

ORTHODOX ANTHROPOLOGY AS ONE OF THE POSSIBLE FOUNDATIONS OF EXISTENTIAL THERAPY

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Abstract. Orthodox anthropology has a deep knowledge of human, his nature and destination. In Christian theology, essence determines existence, but existence is not determined by essence. In our opinion, the Christian doctrine of salvation is existential in its essence. It asserts that human is a freely intelligent being, that is, human = logos (essence) + hypostasis (personality) + tropos (mode of existence). In my practice as an existential therapist, I successfully use the human model of Orthodox anthropology, exploring the issues of the human nature and his existential choice of the way he exists in the world. I would like to share my experience in this area with my colleagues in my report.

Keywords. Orthodoxy, soul, human nature, human destination, existential choice.

Riassunto. L'antropologia ortodossa ha una profonda conoscenza dell'uomo, della sua natura e del suo destino. Nella teologia cristiana, l'essenza determina l'esistenza, ma l'esistenza non è determinata dall'essenza. A nostro avviso, la dottrina cristiana della salvezza è esistenziale nella sua essenza. Essa afferma che l'uomo è un essere liberamente intelligente, ovvero uomo = logos (essenza) + ipostasi (personalità) + tropos (modo di esistenza). Nella mia pratica di terapeuta esistenziale, utilizzo con successo il modello umano dell'antropologia ortodossa, esplorando le questioni della natura umana e della sua scelta esistenziale sul modo in cui esiste nel mondo. Vorrei condividere la mia esperienza in questo ambito con i miei colleghi nella mia relazione.

Parole chiave. Ortodossia, anima, natura umana, destinazione umana, scelta esistenziale.

Having been professionally engaged in Orthodox theology for many years, it became obvious to me that Orthodox anthropology has a deep knowledge of human nature and human predestination. This knowledge not only corresponds to scientific psychology and psychotherapy, but also surpasses them in some matters. In my psychotherapeutic practice, I have noticed that it is very often important for people to rely on some universal understanding of how a person is arranged in general, what is in his area of responsibility and what is not; what does "truth" and "living in truth" mean, what does it mean to "believe", "strive", "be free", "be

healthy" and other similar concepts. Orthodox theology provides definite answers to these universal questions, and I suggest to my clients rely on these answers, that often yields positive therapeutic results.

In my therapeutic practice I proceed from the Orthodox anthropological model, which I would like to present here. According to it, human is a freely intelligent entity, that is, a being capable of self-determination and the realization of his own way of being with what is given to him by nature.

human = logos (essence) + hypostasis (personality) + tropos (mode of existence)

Logos defines what human nature is in general. Hypostasis defines who this particular person is. Tropos defines how this particular person exists.

Logos is predestined to human by God, and the person has no influence on this. The concept of "hypostasis" has two-fold content:

- individuality (the features that make up the uniqueness of this particular person)
- personality (the non-attributive "Self", that is, the ability of a person to personally dispose of what is given to him by nature)

A person can indirectly influence his individuality through personal choice, while "Self" is the center of influence (freedom and responsibility).

Personality also entirely determines the tropos. The world, from the point of view of Orthodox theology, is a field of unfolding the existence of a personality, in which it is called upon to manifest its freely intelligent nature. The world is a gift from God to a human (human in the Christian worldview is the "crown of creation"), and how a person manages himself in this world is his free vocation and responsibility.

The manifestation of a human in the world has three necessary aspects, according to the three forces of the soul, which human possesses by nature:

- cognition, which also includes a person's natural desire for meaning, which corresponds to a natural force - the mind.
- communication, which also includes a relationship with Another (God and/or another person), which is also a natural aspiration of a person and corresponds to his natural force - the heart.
- labor involving the realization of one's potential, which corresponds to a natural force – the volition

Salvation, from the point of view of Orthodox theology, is about gaining human integrity – that is, the gathering together of all the forces of the human soul under the guidance of the spirit. The Spirit (the human self) is related to God, so without faith, such a gathering of forces is impossible. Tertullian, a Christian philosopher of the 2nd century, wrote: "The human soul is Christian by nature", which means its natural desire

for God as the one Truth for all people. Thus, striving to fulfill the meaning of our own lives, it is important for us to understand that we can share this meaning with others and be useful to other people. By communicating and building relationships, we strive for reciprocity, and when we fulfill our potential, it is important for us to be accepted and recognized.

Clients in difficult life circumstances who come to therapy are not necessarily Orthodox, but the universal Christian anthropological model helps me, as a therapist, to look at a person from the point of view of his original integrity, "health", which is currently violated and requires appropriate healing. In order to seek such healing, a person does not have to follow Christian doctrine, attend religious services, or participate in a Christian cult. However, this means that based on Christian meanings, we can together look for ways to heal a person's natural forces, and it will help him fulfill his freedom and to lead his life path responsibly.

How does the Orthodox anthropological model have a positive effect in my therapeutic practice?

1. The question of the human self. Clients of existential therapy often ask themselves the question "who am I?", even if this question does not sound consciously for them. It manifests itself in the desire to determine the point of application of one's own freedom, so that the search for "Self" is actually a search for a zone of influence, one's own "what I can do". In the course of therapy, I strive to ensure that a person "cleanses" his "Self" from the attributes with which he usually identifies himself (thoughts, feelings, desires, habits, experiences, history, etc.) and reaches the level of feeling the Self as a subject who defines his path. The reality of the experience of freedom that a person receives in therapy in this way has a powerful therapeutic effect, and a person can use it to build their own life in the future without the help of a therapist.

2. The question of freedom and responsibility. In Orthodox anthropology, a person defines his tropos and is responsible for it. This means, first of all, a conscious payment for one's own existential choice. Very often, clients in my therapy show confusion about these issues, so that they either refuse to take responsibility for their own choices, or feel guilty for something they are unable to influence. Determining the real area of responsibility helps a person to build a life, retaining his ability to pay by trusting God (or life) in those matters for which a person is not responsible.

3. The question of good and evil. Orthodox anthropology defines a human as good by nature and calls sin to be evil that distorts his good nature. A person's awareness of his goodness and the correct definition of sin as a factor that harms a person help him come to accept himself and others. When a person can separate himself from sin (or his illness)

in the result of therapy, then the path to healing can be open for him, and he can find in himself the strength of his harmonious nature, which further helps him feel his healthy natural desire for integrity and follow it. Naming evil as evil can be healing in itself because, in my experience, the human soul feels evil and cannot rest until it is named as such. When a person learns to support good and resist evil, it becomes easier for him to reveal his natural healthy potential in many life issues.

4. The question of faith. Faith is an existential concept that is broader than a simple understanding of it as a religious faith (doctrinal). In the words of the Apostle Paul, "faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). When I discuss their beliefs with clients, I pay attention to what they expect and what they believe about themselves and their lives. When a person discovers in the course of therapy exactly how he himself, through his beliefs, can manage the creation of his own reality in co-creation with life, this gives him much greater awareness and responsibility about his own beliefs. The mind becomes flexible and is able not only to react, but also to create.

5. The question of integrity: mind, heart and volition. A very common problem of clients in therapy is an internal conflict, when a person thinks one thing, feels another, desires a third one. The painful state of soul forces described by Orthodox anthropology helps me navigate how to bring the forces of the soul into balance and create harmony among them. This part of my work deserves special consideration. I will only say here that understanding the very principle of subordination of the mind, heart and volition to the guidance of the human spirit helps strengthen the ability to manage them. To do this, I use two principles in therapy: reflection and doing. Developing a reflexive skill helps a person get to know himself, and engaging in practice helps a person feel like a subject who thinks, feels, and desires, rather than being the object of diverse thoughts, feelings, and desires. Often, such work only begins with a therapist, and after therapy, a person uses these skills on his own, creating his inner world and bringing his existence to harmony.

In conclusion, I would like to note that Orthodox anthropology as the basis of existential therapy is not a completed therapeutic approach, but rather a creative understanding and application of it. I do not pretend to be an innovator or to present a special technique that is suitable for everyone and always. The purpose of this report is to share experience and draw attention of respected colleagues to the fact that the Orthodox faith has an amazingly deep therapeutic resource, and is not just a religious doctrine relevant only to believers of a particular denomination.