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# FOREWORD

## **The View on a Human Person – Patristic Anthropology as Precondition for Caritative Social Work**

“Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” – is the EU’s growth strategy for the current decade.<sup>1</sup> As part of this strategy the EU wants to create more and better jobs and enhance social inclusion. However, in reality in Europe we see growing social vulnerability and rise in precarious jobs. Obviously, the policy challenges related to the European strategy of “inclusive growth” are big. European policy-oriented research can and must deliver useful contribution to tackle these challenges. Key tools in this social science are not only all types of data (earnings statistics, administrative social data, labor market data etc.), but also contribution of interdisciplinary research regarding poverty, exclusion, people’s life conditions in general.

Current Scientific Proceedings of Latvian Christian Academy, Volume 4, focuses on innovative issues of Caritative social work through multidisciplinary dialogue between Patristic anthropology, sociology and Orthodox theology. It is logical to use the term *integrative research* as a collective noun when referring to a research involving integrated disciplines. Interdisciplinarity features several academic disciplines in a thematically based investigation with a multiple goal “to coexist in a context of European strategy of inclusive growth”. Every author of the Proceedings contributes his or her professional perspective on the issue by analyzing perspectives of Caritative social work, Supervision and Social economy in the issue. Perspective of the Orthodox theology lays the foundation for integration.

Interdisciplinarity means combination of subjects in new ways; regarding the concept of human being it involves data from anthropology, sociology, theology, psychology and other academic disciplines used in a research activity. By crossing boundaries and thinking across them the new knowledge is created. Interdisciplinarity approach involves drawing appropriately from multiple disciplines to define problems outside normal boundaries and reach solutions based on a new understanding of complex situations. Interdisciplinarity is seen as thematically organized and focused on a common problem. These premises are essentially important for the study of Caritative social work in the context of European Social Agenda.

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<sup>1</sup> *Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. (2010) Brussels, 3.3.2010, COM(2010) 2020 final. Communication from the European Commission.

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Patristic anthropology (ca. 2<sup>nd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cent.) is used as a root of knowledge for man's spiritual destination, which is opened for a person by Christ in the Church, and it serves for practical inclusive strategies of European human existence today. Very nontrivial work of a researcher is needed to disclose and articulate mentioned theological and anthropological meanings and connections with Caritative social work. The Proceedings of Latvian Christian Academy aim to improve and broaden current knowledge about innovative Caritative social work and deacony processes within the context of modern European Social Agenda.

Main thematic areas of the articles in the volume are the following:

- Affiliation of Patristic anthropology to social development,
- Patristic-anthropology-based supervision activities,
- Methodology and capacity development in Caritative social work,
- Development effectiveness, collaborative multidisciplinary.

Where Caritative social work undertakes a rehabilitative mission based on casework *in situ*, anthropology becomes a descriptive and analytical social "science" operating out of academic strongholds. As a beginning towards overcoming the separation between Caritative social work and anthropology these Proceedings represent view of Patristic anthropology on how cultural anthropological concepts can contribute to Caritative social work practice, because Caritative social worker is a professional that helps marginalized people to come in contact with the secret of source of life. The idea is that in order to gain an appreciation of life in a particular society or segment of it the researcher must learn to see the world made of members of society "holistically" or within a larger meta-ontological context.

Taking care of body and soul is not a task of either a government or profit-driven commercial organization. If we are to fulfill such demands, we would need active people who are able to incorporate real desire to help others into practical tasks assigned to them: a combination that can only be achieved through *reciprocity*. Reciprocity, the oldest value in human society (that of family), means neither redistribution through a central agency (the State), nor commercial exchanges between producers, which are indifferent to each other. It is based on the following principle: "I am doing this for you because I hope that when I need it, someone will do it for me." The social and solidarity economy is therefore destined to play permanent rather than integrating role in the business economy, and growing rather than residual role in a future development. It is already adding a concern for common goods, notably to its core areas of interest, namely, personal services and culture.

Term "anthropology" usually refers to the scientific study of persons, their behavior, customs and lifestyles in various societies and cultures. However, in Christian Orthodox theology "anthropology" has a deeper meaning. We have to go back to Scriptural sources of revelation for Christian understanding of the nature of a human person. This is expressed in Hebrew forms of thought, found in the accounts of Creation in the Book of Genesis.

In the first account man was created "in the *image* and *likeness* of God" as male or female (Gen 1:27). In the second account God breathed Divine life into the dust of the earth (Gen 2:7). However, human being is not complete until both male and female exist (Gen 2: 20-25). Placed in earthly Paradise, the first persons are free to make choices and even to fail, as they did, but they remain *images* of the living God.

The coming of Jesus Christ provides fuller revelation of the meaning of a human being as image of Creator. Jesus Christ reveals our human nature being as a *new man*. By becoming one of us, God reveals our unique dignity in the order of creation. Human nature is the only appropriate subject for union with the Divine nature. Each of us is an appropriate subject to be united with God through His grace. Our “imaging” of God is expressed above all in our capacity of self-giving-away love, Divine love. Human nature cannot be understood fully without reference to God – it is basic principle for Christian anthropology.

“Accepting strategy of the anthropologization of theology, Orthodox consciousness saw its key problem in the right balance between anthropological and meta-anthropological tasks: between the need to turn to real, earthly human person and still to keep in all its force eschatological message of Christ about victory over death”<sup>2</sup>.

Whatever “social work” could mean in an Orthodox Christian sense, it would have to include the witness of Biblical and Patristic moral tradition.

Fundamental call and goal of each and every person is to share in the life of God. We have been created by God to live in a fellowship with Him. The descent of God in the Person of Jesus Christ has made possible the human ascent to the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy believes that each Christian is involved in a movement towards God, which is known as *theosis* (in Greek) or deification.

*Theosis* describes spiritual pilgrimage, in which each person becomes ever more perfect, ever more holy, ever more united with God. It is not statistic relationship, nor does it take place only after death. On the contrary, *theosis* is a movement of love towards God, which begins for each Christian with the rite of Baptism and which continues throughout his life, as well as in life to come. Salvation means liberation from death, sin and evil. Redemption means our repossession by God. In Orthodoxy, both salvation and redemption happen within the context of *theosis*. This rich vision of Christian life was expressed by Apostle Peter when he wrote about our calling “to become partakers of the Divine nature” (1 Pet 5:1). It was also affirmed by St. Basil the Great when he described man as the creature who has received the order to become a god. The Orthodox Church understands *theosis* as a union with the energies of God and not with the essence of God Himself Who always remains hidden and unknown. Orthodoxy believes that human life reaches its fulfillment only when it becomes Divine. These are certainly strong affirmations that must be properly understood in the context of Caritative social work.

The ever-deepening union of each Christian with God is not a magical or automatic process. While Christ has destroyed the power of sin, death, and evil once and for all, this victory must be approved by each person in cooperation with the Holy Spirit. Each person is called to join with the life-giving and liberating Spirit in realizing the fullness of human life in communion with the Father. Holy Spirit is the agent of deification whose task it is to incorporate us into the life of the Holy Trinity.

Our participation in the life of the Holy Trinity takes place within the Church. For the Orthodox, the Church is the meeting place between God and His people. People acquire Holy Spirit through our celebration of the Eucharist and reception of Holy Communion, through our participation in the Sacraments, through discipline of daily prayer and the practice of fasting, all of which result in a Christ-like life.

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<sup>2</sup> Horuzhy S. (2006) *Anthropological turn in Christian theology: an Orthodox perspective. The lecture in the Divinity School University of Chicago*, October 4, 2006.

There Holy Spirit and the Church are organically linked. St. Ireneus reminded us of this by saying: “Where the Church is, there is the Spirit, and where the Spirit is, there is the Church.” Holy Spirit moves through the life of the Church to reveal our common humanity in Christ and to unite us with the Father.

The fruit of worship is the gift of the Spirit. St. Apostle Paul identified these as: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, fidelity, gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:22). They testify of the fact that the love to God and the love to one’s neighbor are inseparable.

These thoughts are totally linked to the Caritative social worker as professional: Orthodoxy believes that each person has an intrinsic value and importance in virtue of his or her unique relationship to God. Man is never seen as being totally depraved. The “image of God” which can be distorted by sin, can never be eradicated. Through the life of the Church, there is always the opportunity for fulfillment. When the Sacraments are administered, they are always offered to an individual by his or her name. This action not only reminds us of the dignity of each person but also emphasizes the responsibility each person for his or her relationship to God.

Christian social work or diaconia is highly valued and is theologically interpreted as the “liturgy after the liturgy” – that is, as Christian worship expressed in committed engagement with society and culture. Orthodox social ministry is based on social theology and more particularly on the Christian concept of *diaconia* based on solidarity and inspired by Christian values (God’s love and compassion) and anthropological discourse (dignity of each person and each person as a holder of God’s image and likeness).

Since the Byzantine period, Christian theology has aimed at integrated social action into the spiritual life and theology by trying to address actions of social welfare.

Consequently, we see Caritative social work as a profession that not only helps individuals to meet their needs but also promotes social justice and social & spiritual change. Caritative social workers should be engaged not only for reaching the social changes but they should define specific anthropological aims for social change in order to ensure their professional accountability, spiritual responsibility and scientific identity. Through our common anthropological identity of creation in God’s image we gain common vision and common identity that no one can take from us or criticize us for being unspecific. Through the profession’s common view of the value of each person and ethics, there emerges a vision for change and its identity.

The human condition hasn’t changed in any fundamental way since the early monastic writings serving as basis for Orthodox anthropology (4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cent.). This material is already right on target when it comes to diagnosing and treating many diseases of the human soul that afflicted people then and still afflict us now. So, really Caritative social workers have to try to conform their lives to the spirituality of the Orthodox fathers. Caritative social workers besides their professional skillfulness have to ask to themselves: “What am I really doing right now?” In order to help others, Caritative social workers have to seek holiness in themselves, they have to understand where they are starting from. What I am doing when I go to work? How things, words I say can become tools that drive me towards holiness and salvation the way the abstinence, poverty and relative isolation of the ancient hermits drove them toward salvation?

Our whole lives have to be infused with the wisdom of the Church. For there is hope and joy in Christ always – as His “yoke is easy and burden is light” (Matt 11:30). Caritative social workers need not to forget what they as professionals are seeking is ultimately to show their clients the true resting place of their souls. Therefore love as motive of action for Caritative social worker is the crucial one. Grounded thoroughly on a Trinitarian theology that understands the Holy Trinity first as community of Persons united in love, the Church teaches that being God-like means active loving. In general, ancient Biblical Commandments of the moral law are embodiments of loving concern for the welfare of others. Consequently, in most situations loving action is conformed to the guidelines provided by the Commandments<sup>3</sup>.

As a consequence, Caritative social worker has to recognize two dimensions of the clients’ healing process: on the one hand it is recognition that human life is in hands of God. We are – body and soul – His creatures, and it is to Him that we turn in moments of sorrow and illnesses, both physical and emotional. He is, in the first and most fundamental sense, “the healer of soul and body”. But the emphasis of the healing power of God does not mean that human efforts are downgraded. In fact all teaching of Orthodox anthropology recognizes the role of a human effort striving and cooperating with God’s will. Technically known as *synergy*, this belief requires exercise of Caritative social worker’s talent and abilities to teach the client about salvation, – for spiritual growth, for moral behavior, for achievement of human social potential as well as for the fulfillment of God’s will in all things related to our community and social life.

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<sup>3</sup> Harakas S. S. (1970) An Orthodox Christian Approach to the ‘New Morality’. In: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Spring 1970, pp. 107-139.

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**CARITATIVE SOCIAL WORK  
IN THE CONTEXT  
OF PATRISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY**