

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE IN HELPING PROFESSIONS

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Abstract: *Intervention in helping professions involves a lot more than knowledge-based methods and skills adopted by professionals, often it involves exchange of ideas, feelings, beliefs, and values that may or may not be directly addressed or acknowledged, but have profound influence in the process of recovery or reestablishment of the wellbeing of clients. We will try to prove the link between Christianity and contemporary society values such as individual freedom, right to service (human right), social justice, human dignity, professional integrity, and subsidiarity.*

Christian spiritual perspective accepts the belief that God exists and that He created the entire universe, including the material and spiritual realms. These spheres are in mutual coexistence, reflecting intelligent creation, and exist in reality independent of humanity. In the created order, humans are ontologically unique, created in the image of God. Common to all people is their dignity, value, personality, creativity, strengths, and rationality. The value of human differences and autonomy is an important ideal that is emphasized in Christian spiritual perspective in understanding human uniqueness and individuality.

Christian spiritual perspective will be therefore seen as a resource that promotes client efforts to solve or deal with problems. The Christian spiritual perspective can be used as part of therapeutic approaches in counseling models based on empowering strengths and recognizing the role of life events in the therapy, an interactive process in which individuals construct their meaning on the basis of life experiences.

Keywords: *Christianity, spirituality, individual freedom, human rights, social justice, human dignity, subsidiarity, professional integrity*

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Introduction

The way of life Christians live reveals what they believe and whether the faith they profess is a living faith. There are many verses in the Bible that point out that true, saving faith produces a transformed life and that faith is shown through the works Christians do. This is understood as a manifestation of faith as written in James 2:26: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." The Church is called to direct its charitable activity toward protection of the weak and the building of society, more so than to be engaged in social and political activities (Lakičević, 1987).

This paper identifies Christian values and their impact on helping professions. Moral issues related to interpersonal relations and solidarity have important place in Christianity. The commandment 'love your neighbour' specifically influenced the development of solidarity, more precisely the universal understanding of solidarity as a key value of social protection. Christian understanding of the neighbour as elaborated in the Bible, Luke 10:30-36, redefines the meaning of neighbour and also points out the non-selective response for action towards those in need. Furthermore, this paper considers the Christian spiritual perspective as specific for helping professions. The power of this spiritual perspective is identified in the ability to use the potentials that are naturally possessed by individuals and can be used for the wellbeing of individuals, groups and society.

1. Christian Ethics

Understanding the essence of human consciousness in the realm of the spiritual, not the material, can serve as a starting point for connecting ethics and Christianity. Christianity's understanding of the objective generally accepted science of morality originates from the human ability, related to conscience, to have an insight into one's own humanity.

Christian ethics is one of the basic notions within the Christian Science. Christian social science refers to the fusion of "the Christian image of man and societies with a normative understanding of social ethics" (Weilet R., 1995). The term Christian ethics refers to the science of the moral origin of social life that starts from the Christian teaching of man and society. According to the Christian faith, God created the world, and the laws guarantee human survival in it. Disobedience to God's moral laws leads to pain and punishment (Hostetter, E. C., 2002).

The Old Testament legal instructions refer to respect, virginity, trust, zeal for justice, and social order, but they are upgraded by Jesus Christ. The upgrade is especially noteworthy in the case of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments of God, given to Moses on two stone tablets, on Mount Zion, by God. Namely, in the context of Jesus' "The sermon on the mountain" it is said: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."- Matthew 5: 27-28.

Christian ethics is based on man's ability to recognize his actions with his mind and to act according to his nature. (Weilet, 1995: 26). According to Messner, taken from Weilet, man has set pre-existing "existential goals" in his life that define his concept of good and establish the criterion of morality. In this context, Messner distinguishes the following goals: self-preservation, self-improvement, the spread of experience and knowledge, reproduction through sexuality, voluntary participation in spiritual and material, social connection to promote the common good and gain knowledge of the human condition in the world. These existential goals in their own way describe the state of humanity and its establishment as a moral being, as well as its susceptibility to the moral law of nature (ibid.: 27).

The implications of Christian ethics are more dimensional and can be identified in all spheres of society's organization. Starting from setting basic norms of behavior in both vertical and horizontal relation, where the vertical relation implies the norms of relation man - God „*Do not have other gods besides Me*”; While the horizontal relation refers to the relations between people. It is within the framework of the horizontal relationship, which should be a reflection of the second Commandment in the Bible: "*Love your neighbor*", defined as one who is by your side, and less as a relative or member of the same ethnic group, regulates human behavior in all spheres of life. Namely, Christian moral/ethical norms are transmitted not only in the field of relations with loved ones, but also in defining the concept of social justice, emancipation movements, creation of laws, regulation of labor relations, debates in the field of bioethics and so on.

Where does the need for Christians to legalize morality come from? This determination is closely linked to the biblical evidence for the use of the authorities in attainment of the social and moral goals. The good book, as some call the Bible, with its egalitarian laws and morals, with its prophetic threats to power, and with the exaltation of the humble, defines morally accepted forms of social behavior.

When the principle of usefulness takes away the primacy of the spiritual, man moves away from his pursuit of peace. Miovska-Spaseva (2010) analyzes Rousseau's thesis "the more science and culture develop, the more morality recedes" (Rousseau, taken from Miovska-Spaseva, 2010). Rousseau believes that civilization corrupts morality because art serves to luxury life, the legal sciences to injustice, the history to tyranny and war. At the same time, Miovska-Spaseva points out the need to promote moral values, especially in social conditions in which the presence of increased violence between people on various grounds, individual, ethno and religious egoism, as well as the increased spiritual and material misery and poverty impose the need for preserving or promoting moral values (Miovska-Spaseva, 2010).

2. Impact of Christian Values on Helping Professions

Christianity is at essence of the Western world impacting on all spheres of social life including the development of the institutional framework in Western democracies (Dawson, 1961). Historically, Christianity had a crucial influence on the development

of helping professions such as social work, psychology, special pedagogy, clinical mental health counseling, nursing, etc., mainly considered to be products of Western democracies. The establishment of majority of these helping professions such as nursing and social work coincides with the emergence of the welfare state, wherein helping professions secure their functioning and existence.

From the very beginning, Christianity showed concern for people's life problems and developed appropriate activities to overcome them. According to the Christian belief, a converted believer is obliged to do good deeds and to be merciful. This is understood as manifestation of faith as written in Romans 12:13-17 "Share with the Lord's people who are in need, practice hospitality...Rejoice with those that rejoice, mourn with those that mourn... Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position... Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." The Church is called to direct its charitable activity toward protection of the weak and the society.

Roots of helping professions such as nursing and social work can be identified in Jesus Christ's calling to His followers to spread the gospel, help the disadvantaged, and heal the sick. This calling influenced Florence Nightingale, who integrated Christian values with principles of nursing practice (Murphy, S. L., Mark S., Walker, S. M., 2013).

"If I could give you information of my life, it would be to show how a woman of very ordinary ability has been led by God in strange and unaccustomed paths to do in His service what He has done in her." Florence Nightingale, 1860

Nightingale considered that nurses should possess Judeo-Christian ethics and morals (Widerquist, 1992). Similarly, the development of professional social work, especially in the United States, is a result of the spiritual response of Christians and Jews to poverty, homelessness, and other emigrant-related problems. The Judeo-Christian principles of solidarity, compassion, and preservation of values have been the founding values of the Association for Organized Charity, the Settlement Movement, and the Jewish Communal Service (Canda, 1997). But the impetus to professionalize and compete with other helping professions separated social work from its Judeo-Christian spiritual foundations. This emerged as a result of preservation of the ideological determination of the separation between church and state as well as the link created between social work, government social protection programs, and insurance companies (Trbojevic, 2020).

Individual freedom, right to service (human right), social justice, human dignity, professional integrity, and subsidiarity are moral values relevant to helping professions rooted in Christianity.

Namely, the human-God relationship in Christianity is based on the freedom of choice, primarily identified in the Biblical interpretation of God's interaction with the first man Adam, to whom instructions were given on what was and what was not permitted. Nonetheless, God allowed Adam to choose whether to obey or act in accordance with his free will. Freedom and autonomy are at the heart of building relationships of mutual respect and understanding between people. According to Novak (2000), the abuse of freedom can be regarded as the primary sin of modern man. However, individual liberty and equality are seen as basic postulates on which the liberal tradition rests. Namely,

only a democratically organised state can ensure freedom and equality for its citizens through consistent policy implementation (ibid.). Hertzke (2003) claims that nations in which Christianity is the dominant religion enjoy a significantly higher degree of freedom than non-Christian nations. Although such a claim might be understood as an overstatement, some analysts agree that freedom is a direct result of Christian theistic philosophy (Hertzke, 2003; Huntington, 1991). Market freedom (freedom of want) as well as entrepreneurship are considered as crucial features of Western civilisation (Landers, 1999).

The commandment „*Love your neighbor*” had specific implications on the development of universal understanding of solidarity as a key value in functional organization of services in western societies. Christian understanding of the neighbor is based on the parable of “the good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-36). The in-depth analysis of this parable indicates that it aims not only to redefine the concept of the neighbor by including the concept of “the other⁴”, but also to define the scope of service (care), introducing institutional care⁵. Number of other Bible verses refer to care for different categories in need such as the orphans, widows, poor, persons with special needs, etc., e.g., “*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress....*” (James 1:27). Thus, solidarity as moral value refers on the responsibility to care for the weaker and more vulnerable members of the community. The welfare state is not possible without social solidarity as its basic postulate. The Bible addresses problems that are both related to status and redistributive equality. Applying basic Christian values such as the universality of human and social rights, common to all individuals, but also to the concept of diversity that derives from the essential uniqueness of individuals and differentiates them from all other individuals. Christian notion of human rights, as mentioned above, arises from the premise that the human is the primary creation of God, and therefore human rights cannot or should not be taken away or given away by human. Human rights and fundamental freedoms enable full development and use of human qualities, intelligence, talents, and conscience, as well as the fulfillment of spiritual and other needs”(United Nations, 1987).

The aspects of status equality refer to both gender and social equality. Equality between men and women, implies to abolition of direct or indirect forms of discrimination. Social equality considers economic, ethnic, and religious affiliation. In the context of overcoming both status inequality we will cite Galatians 3:28 „*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*”. Social contextualization of these verses testifies of the visionary impact

⁴ This category is most often used by the colonizers and missionaries, who used the term "others" to establish contacts, encounters, and relationships with other civilizations, races, peoples during the imperial expansions. A key feature of this model of thinking, developed by Herodotus, is that we act from the perspective of "unmarked I" or "unmarked self", "we" and it becomes the norm to compare all differences related to alienated categories (Trbojevik, 2015).

⁵ *Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'* (Luke, 10:34-35)

that Christianity will have in transforming societies that embraced it. Redistributive equality is widespread throughout the Bible, and so, despite its provisions on respect for authority, hierarchy, order, and social position, the Bible repeatedly expresses sympathy for the poor, the oppressed, and the unjust (Matt. 19:23-24), (Luke 16:19-31). Such are the provisions given in the second letter of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians „ *Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: “The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little”* (2 Cor. 8: 13-15). Christianity speaks of equality between people, which is the basis on which society should rest, equating people regardless of their social position. We will refer to Jesus’s address to his disciples during the Lord’s Supper with the words, „*Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him*” John 13:16. Social justice cannot be achieved without moral social ideas and norms for order.

There is a consensus among scholars that the domains of the welfare state not only facilitate the evolution of civil, political and social rights but they are also a key institutional mechanism for ensuring the social rights of citizens.

The fourth value-based principal subsidiarity is closely related to Catholic social teaching. The term subsidiarity can be summarized in limiting public interference in the private sphere except in instances when individual options are exhausted. In the broadest sense, the principle of subsidiarity implies to assistance that a higher and more efficient level of organization will give to a lower-level organizations for the achievement of their desired goals. But this help is conditioned after exhaustion of alternatives of solving the problem on a lower level. The state acts as a subsidy to the individual, i.e., as a higher social unit assists the lower social unit only in a situation where it cannot provide adequate resources. Only after individuals and groups have exhausted all alternatives in their immediate environment are they encouraged to associate with other carriers of the same or similar problem (Bežovan, 2004: 32-33). Subsidiarity involves solving problems where they arise, i.e., solving them locally, and assumes a high degree of autonomy to local communities.

3. Christian Spiritual Perspective in Helping Professions

Christian theism accepts the belief that God exists and that he created and continues to be included in the entire universe, including the material and spiritual realms. In the created order, humans are ontologically unique creatures created in the form of God. The essence of all people is their dignity, value, personality, creativity, strengths and rationality. The value of human differences and autonomy is an important ideal that is emphasized in Christian theism in understanding human uniqueness and individuality.

The rational of use of spiritual perspective is based on the notion that religion and spirituality are considered to be general or universal human experience. The importance

of an individual sense of spiritual connection is emphasized in a number of educational theories and approaches in helping professions (Vlaisavljevic, 2012). In some concepts, spirituality is subject of narrower disciplines (social work, counseling, nursing, etc.). Spiritual perspective distinguishes as a separate school, similar to radicalism, feminism, or environmental perspective in social work. It should be noted that its main theses are more elaborate, and it can be said that it is richer in its origin and development than other approaches. The power of the spiritual perspective rests on its ability to put into operation the potentials that are naturally present in individuals and can be used for personal, group, and even social renewal. The power of the spiritual is also reflected in the effectiveness of the services distributed by religiously based organizations (Trbojevik, 2019). The basic values on which spiritual interventions rely are: faith, prayer, the Bible, and understanding of human behavior.

Incorporating spirituality in curricula has been overlooked in scientific circles for a long period, because of two assumptions: (a) Spirituality cannot be subject to scientific studies and (b) Spirituality should not be subject to scientific studies. William R. Miller and Carl E. Thorenson (2003), in their article *"Spirituality, Religion, and Health"*, argue out that spirituality can be studied scientifically (Vlaisavljevic, 2012) and, despite the fact that this topic is rarely covered in the training of social, behavioral and health scientists or workers, there are numerous scientific researches on spiritual-religious processes.

According to Sheridan (2001), implementation of a spiritually sensitive approach in the work of helping professions is based on comprehensive framework of knowledge, values, and skills by helping workers attempting to assist a person at risk or in need of treatment. Professionals using Christian spiritual perspective need to develop a personal framework that is consistent with their own values and professional commitments in the areas of their practice. Christian spiritual perspective is not in collision with the core values of helping professions such as availability of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence (ibid.).

3.1. Implementation of Christian Holistic Approach

Both social work and nursing primarily implemented the medical model of intervention, but as helping professions they are challenged to provide care that goes beyond the medical model of meeting physical needs. Despite their strong historical foundation in spiritual care of a person as a whole, both social workers and nurses struggle with holistic care. Holistic care can be described as spirit-guided care removing oneself as the motivating force and allowing Christ, in the form of the Holy Spirit, to flow through and guide the care provider in the care of patients and families.

Christian spiritual perspective is based on demonstrating value clarity, empowerment, and holistic approach that assumes the bio-psycho-social and spiritual aspect of a human being. Value clarity refers to transparency and honesty of professionals about their personal spiritual and professional values in their work.

Empowerment in this perspective is apparent throughout the client systems at all levels. Empowerment resides on the premise that humans have inherent capacities for resilience, creativity, and transformative action. Empowerment is considered not just as a value principle but also as a goal of administered intervention.

Helping professions that implement the holistic approach should serve the needs of patients as whole persons. A holistic health care addresses the totality of the patient's existence—physical, psychological, social, and spiritual (Sulmasy, 2002). The very concept of health has changed overtime. Nowadays, health is much more than mere biological functioning without disease. Health is strongly influenced by cultural, social, and philosophical factors, including the existence of the meaning or purpose of life and the quality of intimate personal relationships (Vlaisavljevic, 2012). Holistic spiritual care assumes attentive listening, compassion, prayer, use of religious objectives, devotion, contemplation, meditation, pastoral service, etc. However, many scientists remain uninterested or negligent to the importance and influence of spiritual health.

The major emphasis is on learning how to respond with sensitivity and competence to the spirituality found among the individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities served by helping professions. Spiritual care is helping the beneficiary make meaning out of his/her experience or find hope. It involves caring not just for the physical, psychological, and social aspect of the beneficiary but for the soul in a special kind of engagement that goes beyond material. Spirituality is upgrading the bio-psycho-social framework currently used to understand human behavior. A holistic perspective integrates spirituality with the biological, psychological, and social dimensions of the human experience. A professional using holistic approach enters a multisensory journey of thought, feeling, and action.

3.2. Required Skills in Christian Spiritual Perspective

The most common understanding is that social skills are such skills that we use in interaction with other people on an interpersonal level (Georgievska, 2020). A person is socially adept at communicating with others, in a way that fulfills their values, rights, demands, obligations to others. In addition, this person is prepared to share values and requirements openly and without limitation.

The following definition defines social skills as specific components of the processes that enable the individual to behave in a way that will be judged as competent. Skills are necessary to trigger behavior that will lead to the achievement of a goal that is part of a given task (Ibid.). These definitions highlight the macro elements of social behavior in terms of mutuality or reciprocity. Skills can be developed to a greater or lesser degree.

The use of Christian spiritual perspective is based on: adequate assessment of spiritually sensitive context for practice; understanding and assessing spiritual inclination of a beneficiary; obtaining proper knowledge of beneficiary participation in religious or spiritual groups; knowledge on how to use various spiritually sensitive practice skills and techniques; and observing ethical guidelines in determining the appropriateness

of using spiritual interventions. The Christian spiritual perspective can be used as a therapeutic approach in counseling based on empowering client's strengths to deal with everyday problems.

Helping professions assume appropriate communication skills for working with diverse vulnerable clients and communities in order to have adequate response to those in need. Empathy and altruism are fundamental for most of helping professions. Additionally, in order to be successful in providing assistance, these professionals need to possess certain skills such as good communication skills, conflict resolution skills, mediation, emotional stability and balance, mental and emotional maturity, good self-control, management ability. Knowing own impulses, knowing and accepting one's own needs, desires and attitudes. These individuals also need to have the skills to recognize the situation of others, to care for others, and to be prepared to provide assistance. Among these skills and characteristics, empathy, altruism and assertiveness are the most essential for success in the support profession.

Many times in life, people, especially members of the helping professions, whether in the private or professional field, can be exposed to discomfort. In such situations, adequate social behavior and communication with others is necessary. In those moments, a person's legal rights may be compromised, manipulated, labeled, or exploited psychologically and materially. In order to have an equitable relationship, it is up to the man to find a way and fight for it. However, he needs to know how to handle it properly, how to behave himself, and how to express it.

Conclusion

Implementation of Christian spiritual perspective in helping professions has been challenged both by secularism and multicultural diversity related to religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. Christian values are reflected in secular analogies; therefore, one should not disregard it as a model of social intervention.

The use of holistic approach by helping professions as a legitimate dimension of reality takes into consideration not just the physical, social, and psychological phenomena, but also the spiritual needs of the beneficiary often instigating opposition reluctant to employ metaphysical alongside scientific aspects. Inclusion of the spirituality into the holistic approach and addressing not just biological, psychological and social aspects of an individual, groups or communities has been proven as efficient with long-term positive effects in treatment of different social problems such as treatment of dependency, terminal illness, oppression, poverty, and abuse. Therefore, despite the rapid secularization, it is highly suggested to support implementation of this approach in contemporary societies.

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⁶ Original is in Macedonian language

⁷ Original is in Croatian language

