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THE PHENOMENON OF HUMAN PERFECTION: RELEVANCE AND FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF STUDY

This scientific article is dedicated to the phenomenon of human perfection, which is studied within the framework of Orthodox anthropological discourse. The article reveals the relevance of researching the phenomenon of human perfection and the fundamental principles of its study. Based on the author's scientific research, the interrelation of this phenomenon with the Orthodox doctrine of God's nature in Himself is established, the connection of human perfection with the perfection of God is formulated, one of the possible and acceptable definitions of the concept of human perfection is developed, and four fundamental principles of its study are conceived, based on universally recognized principles of theological-anthropological research.

Key aspects of studying the phenomenon of human perfection are identified, including the following: the religious-philosophical discourse actively studies the phenomenon of human perfection, developing concepts based on theological and anthropological principles; Orthodox anthropology is a key direction in this research, considering the human being as the highest form of a rational being, endowed with special relationships with God; the human being in Orthodox theology is considered a microcosm that opens access to understanding the world and God; human perfection is studied through a methodology based on the analysis of Revelation preserved in the Church's tradition and the synthesis of ideas and provisions concerning the human being; according to religious-philosophical discourse, the human being has a dual nature, which includes both spiritual and material aspects. This duality makes the human being a unique subject occupying a central place in the world; the problematic nature of the human being, its incompleteness and contradictions, become the object of study for Orthodox anthropology, prompting an analysis of the spiritual development and evolution of the human being; the human being stands at the boundary of two worlds, the material and the spiritual, and combines them within itself. It opens up the possibility for the realization of the spiritual dimension of existence through the perception of eternity; personality is a key characteristic of the human being, making each individual unique and irreplaceable. It is actualized in interaction with other personalities; the search for meaning in human existence takes place through solitude, interaction with others, and faith in God. Solitude reveals the true meanings of existence, and the connection with God is the basis for finding meaning and perfecting the human being.

Key words: God, human being, perfection, Orthodox anthropology, existence, material, spiritual, personality.

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ФЕНОМЕН ДОСКОНАЛОСТІ ЛЮДИНИ: АКТУАЛЬНІСТЬ ТА ЗАСАДНИЧІ ОСНОВИ ВИВЧЕННЯ

У статті аналізується феномен досконалості людини, який досліджується в межах православного антропологічного дискурсу. Обґрунтовується актуальність дослідження феномену досконалості людини та засадничі основи його вивчення. Встановлено взаємозв'язок вказаного феномену з православною доктриною про постать Бога в Самому Собі та досконалості людини з досконалістю Бога. Сформульовано поняття досконалості людини та розроблено чотири засадничі основи його вивчення, які ґрунтуються на загальнонавчаних у науковому середовищі принципах богословсько-антропологічного дослідження.

Установлено ключові аспекти вивчення феномену досконалості людини, серед яких: релігійно-філософський дискурс активно вивчає феномен досконалості людини, розробляючи концепції, що базуються на богословських та антропологічних принципах; православна антропологія є ключовим напрямом у цьому дослідженні, вона розглядає людину як найвищу форму розумного буття, удостоєну особливих взаємин з Богом; людина в православній теології вважається мікросмосом, що відкриває доступ до розуміння світу і Бога; досконалість людини вивчається за допомогою методології, яка базується на аналізі Одкровення, що зберігається в переданні Церкви, та синтезі ідей і положень, які стосуються людини; людина, згідно з релігійно-філософським дискурсом, має подвійну природу, яка містить духовний, так і матеріальний аспекти. Ця подвійність робить людину унікальним суб'єктом, що посідає центральне місце у світі; проблематичність людини, її неповнота та суперечності стають об'єктом дослідження для православної антропології, що спонукає до аналізу духовного становлення й розвитку людини; людина перебуває на межі двох світів, матеріального й духовного, і поєднує їх у собі. Вона відкриває можливість для реалізації духовного виміру буття через сприйняття вічності; особистість є ключовою характеристикою людини, що робить кожну особу унікальною та неповторною. Вона актуалізується у взаємодії з іншими особистостями; пошук сенсу в бутті людини відбувається через самотність, спілкування з іншими та віру в Бога. Самотність виявляє справжні смисли буття, а зв'язок з Богом є основою для знаходження сенсу та вдосконалення людини.

Ключові слова: Бог, людина, досконалість, православна антропологія, буття, матеріальне, духовне, особистість, самотність.

The problem of studying the phenomenon and developing the concept of human perfection in religious-philosophical discourse is relevant, as perfection is one of the central concepts employed by Christian doctrine in the quest to understand not only the revelation about God but also about humanity (Marchuk, 2017, p. 22). After all, Christian anthropology is Christo-centric, and thus, human-centered. Its guiding idea lies in the glorification and assimilation to God, that is, in the maximal attainment of perfection (Hudzenko, 2020, p. 122).

Directly, this idea, as a perfected act, finds its full reflection and disclosure only in a truthful and morally pure conception of God, for only the “pure in heart” can see God (Matthew 5:8). In Christian religious-philosophical thought, regardless of denominational affiliation in general, and particularly in Orthodox theology, any consideration of perfection without a close connection to the doctrine of the nature of God is not only artificial but also impossible, as all Christian philosophy and ethics, ontology and metaphysics are built precisely on the unequivocal recognition and confession of God not only as the source of reason, existence, and morality, but also of absolute perfection (Camp, 2022, p. 160).

In this context, Christian philosophy and anthropology assign significant importance to cataphatic theology, the foundation of which lies in the fundamental principle that the possibilities of knowing and finding God are only possible by attributing to Him such essential philosophical-theological characteristics as

Unity – Reason – Perfection, and consequently, affirming for Him the highest (absolute) level of perfection in everything that characterizes Him as the First Cause and perfect Being in Himself. Therefore, among many qualities and attributes by which God is characterized and revealed to humanity, the main ones are perfection and love as an inseparable dual unity (Marchenko, 2010, p. 80). It is no coincidence that the apostle Paul emphasized in his letter to the Colossians that love is the sum of all perfections (Colossians 3:14).

In Orthodox anthropology, perfection is defined as the realization of God’s intention for humanity, the full realization of the potential of the image of God in humans through their likeness to the Creator. Therefore, an imperfect human is not yet fully human, as they have not achieved the fulfillment of themselves in God and, consequently, have significantly lost themselves by not achieving complete humanization of their essence. Thus, in the context of religious-philosophical thought, the phenomenon of perfection has an ontological interpretation: the possibility of perfection is determined by the fact that each person has an ideal image of the absolute – God (Korolova, 2009, p. 97).

Given this, the religious-philosophical reflection and reassessment of the concept of human perfection in the Orthodox theological tradition is relevant both from a purely theoretical and socio-practical perspective. The defining role of perfection for the future fate of humanity is a fundamental predictor, confirming the importance and necessity of comprehensive philosophical study of this phenomenon and its essential characteristics.

The actualization of religious-philosophical understanding and re-evaluation of the concept of human perfection in Orthodox anthropology is also due to the absence of a clear and complete system of views on the issue of human perfection. This underscores the need for a comprehensive reflection in religious-philosophical discourse on the description of intermediate links and stages, ideological and value orientations, and spiritual-moral sources on the path of human perfection, means, and ways of achieving it, highlighting the most important elements and aspects of perfection, explicating and characterizing the states and processes that precede the attainment of perfection. Despite the obviousness of these problems, this has not yet been done. This, among other things, attests to the relevance and expediency of studying the phenomenon and scientific development of the concept of human perfection in the context of Orthodox anthropology.

The study of the phenomenon and the development of the concept of human perfection in religious-philosophical discourse should begin with the identification of the common foundations of any theological-anthropological research.

The first foundation. The phenomenon of human perfection and the formulation of a system of views about it are embedded in a theological discipline such as anthropology and are inseparably linked to it, which in turn determines the methodology of studying this phenomenon, ultimately shaping the uniqueness of its perception and understanding, and therefore the formulation of a comprehensive concept.

Orthodox anthropology, as a component of Orthodox theology, is the only theological discipline that comprehensively studies the human being as the highest form of rational existence, endowed with special relations with God. Furthermore, Orthodox anthropology, undoubtedly, can be called a science that deals with the understanding of all existence, since all forms of existence are connected with human existence, and therefore the study of humans, to which anthropology is primarily oriented, becomes the study of the entire surrounding world (Segeda, 2001, p. 3). Thus, the question of the human being is raised to an ontological level.

Humanity is a microcosm that embodies the revelation of the idea of the creation of the universe, becoming a kind of key to understanding the purpose

of cosmogony (Ovchinnikova, 2007, p. 39). According to the divine plan, humans are called to become microtheoses, opening access to God for the entire universe.

Christian thinkers, particularly within Orthodoxy, attributed special significance to anthropology, considering it as one of the prerequisites for theology. Here, the human being, being a microcosm, perceives the world as a macroanthropos.

The importance of anthropology occupies a prominent place in Orthodox theology. To the main question of any religion: “what needs to be saved?” Orthodox soteriology, as a branch of Orthodox anthropology, answers: “the whole person” (Vergelis, 2014, pp. 214–215). Thus, the issue of humanity becomes one of the central problems of Orthodox Christianity.

Humanity is not only a complete creation but also the custodian of the world as both physical and metaphysical, contemplated (spiritual). In humans, not only the entire cosmogony is comprehended but also God, due to human God-likeness. In this regard, Ukrainian clergyman S. Palko notes that “a person has a direct relationship with God and the world, developing the image of God within oneself...” (Palko). Thus, in Orthodox Christianity, anthropology as a theological science becomes the center and starting point of any cognitive process about humans. The subject matter of Orthodox anthropology includes, among other aspects of human existence, the aspect of human perfection.

The study of the phenomenon of human perfection applies the same methodology as to other parts of the subject matter of Orthodox anthropology – the analysis of Revelation about humans, preserved in the sacred tradition of the Church, synthesizing its individual parts, ideas, and provisions obtained through prior analysis, into comprehensive knowledge about a particular aspect, phenomenon, or occurrence related to humans, and therefore included in the subject matter of Orthodox anthropology.

The second foundation. Duality of Human Nature. In humans, two different principles are inexplicably intertwined: the spiritual and the material. These principles are hierarchically connected, with the spiritual realm supposed to dominate. This duality allows humans to occupy a special place in the world – a central, axial position. Not only does person lead his/her life in

the biosphere and the realm of the spirit, but person also creates his/her own unique world – the human world, thus making humans multidimensional (Khramova, 2016, p. 148).

The problematic nature of humans is evident in Orthodox anthropology. Humans are rife with contradictions, slipping away from themselves, impossible to fully grasp at any given moment of existence (Kostyuchkov, 2019, p. 52). This peculiarity of humans prompts Orthodox anthropologists to explore the spiritual formation and development of humans in the conditions of their dual existence: material and spiritual (Vergelles, 2016, p. 208).

Humans are placed on the border of two worlds, bringing them together within themselves. However, primarily, humans have “hope for liberation from the bondage to decay into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Romans 8:21), encompassing all creation. Within this anthropological paradigm, there is no opposition between the spiritual (heavenly) and the material (earthly). Humans are perceived as the unifier of all.

The depth and acuteness of experiencing the problem of the contradictory nature of human existence, the realization of the impossibility for humans to fully grasp themselves, create conditions for them to receive such revelation that lies beyond the boundaries of humans existence within themselves – a revelation from above that proclaims that human fragmentation is not a given of the eternal order but a consequence of the Fall. The drama of experiencing the contradiction between the material and spiritual levels of human existence as a result of the Fall is accompanied by the optimism of revelation regarding the real possibility for humans to overcome this problem, which is one aspect of achieving perfection (Vergelles, 2016, p. 206).

Another aspect that touches upon the issue of the material and spiritual in humans is overcoming death as a consequence of mortality, which, in turn, is a result of the Fall. From a purely philosophical point of view, death marks the end of a certain segment of existence, traditionally referred to as life. However, it is not about life but only about its segment – earthly life. Yet, to imagine a human comprehensively, one can only place him/her in the perspective of eternity, thus going beyond the bounds of temporal interval – the material

dimension of human existence, which encompasses earthly (one-dimensional, material) human life. Humans transition from existence here and now to another type of existence, which is difficult to define unambiguously. Sometimes it is called eternity, eternal life, spiritual existence. Here, the fullness of the spiritual dimension of human existence is revealed.

Therefore, as a result of the correlation between life (earthly) – death – life (eternal), the connection “here-and-now” (temporal existence – material) with “nowhere-never” (eternity – spirituality) emerges. The here-and-now of the individual is constructed in contemplation of the nowhere-never, and at the same time, the human’s position in the nowhere-never is determined by the result of specific here-and-now. Thus, the problem of death emerges as one of the most important and complex problems of Christian anthropology in general and Orthodox anthropology in particular, inseparably linked with the opposition of the material and spiritual dimensions of human existence.

The third foundation. Personality. Every individual is a personality, but the human species as a whole is not. Personality is the beginning of the uniqueness, individuality, and distinctiveness of any individual. However, personality is born only in interaction with others, only in the mystery of encountering another subject. The “I” is actualized at the moment of meeting the “you” (Torrance, 2020, p. 14).

Thus, another common characteristic of humans is personality, individuality. Every person is a personality. This distinguishes them from animals, determining their uniqueness and individuality. Personality is the active center of the spirit. The spiritual nature of personality lies in the form of “we” of its “I”.

Repeatedly, in connection with the concept of personality, the notion of the soul is used, which is not identical to the spirit or personality. The soul is the inner existence of personality, it is perceived as a thoroughly mediating emptiness, through which both self-experience and the experience of another personality are possible. After all, the soul belongs to all personalities, who through their souls enter into communication with each other.

Personality manifests its immediacy through the characteristic expression of those attributes possessed by each personality: intelligence,

creativity, self-awareness, self-determination, and self-expression.

The fourth foundation. The presence of meaning in human existence. A person does not just live, but leads a life, that is, finds meaning in the surrounding world, in themselves, in death, in life, and most importantly in God. They experience everything that is part of them. A person needs the meaning of their existence, which is partly found in solitude and partly in communication with others of their kind, and ultimately in the One

who created them. Solitude, as a human inward gaze, reveals the true meanings of human existence more than anything else. The connection of “I-I” is as significant for humans as the connection of “I-you”. But the connection of “I-Thou” is truly decisive (Vergelis, 2016, p. 208).

Without considering the above-mentioned foundations (approaches) to studying the phenomenon of human perfection, it is impossible to conduct proper research into this phenomenon.

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