

PSYCHOLOGY

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Methods of Christian Psychological Research: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract. With the increase in popularity of studying soul and spiritual characteristics of mental life and the development of Christian psychology there appears a need of methods and research methodology in this area. The article analyzes the existing methodological problems of Christian psychological research and outlines possible solutions. The author proves that the whole reality of inner life of an individual cannot be described on a psychometric level. Communicative methodology may establish agreement between scientific and Christian psychological concepts. The basic principles of Christian psychological research are: the principle of the synthesis of materialism and idealism, a historicism principle, the principle of objectivity, the principle of the unity of academic-scientific and worldview and Christian ideas, a consistency principle and a unity of collective and individual creativity principle.

Keywords: *Christian psychology, methodology, methods, principles, personality*

Introduction. In recent decades, both in Ukraine and foreign countries the research of value and meaning, intimate and personal, spiritual and religious characteristics of mental life has been intensified. More and more scientists believe that the explanation of mental phenomena is impossible without a clear understanding of person's nature (V. Slobodchikov). On the basis of personal and anthropological understanding of the human being a new field in psychology is developing – Christian psychology. It focuses on studying a personality as the image of God. It is believed that the main goal of Christian psychology is to sublimate the person's image and perception that appears as an object of psychological research. Christian psychology brings trinity concept of a human being ('body – soul – spirit') together with its divine nature into scientific understanding [8]. With the development of a new area in psychology there appears a necessity of studying the methods and methodology of the research.

Analysis of the latest researches of the issue. Nowadays Christian psychology is actively developing. It is a powerful combination of empirical and theoretical research and psychotherapeutic practice. In the West such scholars as K. Hraupner, A. Mey, K. Voychezhek, R. Yavorski and others are developing this trend and are applying it to theory and practice [10]. In Russia the development of Christian psychology was initiated by B. Bratus. F. Vasylyuk, V. Slobodchikov, V. Rubtsov, Y. Zenko, L. Shekhovtsova, A. Lorhus and others became his followers. In Ukraine this trend is continued and reinforced by such scholars as L. Hrydkovets, N. Zhyhaylo, A. Klymyshyn, M. Savchyn, V. Tatenko, V. Halanskyi, V. Yurchenko, O. Yaremko and others. There have been launched a Christian Association of Psychologists (SPCh, 1995, Poland; «IGNIS», 1986, Germany), the European Association of Christian Psychologists (EMPCA), which unite psychologists of Europe (Poland, Germany, England, Denmark, Finland, Switzerland). In 2012, at the National University "Ostrog Academy" there was set up the first research laboratory of Christian psychology, ethics and pedagogic in Ukraine.

The key principle of Christian psychology is viewing a personality as the image and likeness of God, as a holistic creation that reflects in trinity concept 'body – soul – spirit'. Another important principle of Christian psychology is perception of spiritual mental things not as causal (reason)

but as personal, creative [10, p. 7]. According to A. Lorhus, a person becomes an individual through the process of freedom, creativity, spirituality, knowledge and autocracy (autonomy, independence). A person, as an individual accepts his existence creatively, mainly in a critical, constructive and axiological way [6, p. 8-9]. This understanding of the individual needs another methodological approach to its study, which scholars are still searching for.

The Formulation of the Goals and Objectives of the Article. The article aims at analyzing methodological problems of Christian psychological research and outlining its possible solutions.

Methodology of research. *Theoretical and methodological foundation* of the research consists of the conceptual positions of the Christian psychology (O. Bondarenko, B. Bratus, A. Lorhus, M. Mryonova, B. Nychyporov, H. Ozhyhanova, B. Randolph-Seng, M. Savchyn and V. Yurchenko). The following *methods* have been used for reaching the objective of the research: theoretical analysis of the literature which helped to evaluate the status of the scientific research; a systematic approach to the object of the research; systematization and generalization of the theoretical positions of the research which allowed determination of the conceptual foundations of the research.

Results of research and discussion. It's not a secret that psychology still doesn't have a unanimous methodological approach to dealing with such fundamental issues as methods of scientific explanation and even the subject of psychology. The main reason is that the fields related to psychology, which have disputable views in different psychological areas, for instance, the theory of personality, defining the psychology of man's "soul" or his energy ("psyche") as a subject of psychology are philosophical issues that cannot be resolved only by "natural" objective methods. M. Mamardashvili once wrote that there are things that can be said only in religious language and only this language describes the spiritual truths of life [7, p. 202]. Analyzing the crisis in European science methodology in the early twentieth century, E. Husserl stated that its cause was unilateral rationalism, which muddled in objectivism and naturalism forced everything human, spiritual and subjective out of methodology. "The science of the spirit", which proclaims dependence of scientific cognitive method not on the object but on ideological scientific position, can overcome this crisis [4].

Methodology has traditionally been perceived as the doctrine of common views a researcher should hold, the rules he must follow in the study, and the means he must use. These views, rules and means are not random but predetermined by one ultimate goal – to identify the subject of science as it really is. Since the subject of Christian psychology is the spiritual dimension of psychic phenomena, there arises a question of how to learn spiritual phenomena. M. Berdyaev wrote that spiritual phenomena are clarified differently than any other phenomena. We totally support his point of view.

Christian psychologists believe that traditional rational methods, which are based on abstraction and analysis, comparison and generalization, can't reflect the subjective reality of inner life of an individual. More complex mental experiences are difficult to describe on a psychometric level. This is due primarily to the intangible nature of the subject of study of both Christian psychology and psychology in general (e.g. such mental phenomena as love, trust, responsibility, moral values, etc.) and relevant world-view ideas.

Thus, we conducted an empirical study of life-sense orientations and values of individuals undergoing rehabilitation in Christian rehabilitation centers. The survey showed that there were already difficulties at the stage of collecting empirical data. In particular, the surveyed for whom Christian values predominate comprehended the questions of the interviewer in slightly different way [9]. For example, the instructions for carrying out the study include such points as "you shouldn't contemplate for too long" or "there is no right or wrong answers" and, thus, there were contradictions from the very beginning. The fact of the matter is that Christian centers are taught not to give hasty answers, as the Bible says, "The heart of the righteous answer: but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things" (Pr. 15:28) [2, p. 607]. There appear peculiarities at the stage of interpreting the questions themselves, which focuses on transcendental, spiritual characteristics.

That is why Christian psychology researchers emphasize the need for a new method that is based on the idea of empathy and creative freedom (V. Manerov, I. Ilyin, M. Savchyn et al.). "Science about spirit is different from natural science in a way that it requires proximity and similarity between the researcher and his subject" (M. Berdyaev) [1, p. 47]. "The scientific method is not a dead system of techniques, patterns and combinations. A genuinely creative researcher always works out a new method. For the method is a lively movement towards the subject, creative adaptation to it, "research", invention, rooting into, feeling into the subject, often improvisation, sometimes reincarnation" (I. Ilyin) [5, p. 412]. But nowadays this requirement seems unattainable for many people.

Analyzing features of Christian psychology deeper, it becomes clear that it includes approaches focusing on the problem of biblical anthropology, but there are areas that tend to academic research psychology. The key difference between these two approaches is different understanding of human nature and appropriate use of various interpreting charts. According to V. Manerov, on the basis of the built-up experience of empirical research, today it becomes obvious that the line between Christian and academic psychology is not as big as it seems at first. Their convergence is possible with the expansion of interpretational schemes

borrowed from Christian anthropology. Thus, the study of the subject of Christian psychology is partly being carried out by traditional and modified methods in academic and humanistic psychology [8]. M. Savchyn writes about the need for communicative methodology in Christian psychological research that will enable researchers to compare psychological concepts and will promote understanding between different areas and approaches [11, p. 49].

An important element of the methodology of any science is a system of methodological principles, each of which serves as a brief formulated theory that summarizes the historical experience of the branch (Christian psychology, in particular) encapsulating its basic laws and rules, and is the initial requirement for further research.

On the basis of the statements made above we can conclude that one of the basic principles of Christian psychological research is the principle of duality, the synthesis of materialism and idealism. It is known that the contrast between body and soul, matter and spirit, brain and consciousness have their roots in philosophy. Since psychology has derived from philosophy it has preserved these "traditions". However, this fight should be understood not as an external conflict of opposing points of view, but as an expression of acute controversy on the difficult way of human cognition. In accordance with the methodological principle of supplementing formulated by N. Bohr on quantum physics, "to most adequately describe the physical object that belongs to the microcosm, it must be described in mutually exclusive additional systems of description, for example, both as a wave and a share" [3]. The same principle is applied to perception of human nature.

In its theoretical and methodological background Christian psychology is based on a number of general philosophical and general psychological principles which acquire specific wording and formulation, being private-psychological principles of Christian psychology, in terms of Christian psychological studies.

These Christian principles of psychological research comprise:

1. The principle of historicism – a study of a certain period in the past development of science in its entirety specific content, in the system of relevant social and cultural conditions, its dependence on the general situation in science in general through comparison with previously accumulated knowledge. It allows you to show the originality and uniqueness of the phenomenon. It is necessary to imagine the history of science in the fullness of its most significant facts. None of the theories should be discarded as useless, because it has its place and meaning for its time. Deviation from the principle of historicism is one-sidedness and schematics of representing a phenomenon.

2. The principle of objectivity – deals with the problem of balance between objective and subjective components in scientific knowledge of Christian psychology. The complexity of the principle is determined by the difficulty to overcome their own motives (academic and personal) in perception of certain psychological knowledge. What is more, a Christian psychologist should use the present-day knowledge as the basis, as the foundation of his professional thinking (outlook). According to this principle, the goal that the Christian psychological researchers have is to shape and sustain the position of the objective, unbiased observer with respect to the final result and in rela-

tion to the studied object (without personal likes and dislikes, or supports of any theories).

3. The principle of academic science and the Christian world-view unity – focuses on the relation between the theories of psychology and Christian ideas and involves studying the correlation between semantic (logical) aspect of the object of Christian psychological research and its analysis from the perspective of Christianity.

4. The principle of consistency - involves understanding of the Christian psychology as a multi-level (fundamental and applied level), multi-functional (routine, scientific, artistic, religious knowledge) and multi-dimensional doctrine, the basic element of which is the spiritual factor. The principle of multi-dimensional and multi-level existence of the subject in Christian psychology determines the affinity and completeness of scientific interpretations of the nature of the researched subject. Determining the nature of the subject can deal with various levels of existence, though they all stay in a hierarchy, depending on the semantic hierarchy of the levels of certain phenomena. Cognitive process of the subject's essence can occur as a consistent perception of each possible level of existence, one of the levels or certain unity of them. According to each studied level an explanatory model of the subject's essence is constructed, research methods, methods of analysis and interpretation are selected. However, the general definition of the subject is given considering all possible interpretations of its essence. Thus, the research process is presented as a multi-dimensional and multi-level phenomenon in which cognitive and transformation actions are carried out in different dimensions and semantic layers, connected to each other by "vector of essence" of the studied phenomenon.

5. The principle of the unity of collective and individual creativity in the development of psychological knowledge involves understanding Christian psychology as a result of not only individual scientists' work, but as a general contribution of the Christian community. This principle directs a researcher towards: 1) singling out all the circumstances preceding the formation of a particular idea; 2) analysis of the context, which ultimately led to drawing up certain

concepts and theories in the works of particular scientists; 3) warns against acknowledging contributions of individual scientists or scientific school in aggregate formation of psychological knowledge as absolute (the following knowledge is based on the past achievements).

Christian principles of psychological research in combination with specific methods form the basis of scientific analysis of psychological phenomena, based on the fundamental idea of a three-dimensional understanding of human nature as a unity of body-soul-spirit.

Analyzing methodological problems it is necessary to emphasize some of the difficulties of using traditional methods in Christian psychological research, as we have already admitted. The term "method" is broadly seen as a form of practical and theoretical understanding of reality, which is the result of the laws of the studied object.

There are following empirical methods used in Christian psychology: observation and introspection, natural experiment, psychological testing, conversation as a dialogue, as well as other methods from Applied Psychology – art therapy, biblical therapy etc. Highly perspective methods are methods of hermeneutic psychology, which combine in the idea of hermeneutic circle synthesis and text analysis, feeling into the subject's integrity and component analysis of its constituents.

Generally speaking, adding the elements of contemplation, dialogue, feeling, and figurative perception alongside with more thorough interpretation, and taking into account the peculiarities of the Christian outlook is the way of transforming traditional research methods of psychology into the method of Christian psychology.

Conclusions and Perspectives for Further Research.

Works on the problem of methodology of the Christian psychological research are still not complete and sufficient, lacking in integrity; its many aspects are not studied well. For conducting Christian psychological researches it is necessary to create conceptual models and methods of Christian psychological research, additionally, to further summarize knowledge of such researches accumulated by foreign and Ukrainian scholars. This will provide authenticity and accuracy in this plane.

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Матласевич О.В. Методы христианско-психологических исследований: проблемы и перспективы

Аннотация. С ростом популярности исследований душевно-духовных характеристик психической жизни и развитием христианской психологии возникает вопрос методов и методологии исследований в этой сфере. В статье проанализированы существующие методологические проблемы христианско-психологических исследований и намечены возможные пути их решения. Автор обосновывает, что вся реальность внутренней жизни личности не может быть описана на психометрическом уровне. Установить взаимопонимание между академической и христианской психологическими концепциями может коммуникативная методология. Основными принципами христианско-психологических исследований являются: принцип синтеза материализма и идеализма; историзма; объективности; единства академически-научного и христианско-мировоззренческого; системности; единства коллективного и индивидуального творчества.

Ключевые слова: христианская психология, методология, методы, принципы, личность