader spiritual experience of the Church. [9]

CONCLUSION

The importance and significance of the sacrament of repentance for the spiritual life are clear and indisputable. Likewise, the necessity of spiritual direction – especially in complex situations – is obvious and highly pressing. In our difficult times the practice of repentance is multiplying, and voices within the Church increasingly stress the need for spiritual guidance. [10] Yet we all realize that it is impossible to have our elder or spiritual father constantly at hand whenever we require counsel. What we do have – always – is a priest nearby. This practical, yet far from negligible, fact underscores the distinction between the sacrament of repentance and spiritual direction, as well as the irreplaceable position of repentance as a charismatic, soteriological sacrament in which spiritual direction is by no means a prerequisite. A second, more profound reason is biblical. The Apostle Paul writes: “Christ has set us free; stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” [Gal 5:1]. We must remember that there are always those who would curtail the freedom we possess in Christ [cf. Gal 2:4]. The Christian is called to resist all attempts to undermine and deny that liberty: “To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you” [Gal 2:5]. Every believer is invited to enter into “the glorious freedom of the children of God” [Rom 8:21]. As the same apostle asks: “Why should my freedom be judged by another’s conscience?” [1 Cor 10:29].

We therefore conclude that, although the sacrament of repentance and spiritual direction share the same ultimate orientation, they are two distinct realities. The sacrament of repentance is a mystery of the Church; spiritual direction is not. The sacrament cannot be questioned, modified, or distorted, whereas spiritual direction is conditioned by many internal and external, objective and subjective factors. Only in relation to the sacrament does one find the unshakable certainty of charismatic, spiritual assurance. [5] In the course of

spiritual direction genuine benefit may indeed be experienced, yet spiritual uncertainty – with its attendant questions – is never entirely excluded. We do not dispute the indispensability of the sacrament of repentance, nor raise concerns about its canonical correctness. But with regard to spiritual direction, numerous objections may be justified: the manner in which it is conducted; the theological and spiritual knowledge, prerequisites, and experience of the guide; the flawless application of such guidance to daily problems; and the potential for distortion through an inaccurate reflection of the guide's own spiritual life. Spiritual life is the personal development of every believer; there are no external guarantees or securities. [11] It is the process of spiritual maturing from childhood to adulthood [cf. 1 Cor 13:11]. A spiritual life monitored and judged under constant supervision alienates the Christian from the immediate and irreplaceable source of spiritual vitality, keeping the believer in spiritual immaturity, even passivity, with respect to self-knowledge and self-perfection in Christ.

SUMMARY

The topic of repentance and spiritual guidance is central to theological and ecclesiastical discussions in the Orthodox Church, as it represents the Christian's effort to live a true Orthodox spiritual life. The Church exhibits particular sensitivity towards these issues, as the outcomes of improper spiritual guidance, especially within the sacrament of repentance, can be both positive and negative. The aim of this work is to examine the essence, method, significance, and factors of authentic spiritual guidance in the context of the sacrament of repentance, based on theological, biblical, and patristic teachings in accordance with traditional liturgical practices. The sacrament of repentance encompasses both an objective, ontological, and charismatic dimension, as well as a subjective, human dimension of spiritual guidance. Spiritual guidance is meant to assist the believer in fulfilling God's will and developing a deeper communion with God, with the spiritual father providing this assistance. Problems arise when spiritual advice turns into authoritarianism, which disrupts the balance between the believer's personal freedom and obedience. Emphasis is placed on distinguishing between the objective, ontological, and charismatic nature of the sacrament of repentance and the subjective, individual nature of spiritual guidance. The sacrament of repentance is not dependent on spiritual guidance, which should take place outside of its framework. Historical events, especially

after the 14th century, contributed to the division of the sacraments in the Church, which diverges from the original holistic understanding of salvation in the early Christian Church. While spiritual guidance is necessary and beneficial in certain situations, it should not overshadow the essence of repentance. The primary goal of repentance is to prepare the believer for worthy participation in the Eucharist. Spiritual guidance is secondary and provides personal advice, without altering the essence of the sacrament. In conclusion, there is an emphasis on the need to preserve the integrity of the sacrament of repentance, while spiritual guidance occupies a specific, consultative role. The spiritual growth of the believer should not depend on constant external oversight, but on the believer's personal spiritual maturity in Christ.

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THE QUESTION OF SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE

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Abstract

This study analyses the relationship between the sacrament of repentance and spiritual guidance in the Orthodox tradition, seeking to clarify their respective boundaries and competences. Drawing on biblical, patristic, and liturgical sources, the author emphasizes that repentance possesses an ontological and charismatic character whose purpose is to prepare the faithful for full participation in the Eucharist. Although spiritual guidance is indispensable within the Church, it is primarily a subjective, anthropocentric process that depends on the personal interaction between spiritual father and spiritual child and lacks an ontological status. The article traces the historical conflation of spiritual guidance with the sacrament of repentance – a development that culminated after the fourteenth century under Western influence and monastic spiritual practice – and shows how this trajectory has fostered contemporary risks of authoritarian misuse, with detrimental effects on the spiritual freedom and maturity of the faithful. The author therefore proposes a clear distinction between confession and spiritual counselling: while confession remains a liturgically defined sacrament, spiritual guidance should retain a consultative and flexible character and must not be treated as a prerequisite for the sacrament of repentance. The conclusion underscores the need to preserve the integrity and charismatic dimension of the sacrament of repentance while cultivating responsible forms of spiritual guidance that foster personal freedom and mature Christian growth. In so doing, the study contributes to current theological discussions on the proper place of spiritual guidance within the Orthodox Church.

Keywords

sacrament of repentance, spiritual guidance, Eucharist, ontological and charismatic character, Orthodox Church, patristic tradition, spiritual freedom

PROSOCIAL TENDENCIES OF HELPING PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS IN TERMS OF AGE AND EMPLOYMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Prosocial behavior is behavior in which help is provided to another person without any type of reward. This issue is addressed by several authors, such as [13], and the author [5], in her publication, also defines prosocial behavior as individual types of prosocial behavior and prosociality as an important human characteristic. A closer description of individual types of prosocial behavior is addressed by authors [4], from whom we adopted the methodology for processing our research. When defining the term prosociality, the definition of the term altruism is often also found, which is addressed by [14], [8] and [6].

In the field of research, several authors present their results in the field of prosocial behavior and tendencies towards prosocial behavior. The authors [11] point to the results of research conducted with university students who were blood donors at least once. Donors were compared with non-donors and it was determined whether there were differences in prosocial behavior tendencies in these two groups. A significant contribution to the study of prosocial behavior was made by the author [1] in his work ProsocialTendenciesMeasure – Revised (PTM-R) - the first experience with a short methodology for measuring prosocial behavior, where the author demonstrated the reliability of the Slovak version of the self-assessment scale for measuring six types of prosocial behavior in people. The authors [2] studied prosocial personality in nurses and future nurses (students of the Nursing study program) and in their work they present that the nursing profession belongs to the helping professions, i.e. it is identified with a planned form of helping. The authors present their results in such a way that significant differences in prosocial tendencies were recorded between these groups of respondents, with nurses who practice this profession achieving higher average scores in individual subscales.

Prosocial behavior of students in the field of social work is largely supported within the framework of volunteering in primary and secondary schools, i.e. before starting their studies at a university in a given field of study [10]. The profession of nursing is a challenge in which there is a willingness to professionally care for those who need help. In order to achieve this goal, nurses need not only motivation, incentives, but an important element is also personal prerequisites – prosociality [12].

Prosocial behavior is key for professions that require constant interaction and support for other people. For future nurses and future social workers, this ability is invaluable, because it allows them to effectively provide care and help to those who need it most. Personally, a helping professional should be mature, empathetic and prosocial [3]. A strong source of motivation for prosocial behavior is also a person's spirituality. The experience of spirituality is unique and individual for everyone. This area helps people to experience everyday life meaningfully and with satisfaction. It gives helping professions strength and courage in this very rewarding and exhausting work. Spirituality is an important part of their personal and professional lives for many [9].

Prosocial behavior includes empathy, willingness to help and developing a sense of responsibility towards others, which is the basis of high-quality professional work in the field of health and social care, which should be based on basic ethical principles, dominated by the desire to always act in the best interests of the patient or client [7]. It is important for these professionals that these tendencies are formed during their studies, when they learn not only professional skills, but also how to respond appropriately to the emotional and psychological needs of clients. This approach can lead to improved relationships with clients and patients, increased efficiency of care and improved overall quality of life for those receiving health and social care.

OBJECTIVE OF THE WORK

The objective of the submitted report is to determine the prosocial tendencies of students in the fields of study of social work and nursing from the perspective of field of study, age and employment.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

Our research sample consisted of students from the St. Elizabeth College of Health and Social Work. They were students of the social work and nursing study program and there were 321 students. The socio-demographic structure of

our research sample is shown in Table 1, where we see that out of the total number of respondents, 232 were female (72%) and 89 were male (28%). The students were aged between 20 and 54 years, with an average age of 37.2 years (SD = 8.7).

Scheme 1 Socio-demographic indicators of the research sample

		Number	%
Total number of respondents		321	100
Field of study	Social work	225	70
	Nursing	96	30
Level of study	Bc.	215	67
	Mgr.	106	33
Gender	Men	89	28
	Women	232	72
		Mean (SD)	Range
Age		37,2 (8,7)	20 – 54

METHODOLOGY

In our research, we chose a quantitative research strategy, where a questionnaire was used as a tool, which consisted of questions aimed at identifying socio-demographic indicators and questions aimed at identifying prosocial tendencies of university students in the field of helping professions, specifically the fields of study Social Work and Nursing were monitored. The questionnaire consisted of 23 questions (items) and was taken from the author [1], who monitored the verification of psychometric properties of the methodology for measuring prosocial behavior. The response scale to individual Likert-type questions was 5-point with answer choices, where: (1) meant it does not describe me at all, (2) it describes me poorly, (3) it describes me to some extent, (4) it describes me strongly and (5) it meant it describes me completely. The author [1] states that the diagnosis of prosocial tendencies is specified into six types of prosocial behavior. The authors [4] developed the Prosocial Tendencies Measure methodology, or its revised version PTM – R, which allows, in addition to assessing tendencies towards individual types of prosocial behavior, to measure a global score. Within the framework of this methodology,

we distinguish six types of prosocial tendencies: anonymous, public, altruistic, emotional, requested and prosocial behavior in critical situations.

RESULTS

We evaluated and processed the collected data in the SPSS statistical software. In the statistical description of the obtained data, we applied basic statistical description and to verify statistically significant differences of the investigated variables, we used non-parametric tests for two independent samples - Mann-Whitney U-test and non-parametric tests for three independent samples - Kruskal-Wallis test in our research set, due to the asymmetry of the distribution of individual variables in the monitored samples.

We assumed that students of the monitored study fields of social work and nursing would differ statistically significantly in the prevailing type of prosocial tendencies. These differences are shown in Table 2, where we can see that out of the six types of prosocial tendencies, statistically significant differences were recorded in two types observed, namely in the type of requested prosocial tendencies ($U = 35383.4$; $p < 0.001$) and prosocial tendencies in critical situations ($U = 36450.0$; $p < 0.01$). Both types of prosocial tendencies were recorded in nursing students with higher average values compared to social work students. This finding may indicate that future nurses have a higher tendency to behave prosocially in critical situations, which is natural given the profession, compared to social work students. Other differences were found in the emotional and anonymous types, which were also found with higher values in nursing students. Based on our results, we can conclude that statistically significant differences were recorded in two types of prosocial tendencies out of the six types monitored, namely in the requested type of prosocial tendencies and in prosocial tendencies in critical situations.

Scheme 2 Differences in types of prosocial tendencies among students by field of study

	Social work (N = 225)		Nursing (N = 96)		
Type of prosocial tendencies	M	SD	M	SD	U
Public	2,6	0,7	2,6	0,7	41446,5
Emotional	3,3	0,6	3,4	0,7	40487,0
Requested	4,2	0,6	4,4	0,6	35383,4***
Anonymous	3,2	0,8	3,3	1,0	42697,0
Altruistic	4,2	0,7	4,2	0,7	41847,4
in critical situations	3,5	0,7	3,7	0,6	36450,0**

sig. p < 0,01; *sig. p < 0,001

Scheme 3 Differences in types of prosocial tendencies among students by employment

	unemployed (N = 125)		employed in the field they are studying (N = 86)		employed in another (N = 110)		
Type of prosocial tendencies	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	χ²
Public	2,7	0,7	2,6	0,6	2,6	0,7	2,8
Emotional	3,3	0,6	3,4	0,6	3,3	0,6	4,0
Requested	4,2	0,7	4,4	0,6	4,2	0,7	12,3**
Anonymous	2,8	1,1	3,4	1,1	3,3	1,1	14,5***
Altruistic	4,2	0,7	4,3	0,7	4,2	0,8	1,6
in critical situations	3,5	0,7	3,7	0,6	3,5	0,6	11,1**

sig. p < 0,01; *sig. p < 0,001

Scheme 3 shows the differences in the types of prosocial tendencies among students according to their employment. From scheme 3, we can see that statistically significant differences were recorded in three types of prosocial tendencies, namely the anonymous type, the requested type of prosocial tendencies and in prosocial tendencies in critical situations. The highest average values were achieved by students in the group - employed in their field of study, namely in the requested type of prosocial tendencies ($\chi^2 = 12.3$; $p < 0.01$), in the anonymous type of prosocial tendencies ($\chi^2 = 14.5$; $p < 0.001$) and in prosocial tendencies in critical situations ($\chi^2 = 11.1$; $p < 0.01$). In other types of prosocial tendencies, no statistically significant difference was recorded between individual groups of students in terms of their employment, but the highest average value in the public type of prosocial tendencies was achieved by unemployed students. Employed students in their field of study achieved the highest average value in the emotional type of prosocial tendencies and the altruistic type of prosocial tendencies. Based on our results, we can conclude that students of the fields of study of social work and nursing are characterized by the fact that they tend to behave prosocially, especially in critical situations, to provide help anonymously and if a person in their environment requests it.

Scheme 4 Differences in types of prosocial tendencies in students by age

	20 – 31 r. (N = 95)		32 – 43 r. (N = 124)		44 – 54 r. (N = 102)		
Type of prosocial tendencies	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	χ^2
Public	2,7	0,9	2,7	0,8	2,5	0,9	10,4**
Emotional	3,3	0,8	3,3	0,8	3,3	0,8	0,3
Requested	4,2	0,9	4,3	0,8	4,3	0,8	4,5
anonymous	3,0	1,1	3,3	1,1	3,5	1,1	28,9***
altruistic	4,1	0,9	4,2	1,0	4,4	0,8	13,5**
in critical situations	3,5	0,8	3,6	0,8	3,6	0,9	4,4

sig. $p < 0,01$; *sig. $p < 0,001$

We were also interested in the differences in the individual types of prosocial tendencies in students from the perspective of their age structure. We found that the youngest students and students aged 32 to 43 achieved the highest average value in the type of public prosocial tendencies ($\chi^2 = 10.4$; $p < 0.01$). The group of

the oldest students achieved the highest average value in two types of prosocial tendencies, namely anonymous prosocial tendencies ($\chi^2 = 28.9$; $p < 0.001$) and altruistic prosocial tendencies ($\chi^2 = 13.5$; $p < 0.01$). Our findings show that the group of the oldest students is characterized by the tendency to behave prosocially, especially altruistically and anonymously, which means that they are willing to help more anonymously and at the expense of some personal loss. There was no statistically significant difference in the three types of prosocial tendencies observed. In two types, higher average values were recorded in the middle-aged and oldest groups of students. These were the requested type of prosocial tendencies and prosocial tendencies in critical situations. The emotional type of prosocial tendencies reached the same average value in all age groups of students.

DISCUSSION

In our research, we examined prosocial tendencies in university students of two study fields from the field of helping professions: Social Work and Nursing. We assumed that depending on the field they chose to study, students would differ in the predominant type of prosocial tendencies. Our assumption was not confirmed, as statistically significant differences were recorded in only two types of prosocial tendencies, namely the requested type of prosocial tendencies and the type of prosocial tendencies in critical situations. These types of prosocial tendencies reached higher average values in the group of students who chose to study nursing. This means that future nurses are characterized by a greater tendency to behave prosocially than future social workers, while they tend to behave prosocially in situations that are critical and will provide help if they are asked to do so. Prosocial behavior, according to the authors [11], is a broad spectrum of behavior characterized by helping or planning to help people and ranges from altruistic acts that are self-sacrificing to acts carried out of one's own free will. Based on the achieved from the results, we can conclude that the highest average value from the entire research set was achieved by nursing students in the requested type of prosocial tendencies, which is also confirmed by the authors' claim [4], who state that requested prosocial behavior is behavior that occurs more often than spontaneous helping.

In terms of age, we noted differences in three types of prosocial tendencies among students, where statistically significantly higher average values were achieved in the anonymous and altruistic type of prosocial tendencies by the oldest group and in the public type of prosocial tendencies by the youngest group of students and the middle group of students. These differences correspond to the author's claim [1], which states that age is closely related to

individual types of prosocial behavior. The author points out the connection between the public and anonymous types of prosocial behavior. There is an opposite relationship between these types of prosocial behavior, i.e. if the average values of anonymous prosocial behavior increase, the average values of public prosocial behavior decrease.

From the perspective of employment, we found a statistically significant difference in three types of prosocial tendencies. Specifically, a difference was recorded in the requested, anonymous type of prosocial tendencies and in prosocial tendencies in critical situations. For all of the above types, students employed in the field they are studying achieved a higher average value. This result indicates that students who also work in the given field of study tend to behave prosocially, which is a favorable result for us, because a real helping professional must really have an internal intention to help, and this was found in our research. Research in the field of humanities and non-humanities was also carried out by the authors [11], who found differences in the monitored set on the subscale of prosocial behavior in critical situations, in which students of the humanities major scored.

SUMMARY

Based on the results of our research, we can conclude that prosocial behavior in nursing and social work students is significantly manifested in various types of prosocial tendencies, and it was shown that nursing students tend to show higher values of prosocial tendencies in critical situations and when they are asked for help. The differences found between students of different age groups and work experience show that age and professional experience in a given field have a significant impact on the intensity and nature of prosocial behavior. These results confirm the importance of the internal intention to help, which should be a key aspect in the development of helping professionals, such as future nurses and social workers. Our study contributes to a better understanding of the factors that shape prosocial tendencies in these professions and emphasizes the importance of their development already during study and practice.

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PROSOCIAL TENDENCIES OF HELPING PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS IN TERMS OF AGE AND EMPLOYMENT

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Abstract

In the presented report, we deal with the area of prosocial tendencies in future helping professionals who are preparing for the profession of social worker and nurse. In these professions, professional training for a given profession, professional theoretical knowledge and skills are very important, but personal prerequisites should also be an important equipment of such a professional. Prosociality should also be an important characteristic. In our research, we focused on identifying prosocial tendencies in students from the perspective of their field of study, age and employment. As a tool, we used a questionnaire taken from the author [1], which followed the verification of the psychometric properties of the methodology for measuring prosocial behavior. In our research, we found that students studying nursing show higher average values in two types of prosocial tendencies, namely in the requested type and in critical situations. The age factor influenced the differences in prosocial tendencies, with the oldest age group achieving higher values in the anonymous and altruistic type, while the youngest group in the public type of prosocial tendencies. We found that students working in the field they are studying showed more pronounced prosocial tendencies, which indicates a stronger internal intention to help within their professional fields.

Keywords:

Social work. Nursing. Prosocial tendencies. A helping professional

THE FAMILY AS A CLIENT OF SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING

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INTRODUCTION

The family is a basic social institution with its own regulation of social activities, manifested in the life of the family on the basis of functional internal and external influences. It is the institution primarily responsible for the socialization and education of the individual. It is the basic social structure of human existence. In this microgroup the personality of a person and its relations to the surrounding world are formed. At present there is a general crisis of this social institution, so important for man. We have massively noted the occurrence of these phenomena:

- increased divorce rate
- postponement of family formation
- couple cohabitation, without the institution of marriage
- childless families, by choice
- increased incidence of single mothers

The family needs to be ensured, including by the state, that it is functional. More intensive creation of instruments of social support for the family. From the point of view of social work, it is necessary to accept the family as its client. The individual, since he is integrated into the basic social group and as a socialising personality, must be seen in the family, which has a functional influence on him. This requirement of looking at the client is also applied in terms of a holistic approach to the client. This is how Matoušek in his publication *The Family as an Institution and a Relational Network* also articulates the family in terms of its composition. [1] We believe that without Christian principles it will not be possible to effect positive change in social work or with its potential client, the family. There are already supportive positions developed on this thesis, by social workers as well as their theorists. Vaverčáková [2] argues that "The Christian dimensions of social work are undeniable. The history of social work and the history of social care convince us of this. Love your neighbour as yourself is the basis of any altruistically directed human-to-human help. The Samaritan or the philanthropist shows us how to love our neighbour, how to help others. In

Christian-oriented countries, such a value is passed on from generation to generation. That is why, from time immemorial, human relations have been influenced by the desire to help the weak, the needy and the needy."

These questions of relationship and interdisciplinarity are addressed by Social Theology, which, as a frontier discipline, is understood as the science of God's acts transforming into the concrete life of man and society in order to implement the social good in social relations on the basis of love of neighbour. To such a definition can be attributed its object of study, which is the phenomena, processes and objects of the spiritual and social world that seek the symbiotic unity of man with the Word of God and its teachings [3].

Based on this learning, social work is developing a qualitatively new approach to the client, with a new understanding of social intervention. This is social and spiritual counselling, which has certain specificities.

Spiritual counselling is an integral part of social counselling, a fact no social work theorist doubts any more. If we want to fulfill the goal of social work, we need to realize a positive change in a person in order to strengthen him in his social competences, so that he is capable of self-orientation in the social world and self-help in the emergence of various social situations that require competent solutions, responsible approach and taking responsibility for their own decisions. Spirituality is as strong in man as his faith in the creator of this world, in God and in his only son Jesus Christ. Sometimes it is necessary, in the context of spiritual counselling, to bring a person to accept the faith or to revive in him the natural ability to accept and develop the faith. All the changes we want to make in a person in the context of therapeutic action are interwoven with his values, attitudes, life experiences that have been formed in a particular social environment. The highest degree of positive change in a person is when he becomes an active reshaper of his social environment in which he coexists with other people. He actively reshapes it in accordance with social norms. Without the spiritual aspect, which is realised through spiritual counselling, even social counselling itself cannot be successfully realised.

Spiritual counselling is understood as a complex of professional services to people in dealing with such complex life situations that they associate with the spiritual sphere, and the aim of this counselling, as in other areas of counselling, is to support the orientation of the client in his/her situation, to acquaint him/her with the various options for dealing with his/her situation and to motivate him/her to implement these options. [4] The whole system of spiritual counseling is directed towards empowerment and strengthening of one's own

consciousness, through which the person receives a source of self-help to overcome the social problem. The main mediating means of this counseling is the spiritual word. Just as in social counselling the main tool for its implementation is the conversation with the client, in spiritual counselling this conversation has a more confidential and binding character. The process of such social counselling implies more than an equal attitude of both actors of the counselling process, the social worker and the client. It also involves a personal rapprochement which presupposes a close relationship of mutual trust, since spirituality in man is one of his most intimate areas of personal integrity. The conditions for successful spiritual counseling depend on the professional training of the Christian social worker because he is the coordinator of the counseling process and knows the methods and techniques of creating a counseling relationship. The counselling relationship between him and the social client, the neighbour, which we consider to be the family, should, on the part of the Christian social worker, fulfil the following attributes:

1. Love your neighbour as yourself. This is a principle that is the foundation of Christian social work and Christian faith. This personal attitude of the spiritual and social counselor creates a qualitatively new relationship in the counseling process between the family and the counselor. The degree of this counseling relationship is determined by the spiritual and social counselor who offers this relationship to his client, neighbor, and family members. This principle is a prerequisite for a trusting relationship between the social and spiritual counsellor and the family and is also a very good starting point for quality spiritual counselling, which is an integral part of social counselling.

2. To spread the Gospel of Christ. In the Gospel there is a great space made for the love of God and for the love of neighbor. By spreading the Gospel we come to a deeper understanding of social service to the clients of social counseling; it is the starting point in spiritual counseling. It will foster the capacity for self-initiative in the further spreading of love and goodness to one's surroundings by the client, the neighbour, the family, which is a very good helping element especially in social and spiritual counselling with the family, or in group social and spiritual counselling in general.

3. Conscientious objection. This principle in social and spiritual counseling is also pointed out by Gerka, who says that the Christian social worker should have the right to have the law of conscientious objection observed in his work. [5] This means that he has the right to refuse a client as a family in spiritual and social counseling or to refuse to provide a service to them that would be contrary

to his Christian conscience. In the case of social and spiritual counseling being carried out with reluctance and in unconvinced of his possible help to his neighbors, he could not even apply the other tools of spiritual and social counseling, because these are tied to the inner experiencing of the counseling relationship of the two actors of spiritual counseling.

4. To be perceived as a Christian, a believer with spiritual strength. The family, as a client of social and spiritual counseling, without the social counselor verbally announcing that he or she is a Christian social counselor, must sense this Christian attitude from the counselor's speech and from his or her relationship with the family. By this informality she can become very close to her fellow family members, to whom she gradually becomes the source of an ideal idea of conforming behaviour. Secular social work calls this ability to use oneself as an instrument of social work also through one's behaviour, attitudes and values the concept of self-instrumentalisation and also teaches how to acquire this ability.

5. Pray together with the family. Prayer and fasting are good means of self-control. [5] Self-mastery is a process into self-mastery in the social competence of the neighbor, the family. Actually, it is about the fulfillment of the ideal of social help, namely to lead the client, neighbor, family to self-help. This capacity for self-mastery is very important, as Gerka, [5] points out, especially with clients, neighbors suffering from addictions, he emphasizes that if a Christian social worker works directly with families affected by addictions, he should realize that the most operative solution to this problem is in prayerful communion with the addict and his family. However, the common prayer is to be at a level of union with God in which the touch of God's presence can be felt. Neither love, nor regret, nor joy, nor sorrow can be felt without spiritual experience. If there is no spiritual experience, then this prayer becomes a mere formality.

In the context of spiritual and social counselling with the neighbour, it is necessary on the part of the spiritual and social counsellor to activate spiritual renewal in the client, which is the family. Starting from the fact that every fall into sin is the cause of a weakened spirituality, faith. And this is the main task of spiritual counseling, to strengthen the Christian faith.

The spiritual renewal method in spiritual counseling includes:

1. Sharing the family's problem, the ability to empathize with the family's current, perceived disadvantaged social situation, i.e. to apply an appropriate level of empathy.

2. Praying together with the family to God Almighty for help to solve the problem the family is experiencing.

3. Giving biblical examples analogous to the family's problem.

4. Attention to guidance through the solution of the problem, not only guidance related to the lending of a helping hand by a spiritual counselor , but also by God who guides the family's steps toward its correction.

5. Thanksgiving to God for the gradual elimination of disorders and problems in the family.

6. Strengthening faith and skills to overcome spiritual and social problems in the family.

The goals of the spiritual renewal method in spiritual and social counseling:

1. Strengthen faith in Almighty God.

2. Strengthen belief in own strengths and abilities.

3. Eliminate resignation, apathy and fatalism.

4. Eliminate states of tension and stress (mostly existential stress).

5. To provide an optimistic outlook on the future [6].

Spiritual counselling as a part of social counselling also works in relation to the family:

a/ **as a tool of social and spiritual prevention**, we apply it even if we do not find deviations in behavioural manifestations in the family within the framework of social acceptance of conformity. One's social thinking and social status must be continuously maintained and systematically cared for, and we must also bear in mind that spiritual life is the basic essence of one's earthly existence,

b/ **as a social intervention tool**, we apply it to any social problem that the family has as part of the strengthening process in social competences, through which family members acquire, strengthen and improve their social competences. In this way, they are better prepared to overcome life's obstacles in the social world. The implementation of spiritual counseling in social work, gives social work more meaningfulness, effectiveness and a certain guarantee of positive change in the family,

c/ **as a tool of social counselling**, by applying spiritual counselling to the process of social counselling, social counselling becomes a very effective tool for personal change of the person and thus also of the family in which the person finds himself/herself.

The activation of personality change of a person in social intervention is conditioned by the perception and acquisition of values, which are the subject of

the analysis of the social problem of the family. The means by which we accelerate this process is spiritual counselling. The position of spiritual counselling in the system of social work methods is thus given a priority position because it is the most effective tool for positive personality change of a person and his family. Spiritual counselling has been taking on its concrete contours within the framework of social work for several years now. For several years now, professional training of spiritual and social counsellors has been running within the framework of the study field of Social Work at the Orthodox Divinity Faculty of the Prešov University in Prešov. Spiritual activity in social work, in its concrete programmatic form, is realized through theological disciplines that correspond to the basic philosophical-theological-social foundations of social work. These include, in particular, the study of the Old and New Testaments within the biblical foundations of social work, Church History, Christian Anthropology, Triadology, Ecclesiology, Social and Charitable Ministry in the Early Church, Exegesis of the Gospels, Christology, Holy Mysteries, Liturgy, and Christian Ethics, Christian Sociology, Byzantine Theologians, Byzantology, Orthodox Psychotherapy, Soteriology, Patrology, History of the Orthodox Church in the Czech Lands and Slovakia, Dogmatic Theology, Orthodox Spirituality, History of Religions, Missiology, Care of the Sick in the Church. At the same time, the disciplines of social work are based on the theological foundations of social work.

In this context, it should also be pointed out that the theological disciplines also draw our attention to the other side of the matter. They warn us against ending our social activity in a self-serving activism that leads us to the mistaken, arrogant and complacent conviction that this is how we will build our own salvation. For activity without the spirit, humility and goodness of God will most certainly miss its effect, will not be in harmony with, but contrary to, the main mission and goal of man, which is salvation. If Christians focus only on social work, even in its secular form, forgetting about spirituality, they will lose their identity, and if, after a while, they are again denied the right to do this work publicly, as has happened many times in history, they may also lose their place in society. In the Church, everything must be balanced and everything must have its proper place in the scale of values. [7]

SUMMARY

In the spiritual counselling process it is a demanding communication and persuasion process, which presupposes the mastery of methods and techniques

of spiritual counselling. It is an inner liberating moment for the social client and his/her family, which, through the power of spirituality, frees the family from the burden of the problem it shares and thus unblocks the family to find common possible solutions for the elimination of its problem.

The role of spiritual counselling is currently a current and almost new method, which in a thin line borders on pastoral counselling. This role is only sporadically presented in today's society and this is due to the absence of professionals in this field. It is the duty of social workers in the society to proceed conscientiously if this form of counselling activity [8].

In view of the social necessity of implementing spiritual counselling in the system of social counselling also for families, a new concept of social counselling is being developed which takes this necessity fully into account. The professionalisation of spiritual and social counselling has already begun, it is necessary to further create optimal conditions for its implementation in practical social work.

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THE FAMILY AS A CLIENT OF SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING

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Abstract

The Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Presov is the only faculty in Slovakia that develops the concept of spiritual guidance that seeks to implement the system of social counselling. The paper analyses the precondition for such a concept as well as the possibilities of its application within the professional training of future social workers.

Keywords:

Spiritual counselling, social counselling, social work, social intervention

REFLECTION ON SELECTED GOSPEL MESSAGES AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE ETHICAL VALUES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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INTRODUCTION

In a society marked by individualism and social differences, social work holds an irreplaceable role. It is a vocation that goes beyond just a form of employment. It is a service to people in difficult situations, in their vulnerability. In this context, Jesus' message of the Gospel—emphasizing love, service, and compassion—takes on a special significance. The words spoken over two thousand years ago in Galilee and Judea remain relevant and alive to this day. They inspire, guide, and empower those who have chosen to dedicate their lives to helping others. This article focuses on the value-based connection between the teachings of Jesus and the daily reality of social work practice.

JESUS' MESSAGE: SERVICE, COMPASSION, AND HUMAN DIGNITY

Jesus' words are not just spiritual encouragement, but a call to concrete acts of love. His Gospel is not a theory but life itself. *"And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"* [Matthew 25:40] With these words, Jesus clearly expressed that serving those in need is a service to God Himself. In these words

lies the very essence of social work: to perceive every person as a unique being, with inherent dignity and individual worth.

The ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ transformed the known world of His time. His work consisted of two fundamental elements. The first was the proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God (theory), and the second was charitable activity (practice), which extended to all those in need. *"Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.'"* [Matthew 22:37–38] Through these words of the Gospel, Jesus lays the foundation for acts of charity. Love for one's neighbor, and the associated works of mercy toward fellow believers, are not merely social phenomena, but also the foundation of spiritual life—for both the individual and the Church. Without love, a person—and thus a Christian—cannot be like God, for in doing so, the divine image in which they were created would fade. Love is the fundamental starting point for both the cause and meaning of life itself. [8]

In the second greatest commandment Jesus emphasized: *"And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."* [Mark 12:31] This commandment is a fundamental call for everyone who works in social service. Love for one's neighbor is not merely a feeling, but a firm decision to do good.

It is a form of help that is personal, concrete, and selfless. Social workers believe in and strive with all their effort to preserve the value and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities—dignity they rightfully deserve. Christianity regards every person as a unique individual with intrinsic worth and dignity, regardless of gender, age, social status, or abilities.[11] This is affirmed in the words of the Gospel: *"Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."* [Matthew 10:31]

ETHICAL VALUES OF THE GOSPEL IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK

The early development of the field of social work, dating back to the 19th century, clearly reflects its Christian roots. Many social workers were inspired by the message and values of the Gospel. It is worth mentioning two significant movements founded on Christian ideas rooted in the Gospel. In Europe, for example, there was the Charity Organization Societies, where social workers addressed urban poverty, or the Settlement House movement, led by figures such as Jane Addams, who was a co-founder of the Hull House in Chicago in the late 19th century, offering support to impoverished immigrants. [7]

In the Dictionary of Contemporary Slovak Language, the term value is explained in several categories. It is defined as a measure of necessity or usefulness, as well as meaning, importance, or the ability to provide some benefit or advantage, or as something valuable, and so on. [2]

Gospel values are moral and spiritual principles coming from the teachings of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament. These values form the basics of Christian life and behavior and often serve as an ethical compass for individuals and communities. Ethical values in social work include social justice, human dignity, and the importance of interpersonal relationships. [14]

Social work is built upon values that Jesus not only proclaimed but also perfectly lived. Respect for human dignity, compassion, and service as a form of power are its cornerstones. Jesus reached out to the marginalized, listened to the despised, and protected the vulnerable. By washing the feet of His disciples, He demonstrated that true authority lies in humility and service: *"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."* [John 13:14] These values are also reflected in the practice of social workers. They do not just offer solutions—they create a safe space where man experiences acceptance and respect.

The Code of Ethics for Social Workers emphasizes specific values such as respect for the individual, social justice, human rights, dignity, equality, and empathy. These values are not neutral in nature; they are deeply rooted in philosophical and spiritual foundations, which are an inseparable part of their essence. [14]

In the context of Slovakia, many social workers are also formed by Christian values, which can naturally influence their professional conduct. Analysis shows that the values expressed in the Gospel messages align with the principles outlined in the Slovak Code of Ethics for Social Workers. For example, the emphasis on human dignity and support for vulnerable groups in the Gospel corresponds with the values stated in the code. Integrating these messages into professional practice can enrich the ethical framework of social work and support a value-based approach to working with clients.

The Christian value of human equality stems from the belief that all people are created in the image of God. The Church Fathers clearly upheld the essential Christian value of human equality in their teachings. Saint John Chrysostom, for example, stated: *"Love removes all inequality; it does not know favoritism or rank."* [17]

Human dignity and respect for the individual are enshrined in many ethical codes. The vast majority of them build upon the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, adopted in Paris on December 10, 1948. This declaration serves as the foundation for all internationally recognized documents and guides the creation of standards and the defense of human rights. Human dignity, inherent to every person without distinction, is the central idea of the entire document. These rights are considered universal and binding for all. The idea of protecting human rights thus finds its rightful place in the field of social care. [20]

To live in accordance with God's commandments means to defend the dignity and rights that God has given to all people. It is especially necessary to defend those who are excluded and exploited. This means loving one's neighbor as oneself. Here we can see then, that the core values of social work find their foundation in Christian values. One can observe a mutually interconnected relationship between secular and Gospel values, which together aim to fulfill the highest interest of the person in need. To serve the needy is to desire social justice, while justice, in turn, protects human dignity and the rights granted by God's grace. Justice is a value that appears across multiple domains, including biblical texts and the ethics of social work. [11]

Justice in the context of the Gospel is closely tied to the nature of God and His laws. In the books of the Old Testament, justice and righteous conduct are emphasized in many passages, which call for individuals and communities alike to act justly toward others. The biblical principle of equality is expressed in the belief that all people are created in the image of God and possess equal worth in His eyes. In the New Testament, particularly within the Gospels, Jesus devoted special attention to the oppressed and marginalized, thereby clearly affirming the equality of all before God. [5]

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." [Matthew 5:6] A social worker should strive for social justice, standing against inequality, discrimination, and unjust conditions.

An interesting value-based principle is the pursuit of reconciliation and forgiveness. The messages of the Gospel often focus on individual relationships, while the ethics of social work address broader community issues and systemic problems. Forgiveness and reconciliation are frequently seen as processes of inner healing, whereas support for restoration and rehabilitation tends to concentrate on tangible outcomes and changes in the life of an individual or community. Forgiveness is motivated by love and compassion, while the ethics of social work are driven by justice and equality. Despite these intrinsic differences, the two approaches are complementary. Forgiveness and reconciliation can significantly support the process of restoration and rehabilitation, while the ethics of social

work can provide practical tools to achieve reconciliation within communities. The integration of both approaches can, through their holistic nature, contribute to the healing of individuals and societies. [3]

The Gospels offer strong encouragement to care for the poor and vulnerable. This value-based principle calls both individuals and society to moral responsibility toward those in need. It is a call to solidarity, empathy, and concrete action. The Bible frequently speaks of caring for orphans, widows, and foreigners, reflecting the need to protect and support the most vulnerable members of society. In the ethics of social work, support for vulnerable groups focuses on delivering services and interventions that help individuals and communities overcome difficulties and improve unfavorable living conditions. Social work ethics include principles such as justice, equality, dignity, and respect. The professional support provided by social workers empowers vulnerable groups by ensuring access to necessary resources and services, while also working to reduce systemic barriers that contribute to their marginalization. Various religious traditions inspire social work professionals toward empathy and care for the vulnerable, while the ethics of social work provide practical tools and frameworks to implement these moral principles in practice. [1]

Material and financial aid to those in need is a very tangible form of support. It involves direct assistance through the provision of goods or financial resources to help people in social distress meet their basic needs. This form of help is insightfully described by Church Father St. Basil the Great: *"If created goods were not good in themselves, they would not have been created. The Lord does not command us to discard these goods or flee from them as if they were evil, but to share them with the poor. If anyone was condemned, it was not because they possessed wealth, but because they had a misguided attitude toward it and used it improperly."* [16]

Empathy is a cornerstone of ethical behavior for social workers in Slovakia. It is essential for building a trustworthy and effective relationship with the client, which leads to better outcomes in social work. Keeping the principles of empathy within the ethical code contributes to the professional and humane practice of this demanding profession.

The Gospel principle of love and compassion emphasizes selfless help for others, regardless of their status or merit, and calls for continuous care for one's neighbor. This approach highlights compassion expressed through practical assistance to the poor, vulnerable, and those in need. In social work, the ethics of respecting human dignity and rights focus on recognizing each person's value, as well as their right and freedom to make decisions about their own life. Gospel-

inspired love motivates social workers to help; in social work ethics, compassion is driven by a focus on equality and broader accessibility for every client. Both values are interlinked, as love and compassion can be practiced through respect for human dignity and rights within professional practice. [1]

JESUS AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

The words and actions of Jesus are a living inspiration for everyone who serves others. When social work is connected with spiritual values, it gains a deeper meaning—it becomes a space where God's love touches concrete human lives. In Jesus, we have not only a Teacher but also a living example of service, compassion, and courage. And in every act of love we perform, we serve God Himself. A social worker is a servant, just as Jesus was—not someone superior, but one who bends down to the weak and helps them rise to their feet. The principle of service expresses humility, responsibility, and a willingness to work for the benefit of others. “...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” [Matthew 20:28]

Jesus intentionally sought out those whom society overlooked: the sick, foreigners, women, children, and sinners. He helped personally and without prejudice. Jesus showed compassion when He healed a man with leprosy through touch: “Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’” [Mark 1:41] He saved a woman from being stoned: “When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, ‘Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?’ She said, ‘No one, Lord.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.’” [John 8:10–11] He spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, breaking deep-rooted societal barriers, as Jews traditionally did not interact with Samaritans: “Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.” [John 4:9] These stories reflect Jesus’ deep sensitivity, empathy, and ability to overcome divisions.

According to Foster, Jesus is the most significant model of service because it is characterized by humility, selflessness, and love. [6]

Jesus did not offer only one-time help—He accompanied, taught, and encouraged. This is a model for anyone who seeks to help not only “from the outside,” but through relationships and trust. Within ethical codes, the motivation for applying their values is typically aimed at the common good. However, the motivation in fulfilling Gospel values includes a supernatural goal—the

attainment of the Kingdom of God and eternal bliss after death. Saint Augustine speaks of this heavenly homeland and the motivation for doing good: *“Recognize the nobility of hospitality: through it, one comes to the Lord. You receive a traveler, of whom you yourself are a fellow pilgrim, for we are all pilgrims. A Christian is one who considers himself a pilgrim both in his own home and in his own land. For our homeland is above; there, we shall no longer be pilgrims.”* [15]

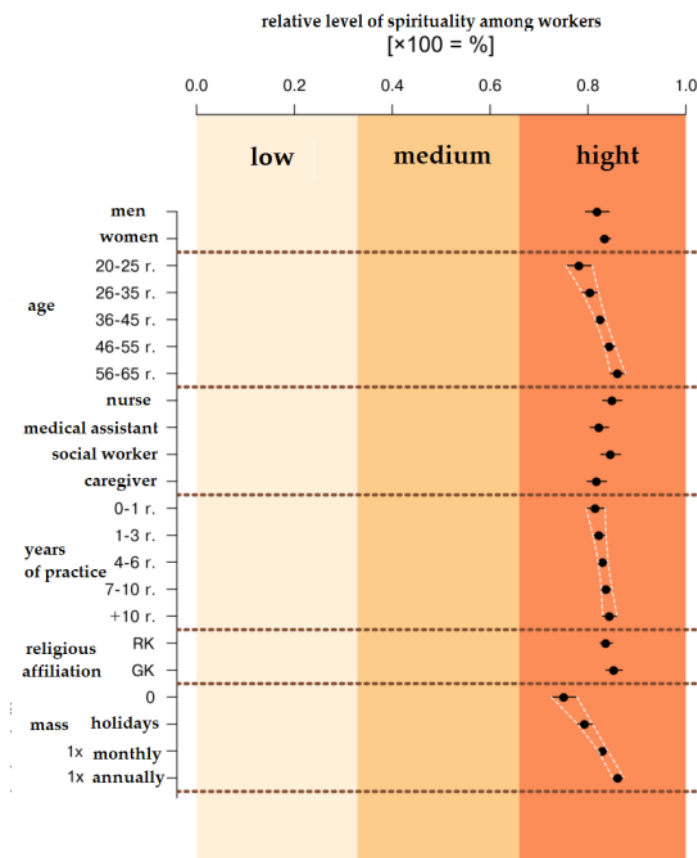
To serve others as Jesus did means to desire social justice, while justice itself defends human dignity and the rights granted by God's grace. Every person is worthy of respect, and each is called to act for the benefit of society. This highlights the importance of relationships. Social workers honor human relationships, recognizing their value in achieving the greatest good for those in need of support during personal and social transformation. Based on the value of relationships, social workers help improve individuals' lives as well as their interpersonal connections. All these values are put into practice by social workers guided by both ethical and Christian principles. [11]

In the Gospel messages of Jesus Christ, His mercy stands out as a central theme. It is rooted in the belief that God is merciful and compassionate. This merciful approach should be reflected in the behavior of all believers. According to Hanobík and Červeň, Jesus teaches that mercy is inseparable from forgiveness. In the Gospel of Luke [Luke 4:18–19], Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah and proclaims: *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”* All these words are deeply rooted in mercy, expressed through concrete acts of love and aid. God, who is rich in mercy, has made us alive together with Christ. It is thus clear that the Gospel calls believers to act mercifully toward others—feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and more. In all of these acts, we serve Christ Himself. Mercy in the Gospel is not just a theoretical concept—it is a call to action, one that should be reflected in the everyday life of every believer. It is essentially an ethical principle urging us to compassion and support for those in need. [9]

A study conducted in 2022 in the Prešov Self-Governing Region revealed a high degree of religiosity/spirituality among 162 social workers and healthcare personnel working in hospice and residential social care facilities. It can be concluded that the value orientation of the majority of these social workers and healthcare professionals is rooted in Christian foundations.

However, the spirituality of the surveyed sample increases significantly with age. A worker aged 20 to 25 has a markedly different level of spirituality compared to someone aged 56 to 65. The level of spirituality does not increase with longer professional experience in the field. Spirituality levels are consistent among workers regardless of their religious affiliation. However, there is a strong positive correlation between spirituality and the frequency of attending religious services and activities. This positive trend—between service attendance and spirituality—is particularly pronounced. [12]

Chart: A graphical visualization of the main effects of the generalized linear model depicting the level of spirituality among workers in relation to their demographic characteristics.



(The black circles represent the estimated mean level of spirituality, along with the reliability of the estimate. If the intervals overlap, they are statistically considered equivalent. The horizontal line on which these circles are located represents the 95% confidence interval. Source: Noga, 2024.) [12]

CHALLENGES AND INSPIRATIONS OF GOSPEL MESSAGES FOR TODAY'S SOCIAL WORK ETHICS

„A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” [John 13:34] Jesus Christ identifies the fulfillment of this commandment of love as the most important aspect of human life. Love for God and love for one's neighbor must be actively lived out. The principle of loving one's neighbor thus becomes the most fundamental moral norm. In the Bible, we find a distinct sensitivity toward the poor, the sick, the possessed, and the sinful. Christ invites us to build the Kingdom of God based on love—expressed in actions—as He Himself states: *„But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.”* [Matthew 9:13] Mercy is one of the core traits of Christianity, manifested in acts of love. Mercy, that is, concrete love for one's neighbor, has been practiced in the Church from its very beginning. *„By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* [John 13:35] Even if Christ had never spoken a word on this earth, His example—through poverty, mercy, and the ultimate sacrifice on the cross—would still have been the most powerful expression of His message of love. Yet the Bible does record His words, which changed the course of history and human civilization. His teachings continue to influence human social behavior. God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus and offers Himself to every human being. Jesus seeks to heal the wounds of the world, not to cause them. His way is the path of love and service—not violence or hatred. A hallmark of the Gospel is Jesus' focus on marginalized social groups, such as the poor, tax collectors, women, and others. Jesus did not belong to the upper classes of society. On the contrary, He came from a poor background and deeply understood poverty and need. His very birth in Bethlehem of Judea took place under humble conditions. As a newborn, He was laid in a simple manger, and on the fortieth day after His birth, Joseph and Mary brought Him to the temple, where they offered a pair of doves—the sacrificial offering of poor families. [19]

Jesus announces His public ministry quoting the words of the prophet Isaiah, which become a kind of His programmatic statement for Him: *„The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”* [Luke 4:18]

Today's social work faces many challenges, from lack of support to emotional exhaustion. It is precisely in this reality that the Gospel can serve as a source of

inner strength, hope, and perseverance. Jesus Himself faced misunderstanding and rejection, yet He never ceased to serve with love.

Jesus' call to be "the salt of the earth and the light of the world" is not about perfection, but about faithfulness: „*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*” [Matthew 5:13–14]

This reminds us that even small acts carry great significance. A social worker is invited to see Christ in those they serve and to be guided by Him even in moments of fatigue. The Gospel's messages—especially Jesus' parables and His attitude toward marginalized groups—bring a strong ethical appeal. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is one of the most vivid representations of social commitment and unconditional love for one's neighbor: „*So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves? And he said, "He who showed mercy on him."* Then Jesus said to him, "*Go and do likewise.*" [Luke 10:25–37]

Jesus' emphasis on mercy, forgiveness, justice, and help for the most vulnerable can serve as a moral compass even in today's social work context.

The Parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10:25–37] offers a timeless example of help free from prejudice and stigmatization. From the perspective of social work and services, this parable affirms the value of empathy, selflessness, and the willingness to go beyond one's duty to help those in need. A social worker should be prepared to provide immediate assistance as well as long-term support, including emotional and practical care.

This approach requires the social worker to set aside assumptions, prejudices, or societal distinctions, and to treat each individual with equal respect, love, and dignity. Social workers should be able to empathize with each client's unique situation and feel compassion for their struggles. The parable shows that help often comes from those who are willing to respond to the suffering of others. [13]

For a social worker, the characteristic should be prosocial behavior, which is shown through respect for others as well as for oneself. At the same time, it involves fostering empathetic behavior and taking into account the interests and needs of other individuals and society as a whole. [4]

Implementing Gospel messages in social work practice may face challenges, such as the plurality of religious beliefs among professionals and clients, as well as the need to respect the secular nature of the profession. Therefore, an approach is recommended that emphasizes universal values—such as love for one's

neighbor, justice, and respect—which are present in many religious traditions and align with the ethical standards of the profession.

APPLICATION OF GOSPEL VALUES IN PRACTICE

Social work, in the context of Gospel messages, can draw inspiration from values such as perseverance, responsibility, and assistance to those facing adverse life situations—such as poverty, abuse, addiction, or mental health issues. Social workers may view their role not merely as a profession, but above all as a form of service with a deep spiritual dimension. In the Gospel, Jesus shows that focusing on the individual and their personal needs is essential, and that every person has the right to receive help and support. [10]

The implementation of Gospel values in social work practice can take place through:

- ethical reflection during supervision,
- the worker's personal spiritual self-reflection,
- integration of these values into the education and training of future social workers,
- the creation of an ethically sensitive work environment where the dignity of every client and worker is respected.

According to Professor Peter Vansač, an honest person—whether a social worker or a client—can find answers through ethical and spiritual reflection while living out their Christian faith: *"When a person finds themselves in a prolonged adverse health condition, they often reevaluate their life. They begin to ask fundamental questions: What kind of life have I lived so far? What values have I prioritized? What have I neglected? What should I change in my life now, during illness? These are what we call existential questions. In answering them, the spiritual dimension of life may emerge. Therefore, addressing the spiritual needs of the chronically ill is extremely important, as it may help the person find answers to essential questions such as: What is the purpose of my life? What is the meaning of my suffering and illness? How can faith help me in my suffering?"* [21]

According to Gerka, Gospel values are reflected in the work of social workers who strive to help and support those in need. The Gospel emphasizes justice and care for marginalized and oppressed groups. Social workers often advocate for the rights of these groups and work to eliminate social inequalities, which aligns with Gospel principles. [8]

Reflecting on the messages of the Gospel can significantly enrich the ethical framework of social work. Integrating these messages into professional practice

can promote a value-driven approach to working with clients and contribute to the development of ethical and moral integrity among social workers.

SUMMARY

Service, social justice, human dignity and worth, and the importance of human relationships are foundational values for understanding and deepening the mission of social work. It is valuable to recognize that 21st-century social work operates under the pressure of constant socio-economic changes. Yet even today, it remains grounded in Gospel teaching, which throughout history has supported the understanding of human value and the intrinsic dignity of every person—being created in the image and likeness of God. We can observe how each core value of social work reinforces and supports another. Secular and Christian values share a connected purpose: to serve the highest interest of the person in need. [11]

Gospel messages shape the inner compass of a social worker, motivating them to act for the benefit of others with love, respect, and justice. These values are not solely religious but represent universal ethical principles that enrich the work of helping professions.

Reflecting on religious texts in a secular context may raise questions about neutrality, pluralism, and cultural sensitivity. Therefore, it is crucial that Gospel inspiration is not seen as dogmatic, but rather as an offering of universal values—values that are understandable and applicable even outside of a Christian framework. Reflection on Gospel messages can meaningfully enrich the ethical dimension of social work. When these messages are perceived as universal values rather than religious indoctrination, they can help shape responsible, compassionate, and value-driven professionals—those who view social work not just as a job, but as a calling.

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REFLECTION ON SELECTED GOSPEL MESSAGES AND THEIR CONNECTION TO THE ETHICAL VALUES OF SOCIAL WORKERS

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of Gospel messages as a source of inspiration for ethical values in the social work profession. It analyzes the relationship between Christian principles and the ethical standards found in the Slovak Code of Ethics for Social Workers. The aim is to demonstrate how these messages can enrich professional practice and promote a value-based approach in working with clients.

Keywords

Ethics, Gospel, social work, codes of ethics, professional values, moral reflection

THE FREE CHOICE IN EARLY EASTERN ORTHODOX ANTHROPOLOGY

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The issue of free choice and free will has been a problem of great importance in theological debates in Western, Latin-speaking Christianity. A special place in the history of Christian theology was occupied by the controversy between Saint Augustine and Pelagius in the early 5th century, in which Saint Augustine defended the doctrine of predestination, and Pelagius insisted on the free will of man. [4] After a long period of dominance of Augustinian theology in Roman Catholicism, debate on this issue flared up with renewed vigor in the west of Christendom during the Reformation. Views on free choice in Lutheranism, Zwinglianism, Calvinism, Anabaptism, Anglicanism and later movements of Protestantism differed significantly. The debate on this issue reached its greatest intensity at the beginning of the 17th century between representatives of Arminianism and Dutch Calvinists, who adopted the doctrine of “double predestination,” which most radically rejected human freedom of choice. Many historical and theological studies have been published on this topic. [7]

Most historians of Christianity, when comparing the development of theology in the Latin West and the Hellenistic East, often emphasize Western pragmatism and focus on practical issues of human salvation. Western Christians have tried to find answers to the questions, “How should a Christian behave?” and “What exactly does a Christian need to do to gain salvation?” At the same time, Eastern theology dealt with more fundamental and theoretical questions of the existence and essence of God and man. Of course, most historians recognize this distinction between West and East as extremely schematic and simplistic. However, it is precisely this division that probably influenced the lack of attention of researchers to the formation of concepts of freedom of choice in Eastern Orthodox theology. It should be emphasized here that freedom of choice was considered by the Eastern Fathers of the Church primarily in the context of Christian anthropology, and not soteriology, as in the West.

Eastern Orthodox views on human free choice are of great importance for all confessions and denominations of modern Christianity. In any crisis situation, thinkers invariably turn to the issue of human responsibility not only in relation to other people, society or nature, but also to oneself. Responsibility is inextricably linked with human free conscious choice. From time to time, Western European authors “discover” the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Eastern Christianity. This happens not only due to the fashionable trends of ‘orientalism’ that occasionally sweep Western European culture, but also because of the ‘fundamental anthropological crisis’ that has struck modern Western civilization. [20] The Eastern Christian concept of human freedom of choice can provide answers to some pressing questions of modern European society, which has rejected traditional Western European humanism and promotes the euphemistical concepts of ‘posthumanism’ or ‘transhumanism’ to draw a veil over its inability to offer any positive values in place of humanism.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the most important concepts underlying the Eastern Orthodox teaching on freedom of choice and human free will, relevant for modern philosophical anthropology and Christian theology.

The Western Latin concept of “free choice” (*liberum arbitrium*) does not have an analogous notion in the ancient Greek language. In Latin it comes from the word “freedom” (*libertas*). The abovementioned terms have legal connotations in Latin. It is rather “right to make a choice” than “capability to make a choice”.

In ancient Greek, the concepts of “freedom” (ἐλευθερία) and “freedom of choice” (προαίρεσις) are not etymologically related to each other. The last word is more accurately translated as ‘a deliberate purpose; a resolution – a principle, or mode of thinking; the principles of action, thinking, or conduct’, [1] or as ‘a choosing (*one thing*) before (*another*), an act of a deliberate choice; a purpose, plan or scope of action’. [9] This concept comes from the verb προαίρῶ – ‘to take out, or take away; to choose; to select’. [9] The antonym of this concept, according to Isocrates, is ἀνάγκη (‘force, constraint, necessity’ [9]).

The concept of προαίρεσις emphasizes not freedom, but awareness and thoughtfulness of the decision. In ancient Greek philosophy, ‘resolution’ is the result of both the mind and the will. At the same time, ancient thinkers differed on the question of how reason and will relate in the decision-making process.

In the West, *liberum arbitrium* was perceived as a legal, normative concept, as the right to choice and free decision-making. This understanding of freedom of choice and free will influenced all Western European thought – Roman Catholic theology, Western European philosophy and all the humanities.

In ancient Greek, ‘freedom’ in the legal and political sense of this concept was denoted by the word αὐτονομία, which is commonly translated in English as ‘freedom to use its own laws’, ‘independence’ or ‘autonomy’ from the words αὐτός (‘self’) and νόμος (‘usage, custom, law’). However, such freedom was considered external, formal and secondary to internal freedom, inextricably linked with the very essence of man. Freedom (ἐλευθερία) and freedom of choice (προαίρεσις) served as a distinctive feature of man from all other creations of God, making man related to his Creator, since only the Lord has absolute freedom. It was the possession of free will and free choice that made a person like God. Thus, freedom of choice was considered in the Hellenistic East, first of all, as an attribute of a person, that is, in the context of anthropology, and not as a legal category.

This understanding of human nature is embedded in the epistles of the Apostle Paul. Despite the fact that St. Paul “speaks a lot about humanity, but rarely about human nature as such,” [18] it was he who gave theological meaning to such significant anthropological categories as soul (ψυχή), body (σῶμα), flesh (σάρξ), mind (νοῦς) and heart (καρδία).

Man was made in God’s image, after His likeness (Gen. 1:26). Man, being like God, has godlike freedom (ἐλευθερία). However, human freedom, unlike the absolute freedom of God, is conditional. If human beings consciously and freely strive to fulfill the will of God, then they receive both grace-filled strength and opportunities for this; if their choice deviate from the will of God, then the possibilities for implementation are reduced to the extent that the intention contradicts the will of God, to the point that it may become impracticable – God will not allow it. But even after becoming a fighter against his Creator, man does not lose his freedom. Man is always able to freely and consciously determine himself. When a person begins to realize his intention, the spiritual essence of the decision he has made immediately manifests itself, which he either brings to life with the help of God, or tries to implement in spite of it, using the support of the devil. [19]

The Eastern Church Fathers thought that man has personal freedom (αὐτεξουσίτης), in addition to his natural inalienable godlike freedom. The term αὐτεξουσίτης can also be translated as ‘independent power’. [9] It lies in the ability of the individual to consciously determine himself, make a choice (προαίρεσις), make a decision (κρίσις), not to be subjected to external coercion or influence, but to proceed from inner motives. Personal freedom is a gift from God, and therefore man ontologically always remains a free being able to make

a free choice. This personal freedom is realized through the will (θέλημα, θέλησις, in Latin *voluntas, velle*). Will is a force inherent in the nature of rational human being, thanks to which he always strives to achieve what he wants. The doctrine of the independent human will plays a key role in the anthropological views of the Eastern Church Fathers.

Hieromartyr Irenaeus, bishop of Lugdunum (now Lyone) (c. 130 – c. 202), native of Smyrna, wrote, ‘the will is the reason of the intellectual soul, which [reason] is within us, inasmuch as it is the faculty belonging to it which is endowed with freedom of action’ (θέλησις ἐστὶ τῆς νοεῶς ψυχῆς ὁ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν λόγος, ὡς αὐτεξούσιος αὐτῆς ὑπάρχουσα δύναμις). [16] In these considerations Irenaeus of Lyon uses the concept of freedom of action, which he, in fact, identifies with human will, as a property of the rational soul. Following the traditions of Hellenistic pre-Christian philosophy, the bishop considers any action or choice made by a person to be the result of the work of his mind and will.

According to Didymus the Blind (pp. 313 – 398), rational will precedes every human action. [21] As a representative of the Alexandrian Theological School, Didymus the Blind was probably influenced by Hellenistic philosophy, in particular by Neoplatonic and Stoic anthropology. More noticeable is the influence of Origen’s teaching on the pre-existence of souls, their eternal fall, incarnation and return to their original state in the course of universal restoration (ἀπο-κατάστασις). Within the framework of this approach, human freedom of choice is temporary, since ultimately apocatastasis will occur, and the souls of all people will return to the original state of being with God. Thus, the free choice between good and evil does not make sense, since evil itself will disappear as a result of apocatastasis.

Saint Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (c. 335 – 394), considered the free will of human beings in connection with the doctrine of personal striving for perfection and full knowledge of the truth, which is completely impossible to achieve in earthly life. Although perfection and truth in their completeness remain unattainable for a person, an insatiable desire to achieve them does not leave him. This desire is an independent willpower. The will for Saint Gregory is thus “free movement”, or “independent movement” (αὐτεξούσιος κίνησις). [10]

Ultimately, the concepts of freedom and will often form a single whole – free will (τὸ αὐτεξούσιον or τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν). As stated above, free will in the understanding of the Eastern, Greek-speaking Church Fathers does not quite accurately correspond to the Latin concept of *liberum arbitrium*. The concepts

αὐτεξουσιότης ('freedom, independent power') and προαίρεσις ('free choice') are interrelated, but not unconditionally. If we talk about the freedom of God, then it is not characteristic of God to choose. John of Damascus drew attention to this, "But in the case of God, it is to be remembered, we speak of wish, but it is not correct to speak of choice. For God does not deliberate, since that is a mark of ignorance, and no one deliberates about what he knows. But if counsel is a mark of ignorance, surely choice must also be so. God, then, since He has absolute knowledge of everything, does not deliberate". [17]

The human will and the ability of man to make free choices are significantly different from the similar qualities of God Almighty. After the Fall, man began to hesitate in his choice, to lean towards one decision or another. This quality of a person is denoted by the concept γνώμη ('thought, judgment, intelligence; will, disposition, inclination; judgment, opinion' [9]). This concept characterizes people after the Fall and is sometimes identified with choice, which is not entirely correct.

Free choice (προαίρεσις) remains with man, both before the Fall and after, since it is a property of the image of God in man and belongs to the will, one of the powers of his soul. The human soul, being one, simple and indivisible, manifests and realizes itself through three of its own powers: rational, irritable and desirable. The attribute of the desired power of the soul is the will of man (θέλημα). Free choice (προαίρεσις) is one of the important stages of such a complex phenomenon as an act of will.

The concept of προαίρεσις is found in the works of pre-Christian ancient Greek philosophers and orators. Plato in his dialogue *Parmenides* used this concept in the meaning of 'a purpose, resolution'. [11] Lycurgus of Athens uses this word in the phrase "τά κατὰ προαίρεσιν αδικήματα" ('wrongs done from malice prepense'). Epicurus, the founder of the Hellenistic philosophical school of Epicureanism, gave this word the meaning of "inclination, affection", and Hippocrates uses it to mean 'motive'. Demosthenes quite often pronounced this word in his speeches in the sense of 'the will, the inclination or disposition'. [1]

Beginning with Aristotle, the term became established in the field of morality or human moral qualities. In the moral sense of the word, the term appears in the philosophy of Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* for the first time. The term προαίρεσις in the works by Aristotle is usually translated as 'conscious choice (moral choice) or moral purpose' and is central to his ethics. [5] After Aristotle, προαίρεσις was widely used by the Stoics, of whom Epictetus used it most often.

[8] Epictetus gave this concept the meaning not of specific decision, but of moral attitude or volitional ability in general. [3]

Most Church Fathers and Eastern Orthodox theologians thoroughly studied the works by Aristotle and had a good understanding of his philosophical ideas and ethical conceptions. Many elements of the philosophy of Aristotle and Epictetus were close to Christian asceticism and Christian consciousness. Following the Classical Greek and Hellenistic tradition, the term προαίρεσις began to be widely used by church authors and holy fathers: Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Tatian, Irenaeus of Lyon, Origen, Athanasius the Great, Didymus the Blind, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Nemesis of Emesa, John of Damascus, Maximus the Confessor and others. John Chrysostom believed that this concept was key to distinguishing between humans, animals and inanimate objects.

According to the Eastern Church Fathers, only human beings have freedom of choice, and this is one of the signs of their likeness to the Lord. In this respect, the concept of προαίρεσις is opposed to the concept of ἀνάγκη ('force, constraint, necessity'). [9] The Christian authors used this concept not in the sense in which Isocrates and the ancient Greek authors use it, but in the sense of ἀνάγκη as a force that predetermines the existence of animals and the inanimate world, whereas man always and in any state has free will and free choice.

On the other hand, since the word προαίρεσις means the free expression of human will, the Church Fathers associate the emergence of sin with it, since the root of sin lies precisely in the human will trends. Moreover, it is free will that makes a person responsible for his actions, despite original sin and the depravity of human desires. For example, Clement of Alexandria wrote, "Whence he who prevents is a cause; while he who prevents not judges justly the soul's choice. So in no respect is God the author of evil. But since free choice and inclination originate sins (ἵν' ὅτι μάλιστα ὁ θεὸς μένη ἡμῖν κακίας ἀναίτιος. ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων προαίρεσις καὶ ὁρμὴ κατάρχει [25]), and a mistaken judgment sometimes prevails, from which, since it is ignorance and stupidity, we do not take pains to recede, punishments are rightly inflicted. For to take fever is involuntary; but when one takes fever through his own fault, from excess, we blame him. Inasmuch, then, as evil is involuntary, – for no one prefers evil as evil; but induced by the pleasure that is in it, and imagining it good, considers it desirable; – such being the case, to free ourselves from ignorance, and from evil and voluptuous choice, and above all, to withhold our assent from those delusive phantasies, depends on ourselves". [6]

Basil the Great in his Homily IX, explaining that *God is not the Author of Evil*, indicated that the reason for the Fall and the falling away from God of both the devil and man is in the personal will of each, and not in nature, “Deaths come from God. Yet death is not absolutely an evil, except in the case of the death of the sinner, in which case departure from this world is a beginning of the punishments of hell. On the other hand, of the evils of hell the cause is not God, but ourselves. The origin and root of sin is what is in our own control and our free will (προαίρεσως)”. [2A]

The Eastern Orthodox interpretation given to the theological doctrine explaining how evil emerged partly differs from the Augustinian concept of predestination. Evil is a result of human free choice. At the same time, Eastern Orthodox theologians consistently rejected Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism, recognizing the corruption of human free will as a result of the Fall. The contradiction between the human will damaged by sin, insufficient for the right choice and salvation, and the freedom of choice given to man by God, is resolved in Eastern Orthodoxy by the concept of synergy (literally συνεργία means ‘joint working, cooperation’). [9] The issue of cooperation between men and God, human personal participation in the matter of their own salvation has always been of great importance for the Eastern Orthodox theologians. One of the key provisions of Eastern Orthodox ethics is that Divine grace acts through human free will. God does not save a person without his participation, will and efforts.

According to the Eastern Orthodox concept of synergy, the interaction of God and man, the divine and human will, occurs freely and in concert. The spiritual transformation of man is possible only through his voluntary cooperation with God. Synergy implies a coordinated and equivalent action of free choice (προαίρεσις) and the influence of grace (χάρισμα), which separately from each other are insufficient for the salvation of human soul. The ‘synergetic effect’ is that salvation is achieved not by the simple sum of human free will and the grace of God, but by their interaction.

The concept of synergy was developed in the works by John Chrysostom, in whose theology and anthropology free choice (προαίρεσις) played an important role. This concept was interpreted by Chrysostom as “a combination of will, reason and emotional elements”. [23] The concept of free choice is explored in *Exegesis of the Epistle to the Romans* by John Chrysostom. It should be emphasized that all who supported the doctrine of predestination, from Saint Augustine to John Calvin, referred to the Apostle Paul, who, according to their assumptions,

clearly substantiated predestination to salvation and the impossibility of man to be saved on his own in the most logical and consistent manner.

The Apostle Paul, speaking about the law, touches on an important topic. He comes to the idea that as a result of the disorder of human nature, it happens that a person desires one thing, but does another, and does not do it on his own, but under the compulsion of the sin living in him (Rom. 7:16-17). But if this is true, then, as it seems to supporters of predestination, it follows that man is incapable of making free decisions.

John Chrysostom explains, "With the words "if I do what I do not want", the apostle does not destroy free will and does not introduce some kind of violent necessity, because if we sin not voluntarily, but under compulsion, then... we had no punishment... there would be grounds". [14, Homilia 13] Further, discussing sin within a person, Chrysostom proves that evil is not in the human flesh itself, "We agree that the flesh is lower and insufficient than the soul, but is not at all opposed to it, not hostile and not evil, but like a harp to a musician, and like a ship to the helmsman, so the flesh is subordinate to the soul". [14, Homilia 13]

According to the exegete, Paul ascribes "predominant importance to the soul", and further in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans 7:19-20 he notes, "Do you notice how (the apostle), having freed both the being of the soul and the being of the flesh from accusation, transferred everything to vicious activity? If a person does not want evil, then the soul is free, and if he does not do evil, then the body is free: everything depends only on one evil will (πονηρᾶς προαιρέσεως). Human soul, body and will are not essentially the same thing, but the former are the creations of God, and the latter is a movement born from ourselves, which we direct wherever we want. Will (βούλησις), in itself, is a natural ability given from God; but the same will is something of our own and depends on our mind (τῆς γνώμης)". [14]

Obviously, for John Chrysostom, freedom of choice has a free, separate existence. He distinguishes between the ability of desire (βούλησις), which we have in ourselves, and the fact of desire (προαίρεσις), which belongs to us and comes from our rational decision (γνώμη). In his opinion, free will or inclination of the will in essence is not the same thing as the human soul (ψυχή) or body (σῶμα), for the latter are the creations of the Lord, and the former is "a movement born from ourselves, which we direct wherever we want". "And if will in general (ἡ βούλησις) is an innate ability given to us by God (ἔμφυτον καὶ παρὰ Θεοῦ), then specifically defined will (ἡ τοιάδε βούλησις) is something our own and dependent from our arbitrary inclination (ἡμέτερον καὶ τῆς γνώμης

ἡμῶν)". [14, Homilia 13] In this regard, John Chrysostom believes that people are 'vessels of wrath' or 'vessels of mercy' not because they are created as such, but because of their own will and choice, "Why are some vessels of wrath, and others vessels of mercy? By their own free will (Ἀπὸ προαίρεσέως οὐκείας)". [14, Homilia 13]

Like Maximus the Confessor and some previous Eastern Orthodox theologians, [26] John Chrysostom sees the reason for human sinful actions not in the sinfulness of his flesh or his soul, but in the inclination of his will to evil. The sinful human behavior was not predestined by the Fall. He wrote, "And whenever you hear about sin, do not think that it is some kind of independent force, but it is a vicious action, constantly beginning and ending, not existing before the commission, and after the commission disappears again. Because of sin the law was given; and the law is never given to destroy anything natural, but to correct an arbitrary bad action (προαίρεσιν πονηρᾶς πράξεως)". [14, Homilia 12] Every sin, therefore, is the result of either a 'careless will' (ἡ ῥάθυμος προαίρεσις) and a 'depraved mind' (ἡ διεφθαρμένη γνῶμη), or 'arbitrary evil action' (τῆς κατὰ προαίρεσιν πονηρᾶς πράξεως). [14, Homilia 12]

In general, John Chrysostom connects sin with the voluntary vicious activity of man (μόνης τῆς πονηρᾶς προαίρεσέως). Sin and vice (κακία) stem from the free will of man and are not natural evil (οὐ φύσει πονηρόν) or some independent force (μὴ δύναμιν τινα ἐνυπόστατον), therefore a person can expel them from himself and instill virtue in himself. Of course, a person can only do this through the atoning sacrifice of Christ. So, for example, discussing the meaning of the phrase "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His" (Rom. 8:7-10), the author explains, "Since the gift was not given by natural necessity, but was given by free will (προαίρεσέως), then it is up to you to become one or the other". [14, Homilia 13] He further develops his idea, "After all, it does not depend on the potter that from the same mixture some go for honorable and others for low use, but on the disposal of those who use the product, so here too the matter depends on free will (τῆς προαίρεσέως)". [14, Homilia 13]

Chrysostom notes that free choice should not be confused with the knowledge of what is good and what is evil. The Creator entrusted this role to human conscience (συνειδός). [22] First of all, man has a natural 'law of conscience' (τὸν νόμον κατὰ τὸ συνειδός), which is an associate (συνήγορον) of man who wants to do good. It strengthens this desire, "So I find the law that when I want to do good, it is applicable to me evil" (Rom. 7:21). I praise the law

according to my conscience, argues Paul, and when I want to do good, I find in it a protector who strains my will; Just as I delight in the law, so it approves of my disposition. [14, Homilia 13] Consequently, the knowledge of good and that which is opposite to it was originally invested in man; this knowledge was subsequently only strengthened by the law given by God through Moses. For one who freely intends to do something good, the divine law is only an ally in this, and to the extent that the person himself desires it.

Considering the works by John Chrysostom, the three points in using the conception of human free choice can be highlighted. First, it is necessary to emphasize the special nature of free choice. Chrysostom very categorically maintained, “We are free and masters of our will (προαίρεσις)”, [13] that is, no one impacts on our will except ourselves, and we are completely responsible for our actions. Chrysostom spends a lot of effort defending the free nature of our choice, having to fight fatalism and Manichaeism. Each of these trends in its own way separates a person from managing himself and removes responsibility for a moral life, denying the freedom of his actions.

The second point is the intellectual element that interferes with the decision made by human free choice. Free choice is determined by the judgments, which are given to things by man. It is here that the word γνώμη appears, used together with the concept of free choice. In particular, Chrysostom wrote, “Προαιρέσεως γάρ καὶ γνώμης ἡ κακία πᾶσα” (All evil comes from will and free intentions). [15, Homilia 37]

The notion of γνώμη is thus a decision based on motives clearly understood by the human mind. Volition is a movement of the human will that forces it to take action. Thus, there is a connection between will as a natural element (βούλησις), judgment of the mind or intention (γνώμη) and free choice (προαίρεσις), that is, the direct movement of the will towards one or another action. Free choice cannot do without the participation of the human mind, so it unavoidably includes rational elements. It is necessary to take into account that any human moral activity belongs to free choice (προαίρεσις), but it relies on the knowledge of the human mind in order to understand and evaluate what is good and what is bad, “Was then that which is good made death unto me?” asks Apostle Paul. Let it not be: but sin, let sin appear (v. 13), that is, let it be proven how great an evil is sin, as well as a careless will (ἡ ῥάθυμος προαίρεσις), the desire for the worst, the very thing is bad and a corrupt mind (ἡ διεφθαρμένη γνώμη), because this is the cause of all evil”. [14, Homilia 12]

The final third point is that free will (προαίρεσις) is a force exclusively inherent in man, according to Chrysostom. It is characteristic of him and it allows one to judge the moral qualities of man. The same ideas were promoted by Aristotle. This is why Chrysostom expresses the opinion that will is more important for man than nature (οὐσία). And it is free choice that characterizes man, since it is not nature that plunges man into hell or leads him to heaven, but free choice, "He once spoke about the old man and showed that it is not this man, but something else, because freedom (in man) more important than essence; the former is more human than the latter. It is not the essence that plunges into Gehenna, it is not the essence that leads into the kingdom (of God), but freedom alone". [12, Homilia 8]

On this occasion, explaining the passage from the Epistle to the Romans 11:24, Chrysostom makes a characteristic remark, "And whenever you hear that (the apostle) constantly uses the expression 'through nature' and 'according to nature', do not think that he means this here immutable nature, but with these names he means both consistent and corresponding, and inconsistent with nature. It is not natural actions that are good and evil, but only actions of the mind and will (γνώμης καὶ προαιρέσεως μόνης)". [14, Homilia 19] The exegete then gives the following explanations, "The apostle did not say, 'Let him not live', or, 'Let not the flesh work', but, 'Let not sin reign', because Christ did not come to abolish nature, but to correct the will". [14, Homilia 11]

The issue of interaction between Divine grace and human will, their relationship was of paramount importance for Chrysostom. The grace becomes the inner spiritual strength of man and contributes to his spiritual growth. Chrysostom completely rejected the idea that man could achieve spiritual perfection outside of his Creator, but he also did not give the grace of God a dominant position in the matter of human salvation. [24] Here, Divine grace only helps a person in his moral transformation. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans 1:11 he stated "It then depends on grace to stand firm and not waver. And when you hear about grace (χάριτος), do not think that the reward for will (προαιρέσεως μισθόν) will be rejected. By mentioning grace, the apostle does not humiliate the labor of choice, but cuts off the arrogance of arrogance. So, do not become weak (in spirit) because Paul called this the bestowal of grace (χάρισμα). Due to his great gratitude to God, he usually called good deeds a gift of grace, because for them too we need great help from above". [14, Homilia 2]

In another part of his exegetical work, commenting on the passage from the Epistle (Rom. 1:18-25), John Chrysostom, discussing the power of Divine grace

and emphasizing the decisive importance of free choice, gives an example from the Old Testament. "And we are surrounded by lions, anger and lust, having dangerous teeth and tearing to pieces everyone who is attacked (by them). Be like Daniel, and do not allow these passions to sink their teeth into your soul. But, you will say, grace helped Daniel in everything. True, but it helped because it was preceded by his own will. Thus, if we also wish to become like him, then grace is now ready to help". [14, Homilia 3] He also explains the passage from the Epistle to the Romans 9:20, "Here (the apostle) does not destroy free will, but shows to what extent one must obey God". [14, Homilia 16]

Apostle Paul widely discussed the moral fall of man in the first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. The moral fall is represented there in a systematic and consecutive way that makes the Epistle one of the most important writings for Christian theology. Most doctrines of predestination are based on this Epistle. According to Chrysostom, the reason for the moral fall of man is not the environment or other factors in the life of ancient man, but the free choice towards sin, a crime against the moral law located within a person. Thus, a person endowed with the gift of free choice self-determines between good - doing good deeds, fulfilling the will of God, and evil - committing sin. "They do not obey the truth, but they obey untruth. Here is another accusation again. What protection can one have who shuns the light and chooses darkness? And moreover, the apostle did not say: "they are forced and subjected to violence," but: "they obey unrighteousness," so that you understand that their fall is from free will (προαιρέσεως), and crime is not from necessity (ἀνάγκης)". [14, Homilia 5]

The theme of suffering was always close to Chrysostom, especially in connection with human free will. For example, in his Letters to Saint Olympia, he emphasized the special importance of free choice, "The causes of joy lie not in the unchangeable laws of nature, which are impossible for us to destroy and change, but in the free reflections of our will (τῆς προαιρέσεως λογισμοί), which are for us to control easily". [2]

In his comments on the Epistle to the Romans, Chrysostom certainly stated that patiently enduring sorrows by man only strengthens his moral force and further confirms him in pious behavior and doing good things, "If you understand what you want or do not want, you must endure what you endure; and if you begin to endure with thanksgiving, you will receive very great benefit, but if you complain, be indignant and murmur, then you will not reduce your misfortune, and you will create an even greater storm. Having such thoughts,

we will accept everything, no matter what happens to us out of necessity (ἀνάγκης), as if it happened according to our desire (προαίρεσως)”.

Within this context, Chrysostom uses another example to emphasize the importance of free choice, “Suppose, for example, that one has lost his beloved son, and another has lost all his property; if you consider that it was impossible to avoid what happened, and on the other hand, that from an irreparable misfortune you can derive some benefit for yourself and courageously endure what happened, and if, instead of blasphemy, you give praise to the Lord, then the misfortunes that befell you against your will, are credited to you as if they happened at your request”. [14, Homilia 9]

Thus, in early Eastern Orthodox theology, the concept of free choice included the will, reason and emotions of man. Free choice was associated not only with the emergence of sin, but also with the possibility of transformation of man by Divine grace, the beginning of virtue. Free choice characterizes man as a moral person, this is a property of God’s image in man. The action of Divine grace and human free will are equivalent in the matter of his salvation. It is important to note that an intellectual element (γνώμη) is introduced into the process of volitional act. Free choice is determined by the judgment that a person forms in relation to the subject of choice. Free choice is always determined by the decision of the mind, and directs the will of man towards either good or evil, either salvation or perdition.

However, by no way free choice should be identified with this intellectual element (γνώμη). John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus clearly distinguish between these concepts – rational judgment (γνώμη) precedes individual free choice (προαίρεσις), but are not equivalent to it. Unlike Western Christianity, Eastern Orthodox theology interprets free choice and free will as the most important qualities of a person, making him similar to his Creator. Freedom of choice is not abolished by the original sin, although the insufficiency of human will for the salvation of the soul is recognized. The concept of synergy eliminates the contradiction between the corruption of the human will and the grace of God, which man must voluntarily accept.

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THE FREE CHOICE IN EARLY EASTERN ORTHODOX ANTHROPOLOGY

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Abstract

The article examines the theological concepts of free choice in Eastern Orthodox theology (Irenaeus of Lyon, Clement of Alexandria, Didymus the Blind, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus). The Eastern theology has absorbed the rich Hellenistic intellectual tradition in interpreting the conception of free choice (Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Lysurgus, Isocrates, Hippocrates, Demosthenes, Epictetus). The differences between the Eastern Orthodox and Western Christian teachings on the relationship between free will and predestination in the matter of human salvation are revealed. The Orthodox tradition considers free choice not in the context of soteriology, but of anthropology, as an inalienable property of human being that is preserved, despite the original sin. The contradiction between free choice and predestination is resolved through the concept of synergy – the interaction between God's grace and human free will. At that, in an individual choice in favor of accepting God's grace and salvation, the entire person participates – reason, will and emotions, which is also peculiar for Orthodox anthropology.

Keywords:

Eastern Orthodox anthropology, free choice, free will, predestination, synergy

RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY IN TERMS OF PSYCHOLOGY

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From the point of view of Christian anthropology, a person's spiritual life is superior to mental and physical life. At the same time, mental health has a significant impact on a person's relationships with others and on the quality of his spiritual life. Very often the holy fathers of our Church have compared the body and soul of man to a fortress in which his spirit dwells. [4]

Religion is the key to everything in human life. The ideal human life is possible only in God, with God, and for God. Divine meaning should be reflected in the existence of each particular human being. [20] Religion focused on the inner world of man, on religious experience, which is of great importance for the emergence of the psychology of religion. [3]

Attempts to study religion from psychological point of view have been made since antiquity. Aristotle, in his famous treatise "On the Soul" (*peri psyches*), raises with astonishing clarity the question of the dependence of the soul and of man's mental states and processes on the physical state of the body. [6]

The psychology of religion, as one component of the study of religion, developed in Europe and America in the 19th-20th century at the intersection of such sciences as religious studies, experimental psychology, history, sociology, ethnography, and philosophy. The humanistic sciences, which gradually separated from theology, developed free theories of the psychology of religion, and as a result, separate schools of research on the psychology of religion emerged. [17]

The first to touch on the problem of "psychology and religion" was the German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. Wundt showed in his work "The Psychology of Nations" that religion arises out of a sense of belonging, fear and hope, as the reality around us, which requires understanding, is subject to a supernatural force. [10]

However, the American scientists Granville Stanley Hall and William James should still be considered the founders of science. [18] The beginning of this

discipline as a separate field of research is considered to be 1881, the date of Stanley Hall's public address in Boston on the subject of moral and religious education. [17] Also the first published work on the psychology of religion – „The Moral and Religious Education of Children“ belongs to Hall. [18]

Granville Stanley Hall was the first to point out the connection that exists between the historical development of the human species and the individual development of man. [21] Hall regarded religion as a necessary condition of the process of personal development, and therefore paid special attention to the research and development of various effective methods of religious education. His two-volume work „Youth“ (1904) became a textbook on the problems of religious psychology in adolescence. [13] Hall, in analyzing his own studies of childhood and adolescence, concludes that the development of religious feeling originates in childhood love, first in the child's trust and gratitude to the mother, and later it continues in the relationship to God. [9]

Williams James, like Hall, was one of the first figures in the field of psychology to explore the relationship between spirituality, religiosity, and psychology. His 1902 paper, „Types of Religious Experience,“ was important to the emergence of the psychology of religion. [11] James distinguishes between institutional and personal religion. It is he who, for the first time in the history of psychology, turns to personal religious experience, to man's subjective experience, man's attitude toward what he „respects as divine“. [18] Personal religion is the source of mystical experiences, the relationship between mental health and religiosity. James points out that religiosity can have both healthy and pathological effects on a person's life. Optimism, „joie de vivre“, and seeing the best around is natural in a person's life religion. James directly linked the truth of religion and belief in God to practical benefits for man. James placed mystical experiences and mystical states of consciousness at the center of a person's religious life and considered them the roots that nourish religiosity. [9]

A new approach to the problem of the psychology of religion was the ideas, opinions and judgments of Sigmund Freud in his classical psychoanalysis. [5] The method of psychoanalysis developed by Sigmund Freud made possible the finest study of mental processes. [2] According to Freud, religiosity is man's painful reaction to the conditions of existence in the natural and social environment. Freud's psychoanalytic conception of religion is based on two basic theses, according to which religion is a collective neurosis and a means of protection against it. Freud sought answers to two basic questions: what is the source and what is the essence of religion. Freud explains belief in God as the

result of our helplessness and desire for a father figure. "And so out of the need to make human helplessness more bearable arises a set of ideas, composed of memories of the helplessness of one's own childhood and the childhood of all men". [9]

While Sigmund Freud adhered to the idea of the incompatibility of religion and psychoanalysis, his best student and yesterday's heir Carl Gustav Jung, who turned Freud's opponent, advocated the union of the two. [2] Carl Jung considered religion to be the explanation of all his psychology, and his psychotherapeutic work was more about the spiritual guidance of patients. Jung divided religious issues into three levels:

The first was the psychological plane, where he investigated the influence of religion on the condition of his patients.

The second plane is religious, precisely because of his extensive knowledge of different religions.

The third - the mystical plane - Jung had many spiritual experiences. [9]

According to Jung, religion is first and foremost a state of consciousness, a manifestation of a vital connection with those mental processes that lie deep within the soul. Religion is the way of salvation revealed in revelation; it is man's inner state, the manifestations of which appear in the process of his spiritual history. Religion is rooted in the history of every nation and emphasizes its authentic psychology. Religion gives man a psychological balance. Since ancient times, people have supported their actions with appropriate rituals of a religious nature. Magic gives man a sense of security. The history of religion, according to Carl Jung, is the history of the change of symbolic images through which the collective unconscious constructs a system of symbols. With the help of religious symbols, the meaning of existence is discovered and gives meaning in human life. The loss of the sacred character of symbols for man, according to Jung, will be tragic. [13]

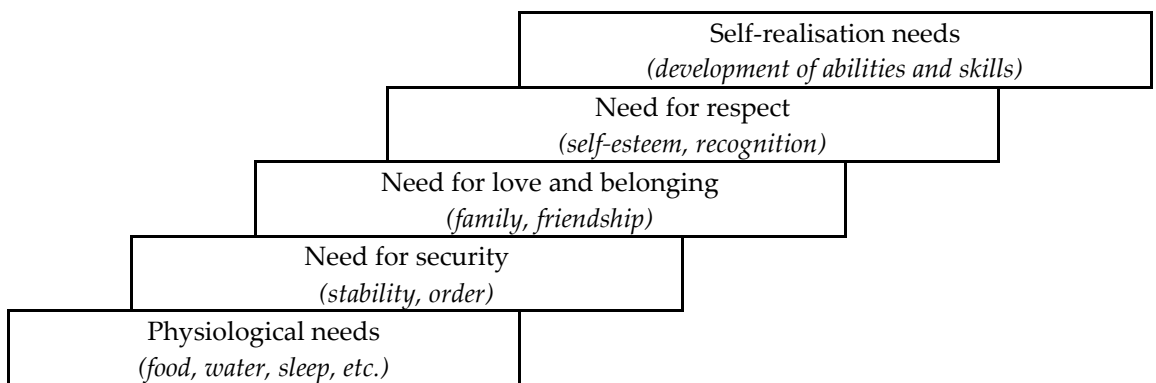
Karl Marx considered religion to be an illusion in which man finds himself. According to Marx, man is in a distorted reality and is searching for his place in this world. [8] As a true follower of Ludwig Feuerbach, Marx believed that the religiosity of the individual - the desire for the best, the desire for happiness and the state of bliss. [15] Not finding a way to improve his life causes him to turn to religion. Karl Marx's claim, familiar to many, that religion is „opium“ for humans only underscores his atheistic views. [1] Marx believed that people must gain control over production and wealth. Then man will be closer to himself and to other people. [8] Then the need to look for a substitute in religion also disappears.

[22] For decades, Soviet ideology has used Marx's teachings to spread atheist propaganda. [17]

Durkheim and Weber found a relationship between the origin of society and the origin of religion. According to Durkheim, religion contributes to the socialization of society, promoting tradition and order. [8] Weber paid attention to the importance of being in harmony with God. The more man deviates from God's commandments, the more the world becomes sinful and without God. [17]

Berres Frederick Skinner saw much in common in politics and religion. In his view they had one main goal - human control and behavior. Social behavior is governed by concepts of "good" or "bad", the state governs conditions of "legal" or "illegal". In religion, the presence of hell and paradise stimulates man to lead a religious lifestyle. All this provides these institutions with the effectiveness of human management. [16]

Abraham Harold Maslow, in his humanistic theory of personality, argued that psychology should be interested not only in the depth of the human spirit, but also in its spiritual world and ontological values. According to Maslow, neurosis and man's psychological maladjustment to life occur as a result of the failure to satisfy basic human needs. Below we present Maslow's famous ladder in hierarchical order.



Maslow's hierarchy of human needs

The sequential ordering of basic needs in a hierarchy is the main organizing principle of human motivation. The needs located at the bottom are dominant and must be more or less satisfied in order for a person to be aware of the presence of the needs located at the top and to be motivated by them. Maslow abandoned organized religion and concentrated all his attention on individual

religion. Maslow believed that religious feelings and values are related to the individual's feelings and values. Each person has their own religion, developed according to their own perspective, revealing their personal myths, symbols and rituals that have no meaning to anyone else. Maslow did not take into account that this approach complicates communication between people. [12]

According to Gordon Allport, each person is unique in nature and his personality is constantly changing and developing dynamically. An individual's religiosity is much more complicated and multifaceted than it looks from the outside. It is like a piece of simple white light in which there is nothing unexpected, but in reality it is a rainbow overflowing with color. It is impossible to simulate a religious experience. A person's religiosity is influenced by physiological and psychological needs, intellect and environment. [13] Allport believed that each of us can be classified into one of two groups depending on how we view faith. For the first group, faith appears as something external to the person. For believers, faith is seen in categories of usefulness, respectability, democracy, status, etc. For them, faith has value because of the possibility of achieving life goals. Such believers can always rationally explain why faith is necessary. For the second group of believers, faith has absolute value in itself, without any benefits. Such believers are prepared to suffer for their faith. As a rule, they are deeply committed to a particular religious tradition, strictly adhere to established religious canons and rules, are very dogmatic, and refuse to take a critical stance on matters of faith. They acknowledge the dominant role of faith in life, relegating social criteria for evaluating life to the background. [14]

According to Albert Bandura, religiosity is built on various characteristics of the human psyche, one of which is the tendency of a person to follow the behavioural patterns or models of other people. People observe and analyze religious behavior in their social environment and become religious themselves. Through their religious experiences and actions, they can support and change this social environment. [7] By observing other people, one learns and adopts new forms of behaviour, while at the same time shedding old forms of behaviour. [3]

Eric Fromm questions the meaning of human existence, the extent to which happiness is attainable for human beings in our technocratic civilization. [2] Man's religiosity can only be understood in the light of the influence of culture in a specific historical aspect. The need for orientation and attachment forms the basis of man's basic religious need. Psychology often reveals truths that have long been discovered and used by various religions. Religions have been solving

key human problems, both existential and mundane, for centuries. Before the advent of psychotherapy, religion was the only tool that supported the mental and spiritual health of society. While Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung considered religion an object of study, Eric Fromm considered it a medical tool and a cure for a sick humanity. [9] Eric Fromm believed that a distinction should be made between psychoanalysis, which deals with the problem of social adjustment, and psychoanalysis, which focuses on the „healing of the soul“. The goal of psychoanalytic healing of the soul is to help the person achieve an attitude toward life that Fromm called „religious“. The psychoanalyst is not a theologian or a philosopher and does not claim to be competent in these areas; but as a healer of the soul, the psychoanalyst is concerned with the same problems as philosophy and theology - the human soul and its healing. At present, then, two groups are professionally engaged in the study of the soul: priests and psychoanalysts. [2]

For centuries, religions have used various techniques that make up modern professional psychological tools:

Priests:

Confession
sacrament of confession
forgiveness of sins
catechesis
prayer
fasting and abstinence

Psychoanalysts:

a story about mental and social problems
doctor-patient confidentiality
purification, catharsis
advice, training
emotional euphoria, rhythmic repetition
acquisition of new skills.

According to Fromm, religion serves basic psychological processes based on corresponding human needs that are characteristic of human beings, regardless of their relationship to religion. At the heart of religious worship and individual prayer lies the same process of transforming negative emotions and experiences into positive psychological experiences. The professional ethics and roles of spiritual fathers and psychotherapists largely coincide because both are “concerned with the human soul”. Before Fromm, psychoanalysis was only concerned with human mental health. It was Fromm who brought to psychoanalysis an interest in human spiritual health. Fromm believed that a psychoanalyst should not give up caring for the soul unless he himself held religious views. What is important is to see a person's inner orientation toward love and truth, not what symbolic system a person relies on. All religions and

ideologies are aimed at satisfying the human need to feel connected to oneself, other people, and the world as a whole. [9] If religions promote the growth, strength, freedom and happiness of the people who believe in them, we see the fruit of love. But if they lead to the corruption of human faculties, to unhappiness and the absence of any fruit, then they are not born of love - and it doesn't matter how the dogma would like to present the issue. [2] If a religious system does not conform to the prevailing social character, it becomes an ideology, and society is faced with the task of finding a true religious faith. [9]

Viktor Emil Frankl, the author of logotherapy, believed that psychology should heal the soul. Frankl placed human spirituality above biological functions and psychological mechanisms. Frankl saw in logotherapy a path leading man from a state of nihilism, loneliness, and despair through comfort and the search for meaning to a sense of security, to God. For an inner dialogue with God, man needs the experience of loneliness. By understanding loneliness, one comes to a deeper understanding of religiosity. *"Trouble teaches prayer"* - this popular saying forms an inner support in man on his journey towards God. *"Be the master of your will and the slave of your conscience"*. If you want to have a purpose in life, you must take responsibility for your life. At a time when the Ten Commandments of the Gospel have ceased to be the norm of life, only the search for meaning, guided by conscience, can give one confidence in the rightness of the decisions one makes. When we speak of ultimate meaning or super-meaning, knowledge recedes into the background and man is left only with faith. A person who has faith does not raise the question of the meaning of life as acutely as one who does not have faith. [19]

Man has the greatest treasure - the sanctuary of his soul, which is the image of God. Both the priest and the psychologist must be reverently and carefully approaching the soul of man. This is the mission of true professionalism and the way of spiritualizing psychology itself. Psychology and psychotherapy need a dialogue with religion because they share with it a common point of application - the human soul, but the goal of psychotherapy is the healing of the soul and the goal of religion is the salvation of the soul.

SUMMARY

A person has the greatest treasure - the sanctuary of his soul, which is the image of God. Religion is the key to everything in human life. Ideal human life is possible only in God, with God and for God. Divine meaning should be reflected in the existence of each particular person. For a religious person, it is

natural to see the best, with optimism and joy to watch tomorrow. Psychology often reveals the truths that have been discovered and used by various religions many centuries ago. For centuries, religion has been engaged in key human problems, existential and secular. Before the appearance of psychotherapy, religion was the only tool that supported the mental and spiritual health of society. Professional ethics and role of priests and psychotherapists are largely solidary - they both "deal with the human soul." Both the priest and the psychologist should respectfully and reverently treat to the soul of a person. Psychology and psychotherapy need dialogue with religion, because they have a common point of contact - the human soul. Only the goal of psychotherapy is the healing of the soul, while the purpose of religion is the salvation of the soul.

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RELIGION AND RELIGIOSITY IN TERMS OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

The religiosity of a person is much more complicated and multifaceted than it seems from the outside. Physiological and psychological needs, intelligence and the environment have an impact on human religiosity. For centuries, religions have used various methods that make up modern professional psychological tools. Religion is focused on the inner world of a person, on its religious experience, which is of great importance for the emergence of the psychology of religion. Religion contributes to socialization, supporting traditions and order in society. As a healer of the soul, the psychoanalyst is interested in the same issues that philosophy and theology - human soul and its healing.

Keywords

Psychology, religion, religiosity, soul, psychologist

SIN AS A DISEASE AND ITS THERAPY¹

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INTRODUCTION

God created everything very well. He created man as best he could, in his own image and likeness. He gave him the opportunity to become a god according to grace. How? By maintaining unity with God in love, grace, and understanding. This means that just as God, who is love, is apathetic, he cannot create something in which there is passion. It follows that sin is not something that God created but is the result of our distancing ourselves from God. Distancing ourselves from God has created a gulf between God and man, but despite this, God does not cease to love man. Illness always follows health; a person who is far from God becomes [spiritually] ill. Pain, sorrow, and death enter into his life. However, Christ does not come into the world to punish man, but to heal him, to deliver him from the power of the devil, who through sin gains power over man, and to restore him to his original state of union with God. It is precisely this concept that we encounter in the words of Christ in the Holy Scriptures when Christ met with the Pharisees. He said that a true friend of God is not one who merely fulfills the prescribed laws, i.e., to create an imaginary image of a good person, but one who understands that far from God there is no life, no salvation, no light.

EGOISM VERSUS LOVE

And so, we Christians often enslave ourselves with canons and rules, superficial expressions of our faith, and we imagine that we are good. We enslave ourselves and create our own idols. This means that we are actually worshipping ourselves. Christ said that he came to save and redeem people, to heal and cure them. Now we are in the period of the Lenten triodion (*The lecture was presented during the preparation for Lent.), when characteristic gospels are read on Sundays,

¹ This lecture was presented at an international conference on the topic of "Spiritual Therapy in Modern Society," which was held on February 18, 2025, at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Prešov in Prešov. The event was organized by the Institute of Greek Language and Culture.

as we read about the Pharisee and the publican. God does not like boasting but accepts a person who is able to destroy this idol of himself and become a person of repentance. Another reading that moves me deeply is the healing of the blind man. You surely remember when the apostles asked, Christ replied that this illness was not because of the sin of the man or his parents, but so that the name of God might be glorified. And just as it was in the beginning, when God created man from clay and water, here again he takes sand and saliva in his hands, rubs this mud on the place where the eyes should be, sends him to wash himself, and thus recreates his physical eyes, and he sees again. In other words, God tries to cleanse and rebuild this destroyed image of man. The highest expression of his divine love is his sacrifice on the cross. Christ forgave the sins of the whole world until his second coming. So where is the responsibility and where is the injustice? The first inhabitant of paradise is the thief on the cross. So, what is our salvation based on?

BEGINNING OF INNER TRANSFORMATION

Christ has prepared everything for us and is waiting for our return. Not to judge us, but to heal us, forgive our sins, and recreate us as in the beginning. When a person understands that the way he lives is not his right, that it is not the joy of life, but an attitude towards life that actually distances him from God, he desires to return to God. And that is where the myth of the good person is shattered. Through self-knowledge, this idol is destroyed, and man sees himself as naked. He understands that he is not essentially a bad person, but a suffering and sick person. When someone realizes that he is sick, he seeks a doctor to be healed. For us, the doctor of our souls and bodies is Jesus Christ. And this steady march toward healing is called repentance, which is made perfect through confession. In confession, the Holy Spirit descends upon the confessor, forgiving, healing, and sanctifying him, and his personal transformation begins. We all experience our own transformation, when the Holy Spirit makes us immortal from mortal, incorruptible from corruptible, healthy from sick, and holy from sinful. From the moment a person joins the body of the Church, which is a hospital for souls and bodies, it does not mean that he will not sin again, but his attitude towards sin changes. Sin is no longer a pleasure he enjoys, but rather a state that distances him from God. He may sin, and often a sin committed frequently over several months or years becomes his passion. Passions are not easily eradicated but require struggle and time. The penitent strives to purify

himself of his passions and he has faith in God that this will happen. Moreover, this person is in love with God and believes that He will heal him.

We have many remedies in the Church that help the penitent to heal. In the presence of a good spiritual father, obeying the Church under the supervision of a spiritual father, a person gets rid of his ego. An egotist always does his own will. The devil did this, and so did the first humans. Christ, as the new Adam, and the Most Holy Mother of God, as the new Eve, remedy the state of separation from God. Christ acts in complete obedience to His Father even to the cross, and the Most Holy Mother of God acts in obedience to God with the words: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to Your word." When we obey, we also destroy our egoism and act according to God's will. In cooperation with a spiritual father, we learn to struggle spiritually. A spiritual father must always strive to show the face of Christ, not his own. There we learn to fight our thoughts, because all thoughts are born in the mind. The devil has his collaborators. Through thoughts, he tries to enslave our minds, sow passions in us, he has his people who tempt us and he also uses the passions in us, which he magnifies and thus binds us with imaginary chains. It is necessary for us to be able to control our thoughts and have only good thoughts. I try to fight bad habits, I distance myself from places of sin and from people who lead me to sin, not because I hate people, but because I myself am sick and do not have the strength to fight my passions. The prophet David says in his psalm: "I prefer to befriend people who will rebuke me, rather than sinners who will praise me." Habit is very bad because it strengthens passions. For example, a single thought of dislike for someone can, if left unchecked, turn into hatred. Constant anger turns into passion. I must be careful that my heart does not rejoice only in the satisfaction of worldly things. Otherwise, contact with God is lost. It is one thing to eat to survive, and another to become a gourmet. It is one thing to drink a glass of wine, and another to become an alcoholic. It is one thing to sleep, and another to be lazy and care only for one's body. The holy fathers warn that idleness is the mother of all evil.

MEANS OF SPIRITUAL HEALING

The Word of God is preserved, fasting is the mother of every virtue, prayer is a conversation with God. The prayer of Jesus has great power: I confess Christ as my God and ask him for salvation. Reading and studying the Holy Scriptures and the lives of the saints, from which we draw ready-made spiritual nourishment that moves us. These are the medicines that the Church offers us,

with the constant awareness that we are sinners. These are not medicines for their own sake, but tools to achieve a goal. God does not tell us that we are good, but that we can choose to remove the hardness in our hearts. Even a farmer must first clear and plow the field before he can sow. This can be achieved in holy silence, in peace. Of course, not everyone can become a monk and go to a hermitage today. Peace is not a state of place, but a state of soul. We can be in the forest and still be restless. We can be in a state where we want to run away because we have beasts inside us. Nowadays, people are engaged in many activities, but they must also set aside time for themselves. We visit many places and people besides ourselves. That is why it is necessary to set aside time for ourselves every day so that we can look at ourselves critically, turn to the depths of our soul, and have time to talk to our Creator with respect and trust. Then all spiritual remedies will be effective. Once, a lady asked me during confession if she was doing the right thing by listening to various sermons and prayers while cleaning and cooking. I told her that she was doing the right thing. However, look at it this way: if I visited you and instead of sitting down and talking, you cleaned, washed dishes, etc., I would think that this woman has a lot of work to do, so I would probably leave. Yes, this method helps our minds to devote ourselves to prayer, but it cannot be said that it is prayer. It is a good activity. It is necessary for me to stand before God and introduce myself to Him. Isn't it a beautiful image when Adam and God walked together every evening in paradise?

All these means of falling in love with God help us to convince Him that we want Him in our lives. God always shows me complete love and mercy. Therefore, I want to make room for Him in my life so that the Holy Spirit can heal my soul and root out my passions, because I cannot do it myself. And the Holy Spirit gives me everything I need for my salvation. As it is said on the feast of Pentecost: "The Holy Spirit is the one who heals the sick and fills what is lacking." So if I show God that I want it, God can and will do it. I cannot save myself, but Christ can. Therefore, I prove to God that I am a soul who wants to learn to love. Christ is the source of this love, and unification occurs.

SUMMARY

Man is created in God's image and likeness. In paradise, this image was marred by sin. This caused man to distance himself from God, which he was unable to overcome on his own. God Himself, in His infinite love, sets an example in His only Son, who came into the world among men and showed an

example of obedience even to the cross in order to save mankind. However, salvation is not automatic. Man must first understand his state of sinfulness and separation from God. Only then can he embark on the path to salvation. God, in his Church, offers man many means of support on this difficult path. However, if man loves God on the basis of the love he sees in God towards himself, he will turn away from his selfishness and transform his passions into virtues that will help him to salvation. There is no path to salvation without accepting Christ as a friend, teacher, Creator, and Savior.

SIN AS A DISEASE AND ITS THERAPY

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Abstract

The article introduces the idea of spiritual transformation of a person from sinful and sick, through repentant, to loving God. Distancing oneself from God creates a chasm between God and man, but despite this, God does not cease to love man. Illness always follows health; a person who is far from God becomes [spiritually] ill. Pain, sorrow, and death enter their lives. However, Christ did not come into the world to punish man, but to heal him, to free him from the power of the devil. God seeks to purify and rebuild this ruined image of man. The highest expression of His divine love is His sacrifice on the cross. Christ forgave the sins of the whole world in his person until his second coming. When a person understands that the way he lives is not his right, that it is not the joy of life, but an attitude towards life that distances him from God, he desires to return to God. This steady march toward healing is called repentance, which is perfected through confession. In the Church, we have many remedies that help the penitent to heal. In cooperation with a spiritual father, we learn to struggle spiritually. Nowadays, people are involved in many activities, but they must also set aside time for themselves. We visit many places and people besides ourselves. All these means of falling in love with God help us to convince Him that we want Him in our lives.

Keywords

Love, spiritual struggle, therapy, salvation, sin, repentance

BYZANTINE HUMANISM IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY HUMANISMS - INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE IN HONOR OF PROFESSOR ALEXANDER AVENARIUS

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On October 21-22, 2024, an international scientific conference was held at the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Prešov in Prešov on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the death of the eminent historian and Byzantinist of European stature, Prof. PhDr. Alexander Avenarius, CSc., entitled Byzantine

Humanism in the Context of Contemporary Humanisms. The event was organized by the Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Prešov, the Historical Department of Matica Slovenská (Slovak Matica), and the Slovak Historical Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.



The aim of the conference was to examine the basic trajectories of Byzantine humanism in the context of European and Slovak history and its philosophical, theological, and historical aspects. The title itself suggests a wide range of topics that were discussed during the conference. In addition to Slovak researchers, the following institutions accepted the invitation to the conference (Orthodox Theological Faculty of the University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Arts of the University of Prešov in Prešov, Faculty of Arts of Comenius University in Bratislava), researchers from North Macedonia, Israel, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine also accepted the invitation to the conference. The contributions dealt with the issues of the Byzantine heritage in medieval Rus and Italy, the question of the autochthonous theory of the origin of the Slavs, as well as Byzantine military history and Byzantine philosophical thought, humanism in the Old Testament, and the theological concepts of St. Justin Popovich.



There were also presentations devoted to Byzantine themes in Slovak history textbooks, the views of Counter-Reformation authors on the fall of Constantinople, and selected historical views of Jonáš Záborský. Other interesting contributions concerned St. Clement of Ohrid and his place in Macedonian oral tradition, as well as Byzantine issues in the work

of Vasily Pronin. Master's students also had the opportunity to present their contributions at the conference, covering various topics from Hebrew studies and Byzantine studies to church history of the 10th-11th centuries. All the contributions were very enriching and led to fruitful discussions. In the end, it was not just a series of academic presentations, but the entire event was held in memory of Professor Alexander Avenarius. Everyone remembers Prof. Avenaria as a true scholar who excelled not only in his passion for science, but especially in his genuine modesty and sincere love and respect for his students. In this context, the term humanism is more than appropriate.

An interesting addition to the event was the performance of the Choir of the Orthodox Theology Faculty and the recitation of traditional Byzantine liturgical songs by the Byzantine Choir of St. Kassiana the Hymnographer. In addition to local ensembles performing within the PBF PU, participants also had the opportunity to listen to traditional Macedonian songs performed by Doc. Dr. Viktor Nedeský from the University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. The ceremony was enhanced by a memorial service for Prof. Avenarius at the cross on the faculty grounds. The memorial service was complemented by the memories of doc. ThDr. Václav Ježek, PhD. et PhD. about his teacher. In his speech, he emphasized the genuine humanism manifested in the everyday life of Prof. Avenarius and his exceptionally thorough approach to the study of sources, which he constantly encouraged in his students. It was more than symbolic that four of his former students, who are now recognized experts in various fields, attended the conference.

The conference program also included a lecture for the public entitled *How Terrible Was Ivan IV. The Terrible*, led by Associate Professor Dana Picková from

the Faculty of Arts at Charles University, an expert on Russian history. The lecture was attended by many students and the general public. The conference was closed with a speech by the dean of the Orthodox Theological Faculty, Associate Professor ThDr. Štefan Pružinský, PhD., university

professor, who expressed his gratitude to all participants, domestic and foreign guests, as well as the organizers of the event.



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