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**The Development and Formation of the Personality of the Child with special needs
in the context of Christian psychology**

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Abstract. Development and formation of healthy personality of the children with special needs is one of key tasks of modernity. Empirical pedagogy often is unable to theoretically comprehend what comes in immediate intuitions and is confirmed by experience. Involving the ideas of Christian psychology for understanding the inner world of personality with special needs will help to solve the problem. Information about development of the children with special needs has been systematized and theoretical analysis of the basic ideological and Christian positions has been conducted in the article. Age-old traditions of negative attitude towards the people with development disabilities were changed by the Christianity. The author proves that formation of a personality separated from religion and values is aimed at temporary community interests, but not at the individual as value. Christian psychology is focused on the highest level of psychological health – personal. It focuses on resource models of human functioning, as opposed to more common, deficitary, focused on pathology. It is important to identify and develop the strong resource areas of functioning of the “special” children, relying on which they could “turn face back” to the world without sense of guilt, shame, desperation and rejection. Their potential resources are located in the emotional, cognitive-behavioral and existential spheres of personality. On the basis of analysis the author concludes that development of healthy personality of the child with special needs must be inextricably connected with development of freedom and responsibility. Unconditional acceptance of the child by the parents, building relations on the basis of mutual trust, formation of trust in God and positive attitude to themselves are main conditions for such a development.

Keywords: *personality, a child with special needs, Christian psychology, personal resources.*

Introduction. Development and formation of a healthy personality of the child with special needs is one of the key tasks of modern pedagogy and psychology. Despite the fact that much attention is paid to this issue both at the legislative and societal levels, it has its constant relevance. Today there are 2,640,000 people with special needs living in Ukraine. Trans-cultural studies show that in recent years the number of children with developmental disabilities has increased and makes 20% in the areas of social disadvantage; taking into account the full range of disorders (from minor to serious) the number of children in different regions is increasing up to 35-43 % [12, p. 480]. As the practice shows, a person with disabilities has a problem not just because of an illness, injury or congenital limitations but because of the inability of the social environment to adjust to his/her specific needs and low self-esteem due to the prejudices of the society and tags of mass psychology.

Analysis of the latest researches of the issue. The mentioned problems influenced the necessity of studying the children with special needs by different disciplines: medicine, physiology, psychology, pedagogy. Various aspects of their psyche and behavior are studied; ways and means for their development and education are worked out. Thus, the study of such scholars as V. Bondar, A. Ilchenko [3], B. Pinsky [14], A. Hohlina [22] demonstrated the influence of practice on the formation of cognitive and language activities alongside with the development of communication and movement skills in children with special needs. V. Tarasun, V. Bondar, V. Zasenko [17], L. Fomichova [20] researched the development of intelligence in the children with special needs and showed that at the early stages of ontogenesis their intellectual development is implemented in different types of purposeful activity.

Despite many studies of children with special needs, the way they are developing and shaped as individuals is not researched enough.

Having adopted the Declaration on the policies, principles and practice in education of people with special

needs (Salamanca, Spain, 1994, UNESCO), all countries faced the problem of improving education, upbringing and social involvement of physically and mentally impaired children. The Law of Ukraine "On Protection of Childhood", Concept of Early Social Rehabilitation of Disabled Children, Concept of International Standard of Special Education and other public documents indicate that the organization of the educational process should be aimed at creating a suitable living space that will help each child find their place in life, be an independent personality able to value not only him/herself but also the environment, make conscious decisions and take responsibility for their implementation. Thus, it regards the formation of a healthy individual.

Term “healthy personality” has a number of definitions in psychology. Behavioral psychologists consider healthy personality through the prism of healthy behavior; cognitive view it through cognitive structures; psychoanalysis analyse timely resolution of permanent conflicts; in the humanistic psychology development of a healthy personality is possible only through the relationship with higher values. Thus, according to E. Shoben (1957), healthy personalities are characterized by self-control, personal responsibility, democracy and the existence of ideals [6]. K. Young believed that the development of a healthy personality is a progressive movement on the way of coherence of personal experience and the universal human experience [23]. A. Maslow considers one’s reliance on their internal essence – the voice of authentic “I”, responsibility and conscious choice - as a primary precondition of personal health [11]. From the standpoint of V. Frankl, search for the sense of life and its realization are the main motivational tendencies of a healthy personality. So far, the psychologists of different directions to some extent connect the personality’s health with higher values and ideals.

It has led to the revival of connections between pedagogy and philosophy, in particular “philosophy of values” (so-called “Wertphilosophie”). According to the basic principles of philosophy of values, “a person cannot be

overemphasized, they do not develop by themselves, but acquire their content in communication with the world of values in a living social experiment, by addressing the God”, and in the God they seek for reliance and meaning [7]. However in the modern world where the technological and economical progress is dominating, the spiritual sides of human life are being actively displaced [1]. Pedagogy and psychology which are based exclusively on empiricism, often cannot theoretically comprehend what comes in direct intuitions and is confirmed by experience. According to V. Zenkovskiy, this creates an internal deadlock in which the modern pedagogy is located [7]. The religious outlook comparatively rarely is a focus of researches, although practicing psychologists have noted the necessity of the additional researches directed at clarification of the interconnection between the religious outlook and attitude towards the children with disabilities [15]. From our point of view, inclusion of the ideas of Christian psychology which is promptly developing both in Ukraine and abroad will help to solve this problem.

Therefore, the **main objective of this article** is to carry out a theoretical analysis of the main ideological and Christian concepts and on this basis identify and substantiate the conditions of development of a healthy personality of the child with special needs.

Methodology of research. *Theoretical and methodological foundation* of the research consists of the following parts: methodological positions about psychological, social and spiritual essence of a personality (A. Adler, H. Kohut, T. Reich, K. Rogers, V. Frankl and E. Fromm); conceptual positions of the Christian psychology (B. Bratus, O. Bondarenko, A. Lorhus, M. Mryonova, B. Nychporov, H. Ozhyhanova, B. Randolph-Seng, M. Savchyn and V. Yurchenko); opinion of Y. Shymolon [31] about the similarity in a person’s feeling before the Absolute and consciousness before the parents; positions of V. Moskalets and V. Zenkivskiy [7] about the essential importance of a family in formation of a spirituality of a personality; opinion of V. Prezhyna [30] about development of the religious ideas in ontogenesis; views of V. Myasishchev [13] about the attitude as a fundamental factor of formation of a personality.

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 and justify the conditions of development of a healthy personality of the child with special needs in context of the Christian-oriented psychology.

Results of research and discussion. The term “children with special needs” has only recently begun to be used in psychological literature. Before that people with developmental disorders were called “disabled”, “persons with disturbance”, “abnormal children” etc. Parents of such children initiated a shift of focus from disabilities / abnormalities to the special educational needs that was caused by the activity of charitable organizations. According to A. Kolupayeva, a term “children with special needs” includes all the children whose educational needs go beyond the generally accepted norm, and this causes a

necessity of the additional support in their education and development [9].

Such understanding coincides with the most common standard definition of “special needs”, particularly in the countries of European Union, which is presented in International Standard Classification of Education: “Special educational needs have the persons, whose education requires additional resources. The additional resources may include: personnel (for providing assistance in educational process); materials (different learning tools, including assistive and corrective); finances (budgetary allocations for receiving additional special services)” [29].

The term proposed by G. Lefrancois is logically defined and grounded. “Special need is the term used in relation to people whose social, physical or emotional peculiarity requires special attention and service in order to develop their potential” [27]. This category of children includes disabled children, children with minor health disorders, children with social needs and also gifted children. It should be noted that in Ukraine children with physical disabilities are considered to be the main category of children with special needs.

People with disabilities have existed in all times and in every society. The attitudes towards them were changing through centuries ranging from rejection and exclusion to tolerance and merciful compassion and recognition of their right for a dignified life and integration into a society.

The Christianity played an important role in changing attitudes towards the people with disabilities.

The birth of Christianity opened up a new perspective for the meaning of life and man as the highest value in life, created in the image and likeness of the God, who is a reflection of the World Mind, Love, Liberty, and Freedom. All are equal before the supreme Creator and everyone, regardless of appearance, illness, or physical and mental disability, is the epitome of the Temple of God. Neither antiquity nor the Old Testament World had a clear idea of a personality, the eastern world beyond the Christianity, for instance, Hinduism or Buddhism. In the best case, an “anticipation of personality” could be observed, but they were missing one of the key moments of its understanding – the absolute value and the unique identity [21]. If in the Old Testament the God is speaking to the chosen people, the Christ refers to a personality and not to people. Providing a personality with such absolute value and strengthening of one’s uniqueness, in turn, was done by adding strengths to the spiritual improvement.

The Christianity has helped to change the ancient traditions of negative attitude towards the people with developmental disabilities. The Holy Scripture calls on people for compassion, mercy, help to the sick, support of charity (Job 29:15; Deuter. 16:9-10). Jesus said, “As you did to one of My smaller brother, you did that to Me” (Gospel of Matthew 25:40). Today there are even views that “deprived people can teach what love which saves is” that “the people with disabilities can become messengers of the new world which is not governed by force, violence and aggression, but by love, solidarity and acceptance of the other” [8]. Since at that time an illness was considered to be a punishment for the sins and a sick person was considered to be the one who surrendered to evil, the

treatment was understood as a moral change of the personality. Jesus considered himself to be called to treat people, and therefore, among his activities there were many wonders of healing: he healed the crippled, the lepers and the raging; people ceased to limp, the blind received sight, the dumb began to talk etc. (Gospel of Matthew 9: 1-8, 15:29-31; Gospel of Mark 2:1-12, 7:32-35, 8:22-26; Luke 5:17-26). Healing the sick, he clearly understood that everything depended of the strength of beliefs of the mentally and physically sick. In the Gospel of Matthew there is a description of healing of a centurion's servant: "Go, and as you believe, so be it" (Gospel of Matthew 8: 13). At the same time in Nazareth, due to mistrust of His countrymen to Him He could not perform the wonders. Faith adds strengths and optimism to a man, allows going beyond the borders of one's capabilities. Thus, the researches of Zuk (1959), Miller, Bartram and Kling (1961) showed that the religious and believing parents more easily accept their "special" children and they have a smaller sense of guilt compared to the other, not believing parents [15].

In the light of Christian worldview, a child is a priceless treasure presented by the Lord. However, when a sick child is born, it is often seen as the God's punishment or challenge for parents. As a result, some parents abandon a sick child and leave him/her in an orphanage not willing to complicate their lives, others - take the baby home and complain about their plight, trying to understand what this punishment is for. However, the Holy Bible says that a child, even sick, cannot be a punishment. A child is always a reward and light. What people despise and reject is priceless for the God. When asked whether the birth of such a child is a sin, Jesus is answering that there is nobody's fault in this: this person lives for the purpose of appearing the God's works in them (Gospel of John 9: 1-3). And the God's duty is to unity people, to heal the souls, to bring peace. It is through people with special needs a man's heart might open to creation of the good and living in love.

A bright contemporary example of the mentioned above is a story of Nicholas Vujicic, an Australian boy who was born without arms and legs, but with the God's help he has realized his mission and is fully realizing himself as a personality. Nick Vujicic says: "How many people would believe if they showed me on TV and tell: 'This guy prayed to the God and his arms and legs appeared'? But when people see me the way I am, they wonder: 'How can you be smiling?' It is a visible miracle for them" [18]. They are looking into the eyes of a person without arms and legs and see peace and joy there – something that everyone strives for; they see that "the God's power is carried in weakness".

It is extremely important for the parents to *accept* their child as they are, to perceive the illness and information about it adequately at all the stages of development of the child. Acceptance is exactly the help which is needed for the child with special needs. This is one of the most important preconditions of a healthy development of a personality. It is certainly difficult for a man to accept any imperfection. However, communicating with the world of the Absolute and the Infinite a man has a concealed experience of unconditional acceptance; it is only necessary to realize and develop it.

Unfortunately, most of the models of work with the "special" children are imperfect, and they focus their attention on what is "wrong", what is missing and which irregularities require correction [4]. The Christian psychology proposes to rely on the idea that any man, as the image of the God, can solve the own problems and receive the necessary knowledge. It is important to realize and support the belief that all the people possess an ability to develop, learn and change. It is important to pay attention not to what the child is lacking but to what they are possessing. This increases confidence and opens up new opportunities. In fact, very often such problems are viewed as natural by such children, as they do not understand what the physical disabilities are, until someone points this out. The skills, knowledge and capabilities of the "special" children when being noticed and evaluated may become useful for them. When the attention is paid to the resources of the "special" children, they begin to be perceived as more interesting and unique, and it becomes much easier to respect and value them.

The next condition of a healthy development of a "special" child's personality is *trust of the parents*. Trust enables one's freedom of choice to trust, which is nothing but an acceptance of responsibility [9]. The trust of the parents includes two levels which are trust in general, the trust that everything is to be done in the way it should, and the trust in the particular act or situation. "By His example it seems that Christ says that for Him there is no stranger. He trusts us so much that He is ready to sacrifice His life in order to make us believe that the God trusts us. He is the one who trusted every one of us. Knowing everything about us, including the way we break the law of the God, Christ says, 'Look, I accept the body of a human being, becomes the human being to make you know and trust: I trust you, human, takes the image and the body that you are expected to, the one of a Human, as I did'" [16]. Psychologists reveals that parents' trust in their child is the condition that later makes this child believe in him or herself, becoming emotionally and morally stable [9]. If the parents are strong in their souls and are full of trust, they can positively influence the state of health of the sick child. Moreover, they can adopt him or her to the conditions of society so that they never feel like disabled but live the life of a healthy individual.

Thus, it is necessary to show to the child the God who cares about every man, and in particular about the child, and who is always close and ready to help. The Lord has given a clear instruction to the parents, saying "Let the children come to Me, do not forbid them: for such is the Kingdom of God". Fostering a sense of trust and love to God makes the life of the child peaceful and full of hope. As the child learns to love God they learn to love their own neighbours, understand own connection with them and thus, satisfies own need for "We".

In the light of modern humanistic psychological thought, the development of a personality presupposes the need to enable every person to act in the fullness of their strengths, help them to creatively realize what is founded in their depth and in the foundation of their originality. Accordingly, the main objective is to ensure that personalities could freely create themselves, so that their creative strength would not be restricted by either stereotypes and prejudices or other similar settings.

Thus, as we see, an issue of development of a personality is closely connected with the issue *freedom in a man*, which is one of the biggest mystery and at the same time the most important topic in the fields of psychology and pedagogy. What does the freedom mean in a child's soul? What are its conditions? Where is its place in a man? It is known that the Christian church does not consider a child under 7 years old responsible for their own actions (this is why a child does not need repentance). In early childhood a *child is already free, but not responsible yet* – it is like a prototype of the holiness which is always free, but to which there is nowhere to attach a moment of authorship (and therefore, responsibility) because of real and direct connection with the God. By giving a child the power of choice, begins a dramatic struggle between good and evil. In such a way, the child already possesses freedom, but does not realize its sense, power and amount to the end [7]. However without the development of freedom there is no sense in the development of a personality, as it turns into animal training, suppression of the personality and their humiliation. As noted by V. Zenkovskiy, there is some indescribably painful contrast between a task of the development of a personality's strength, the way educational process is put forward, the ability to "find themselves" and "defend themselves" in the difficult conditions of the modern life and how much a personality is suppressed and cramped nowadays from all the sides and how powerless they feel themselves there. From the scientist's point of view, modern education neglects all the real difficulties of the soul and deals with a soul periphery, which causes different complications in a child's soul [7].

A Christian-oriented approach in working with children with special needs considers a personality in their integrity and uniqueness. Thus, the dysfunctions of the "special" children are not ignored. The emphasis is placed on the strengths of the children and parents, and their resources are being noticed and enhanced. Analysis of the literature devoted to the research of the families with a "special" child [25] allows us to determine the strong and resourceful sides of their life. Potential resource may be located in emotional, cognitive-behavioural and existential spheres of their personality. In emotional sphere, it is the ability to empathize, share their love and rejoice [28]; in cognitive-behavioral, it is obtaining new skills, knowledge, new ways of solution of the problems [24]; in existential, it is a new understanding of life, development of spirituality, openness and humaneness [26]. Some ideas of using the resources in psychological work with the "special" children have been implemented in the Center of Therapeutic Pedagogy and Differential Education "Our House" (Moscow) and have been described by Y. Fysun and L. Mikaelyan [19].

It is important to know that a Christian approach does not romanticize the life of people. Faith in resourcefulness does not foresee minimization of difficulties that exist in life. Christian-oriented psychology provides an opportunity to avoid a dichotomous view on the children with special needs as not only dysfunctional or only resource, and helps to accept the reality in all its contradictions. It is natural, if, for example, a child has a severe genetic illness, nobody can make so that there is no this disorder. But the Christian outlook may help in changing the atti-

tude towards the disorder. *"Why does the God allow in our present all kinds of misfortunes, illnesses and adversities? Nobody will tell you this. Me too. And it is not a fact that He will change the conditions in which you find yourself. But He can change your perception of yourself and your own situation. This way you can become a winner of your own troubles"*, says already mentioned in the article Nick Vujicic [18]. Focusing on the relations with the disorders (and not on the disorders themselves) shifts the attention to a psychological sphere, to the "reality of the subsequent order" [5]. This "reality" has a greater "degree of freedom". The changes are possible in it. There is a place for choice in it for the children with special needs.

Conclusions. The previous analysis of the described issue allows formulation of the following conclusions. Development of a healthy personality is possible through the analysis of the higher values and ideals that are mostly reflected in religion. Formation of a personality separated from religion and values "is aimed at temporary life goals related to the needs of a family, society and state". Its goal is the interests of the society, and not a personality as a value".

Christianity has brought spiritual and moral values and a new understanding about a man as a personality into the European and national culture. This has received its reflection in the humanistic concept of man, in the Enlightenment, in development of the sciences. However, the secularized humanism having absorbed the personality ideas of Christianity, denies the spiritual-religious essence of a man and the metaphysical core of their personality, thus moving away from its essence – strengthening human in a man, development of their personality. Christian psychology considers a personality in their integrity and uniqueness, and contributes to integration of I-Concept.

Christianity has played a great role in changing the society's attitude toward the people with special needs. Since its emergence, the attitude to disabled people has become more human, tolerant and compassionate. Christian outlook contributes to deprivation of the feeling of guilt and shame for the birth of a "special" child, and this is starting point in formation of a positive attitude toward themselves and a healthy personality, constructive and emotionally open interaction of the parents with the child.

Based on a systematic approach and relied on theoretical analysis of the Christian philosophical ideas the following conditions of the development of a healthy personality of a child with special needs were chosen and justified. These are: a) unconditional acceptance of a "special" child by their parents, and consequently the child themselves. Communicating with the God a man receives the experience of unconditional acceptance which can be transferred at others; b) focusing attention on resources of "special" children which potentially can be found in the emotional, cognitive-behavioural and existential spheres of a personality; c) forming among the children trust in the God which is a precondition and source of development of the trustful attitude of the parents to the children and vice versa; d) development of internal (personal) freedom without which a formation of a personality turns into animal training, suppression and

humiliation. Belief in God makes a man personally free, thus responsible and active.

The Christian psychology focuses of the resource models of human functioning as opposed to the more com-

mon, nonperfect and focused on pathology. It also helps to avoid the dichotomous view of the children with special needs and to accept the reality in all its contradictions.

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Развитие и формирование личности ребенка с особыми потребностями в контексте христианской психологии.

Аннотация. Развитие и формирование здоровой личности детей с особыми потребностями – одна из ключевых задач современной педагогики и психологии. Однако эмпирическая педагогика часто не может теоретически осмыслить то, что рождается в непосредственных интуициях и подтверждается опытом. Решить эту проблему, по мнению автора, поможет привлечение идей христианской психологии к пониманию внутреннего мира личности с особыми потребностями. В статье систематизирована информация о развитии детей с особыми потребностями; проведен теоретический анализ основных мировоззренческих христианских положений, который позволил выделить и обосновать условия формирования здоровой личности “особого” ребенка. Вековые традиции негативного отношения к людям с недостатками в развитии изменило христианство. Автор обосновывает, что формирование личности, оторванное от высших ценностей имеет целью временные интересы общества, а не личность как ценность. Христианская психология ориентирована на высокий уровень психического здоровья – личностный. Она ориентируется на ресурсные модели человеческого функционирования, в отличие от более привычных, дефицитарных, сфокусированных на патологии. Важно выявлять и развивать сильные, ресурсные зоны функционирования “особых” детей, опираясь на которые, они смогут “вернуться лицом” к миру без чувства вины, стыда, отчаяния и отторжения. Потенциальные ресурсы находятся в эмоциональной, когнитивно-поведенческой и экзистенциальной сферах их личности. На основе проведенного анализа автор приходит к выводу, что развитие здоровой личности ребенка с особыми потребностями должно быть неразрывно связано с развитием свободы и ответственности. Основными условиями такого развития являются: безусловное принятие ребенка родителями; построение отношений на основе взаимного доверия, формирование у ребенка доверия к Богу и позитивного отношения к себе.

Ключевые слова: личность, ребенок с особыми потребностями, христианская психология, личностные ресурсы, доверие, самоуважение