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LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE PHENOMENON OF HUMAN PERFECTION IN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

The goal of the article. The article is aimed at expounding on and synthesizing the theological grounds, historical evolution, and modern implications of human perfection in the context of Orthodox theology.

Problem statement. The modern foundational literature on human perfection in Orthodox theology is made of three major categories of texts that philosophically and theologically expound the subject matter.

The first category is the fundamental source that is represented by the work of Alexis Torrance, "Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ" [10]. It provides an exegesis of theological frameworks for human perfection in Orthodox theology through various sub-concepts in Orthodox Christianity. The author systematically developed the doctrine of human perfection in Orthodox theology, showing the way for human beings to attain indissoluble union with God. His writing bridges ancient wisdom and contemporary understanding through systematic analyses that explains in depth how the teachings of early and later church fathers concerning human perfection are very much relevant to the contemporary context.

Secondary category consists of a wide variety of sources focusing on human perfection as expressed by various individual thinkers in Orthodox Christianity.

The book "Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection" by Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski [1] focuses on the concept of Christian perfection in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. It highlights the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on early Christian thought.

The book "A Divine Perfection and Human Potentiality" by Jarred Mercer [6] presents Hilary of Poitiers's theological vision and its fresh interpretation.

These two scientific sources provide valuable historical and theological insights, nevertheless Clement's and Hilary of Poitiers's theology do not fully express all important elements of later Byzantine and Orthodox thought on human perfection.

The third category deals only with the limited treatments of the theme of human perfection in Orthodox theology.

Such academic works as by Billy Camp [2], Harold Coward [3], Robin Gill [4], Michael Hyde [5], Candida Moss [7], John Passmore [8], Jeffrey Siker [9] often approach the theme from an outside perspective and do not inquire into many aspects of Orthodox teaching in all its depth. These aforementioned sources touch upon aspects of human perfection but often lack the theological depth and systematic approach in respect of orthodox beliefs that can be found in source of the first block.

This also sets it apart from the other two sources, which are relatively not exhaustive in their debate pertaining to human perfection with respect to Orthodox beliefs.

These works emphasize particular aspects of human perfection without providing a more extensive context within Orthodox theological tradition.

However, the third block of works dealing with human perfection in Orthodox understanding often provide either a fragmented or oversimplified understanding, concentrating on isolated topics without linking them to the wider theological framework.

While these may serve as introductory sources regarding the general notion of human perfection, they do not stand as substitutes for more thorough studies of the view in Orthodox literature as found in primary sources.

The methodological distinction made by the author of this article may assist researchers in determining the sources they engage with: first, relying on an understanding that comes from primary texts, second, recognizing the limitations of secondary and third peripheral sources.

This obviously affirms the importance of anchoring research within modern primary theological texts, embodying orthodoxy, while at the same time keeping the broadest spectrum of literature in view.

This type of methodological division developed by the author of this article may guide researchers to prioritize their engagement with the sources so that

the basic understanding comes from the primary texts while secondary and third peripheral sources may provide some support in analysis and further research.

This reiterates the significance of situating all the research in the contemporary primary theological texts representing the orthodox thought while being aware of the wider spectrum of available literature.

Literature review.

Main part.

The book "Human Perfection in Byzantine Theology: Attaining the Fullness of Christ" by Alexis Torrance.

Traditionally, human perfection in Byzantine theology has been approached through a variety of lenses, but a promising perspective emerges out of rigorous examination of Christ's humanity, which is the basis for human spiritual development.

This innovative methodology constitutes the key thesis for a very moving theological work that will bridge historical Byzantine thought with contemporary understanding. The book aims to rethink the understanding of human perfection in Byzantine theology in light of various aspects of the full humanity of Christ [10, p. 40-41].

The study examines some Byzantine theologians whose thoughts on human perfection will be the sole focus of attention.

At first, the author provides a background on modern orthodox theological anthropology, especially on such issues as personhood and deification [10, p. 11].

Then he engages in chapters devoted to individual Byzantine thinkers: Maximus the Confessor [10, p. 53], Theodore the Studite [10, p. 82-85], Symeon the New Theologian [10, p. 110-111], and Gregory Palamas [10, p. 152-153].

This final chapter, dwelling on the twelfth-century Byzantine dispute surrounding Christ's humanity, brings the author back to the verse "my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) to exemplify the importance of "Christ's humanity as the gateway to human perfection" [10, p. 39].

The author employs a neo-patristic synthesis methodology, similar to that of Georges Florovsky. This approach involves a creative engagement with historical theology in the service of systematic concerns [10, p. 7].

The red thread running through the book is the Christological imperative, beginning with the contention that one cannot understand the doctrine of man without very "careful attention to the doctrine of Christ as God Incarnate" [10, p. 1].

Torrance believes that human beings can only achieve "their high calling to be perfect" [10, p. 1] through the humanity of Christ [10, p. 1].

The common view that Byzantine eschatology consists simply in the idea of epektasis, or perpetual

progress, is challenged by this book [10, p. 43-44]. The Byzantine thinkers, through Maximus the Confessor's works, focused on the themes of rest, cessation of motion, and immutability in the age to come [10, p. 70-71].

Torrance offers a subtle conception of the "heresy of mediocrity" from the works of Symeon the New Theologian. Symeon's concerns include any theological approach that denies the possibility of Christian holiness and the conscious experience of communion with God [10, p. 110-111].

The Christocentric character of Gregory Palamas's understanding of deification from divine energy is analyzed, evidencing Christ's humanity functioning "as the locus for" [10, p. 153] the communication and reception of deifying energy [10, p. 152-153].

The strengths of the work lie in the thorough analysis of primary sources. The book covers views regarding the perfection of human nature among major Byzantine theologians, usually giving deep and fresh analyses of their perspectives.

The author challenges existing paradigms by questioning common assumptions about Byzantine theology, particularly concerning eschatological epektasis, prompting a reevaluation of traditional interpretations.

The book's emphasis on the Christological imperative realized through consistent focus on the importance of Christ's humanity for understanding human perfection offers a valuable corrective to theological anthropologies that neglect this central tenet of Orthodox faith.

Essentially, the book has some limitations; it is disengaged with most modern orthodox thinkers and selects only a few Byzantine figures in its engagement. Engaging more figures would give a wider representation of Byzantine thought with regard to human perfection. Deeper engagement with contemporary orthodox thinkers would also invite newer dimensions into the discussion.

With these limitations aside, the book actually offers very important contributions to the theological scholarship, since it provides fresh insights into Byzantine theological anthropology on the basis of the Christological imperative.

It opens up pathways for realizing a newer understanding of human perfection in Orthodox tradition, thereby retaining its relevance for both scholars of Byzantine theology and those interested in Christian anthropology more broadly.

The book "Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection" by Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski.

According to Ashwin-Siejkowski, the Christian concept of human perfection (telei sis) is what turns Clement's model significantly different from other views presented by other Christian groups and philosophical schools [1, p. 10].

The structure of the book is such that it first explains the background of Clement's project, and then analyze the project itself.

Chapters 1 and 2 introduce Clement's life and his engagement with Hellenistic Judaism, especially which put a great influence on his conception of Christian theology and *telei sis* [1, p. 2-3, 10, 39].

Chapter 3 illustrates the impact of Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism on Clement's project [1, p. 10, 81].

Chapter 4 focuses on Clement's direct interaction with and response to his "hetero- Gnostic" opponents [1, p. 10, 109].

Chapter 5 and 6 delve into Clement's project of Christian perfection, the characteristics of this Christian Gnostic, and how attaining perfection relates probably the most with the membership in the church [1, p. 10, 12-13].

Ashwin-Siejkowski's methodology consists of a close textual analysis of writings of Clement, which uses St hlin's Register to trace the development of Clement's thought through his specific terminology and citing appropriate scriptural, theological, and philosophical sources [1, p. 12].

The book's central theme is Clement's understanding of Christian perfection as a process of "intellectual and spiritual growth" [1, p. 227], which culminates in a harmonious coexistence of faith and reason [1, p. 227].

Central themes of the book cover following:

1. The Influence of Hellenistic Judaism. Ashwin-Siejkowski states that the concept of *telei sis* was undeniably influenced by Clement's interplay with Hellenistic Judaism, especially by the allegorical interpretation of scripture by Philo of Alexandria and the Jewish sapiential literature [1, p. 2-3, 10, 39].

2. The Role of Greek Philosophy. The influence of Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism is acknowledged, noting that wherever used, Clement did it selectively and for the benefit of a mostly scriptural understanding of Christian perfection [1, p. 81, 2-3].

3. Polemic with Hetero-Gnostics. Clement's project happened in a context of discussions with other Christian groups which made him establish his definition of *telei sis* distinct from the other alternative models [1, p. 109, 9].

4. The Christian Gnostic. Clement defines the Christian Gnostic as a person who has intimate knowledge of scripture, leads a virtuous life, and is committed to making his life a teaching for others [1, p. 147, 162].

5. Ecclesiological Context. Ashwin-Siejkowski points out that in attaining Christian perfection, the church community is important, declaring that Clement's concepts very closely relate within being of the church member [1, p. 12-13, 189, 228].

In this work there have been many substantial contributions towards theological-literal studies. Author admitted the Hellenistic-Jewish influence on Clement's thought [1, p. 10, 39]. That admission directly challenges the common viewpoint of Clement being exclusively a Christian thinker through showing how he creatively synthesized Jewish and Greek ideas within a mainly scriptural background [1, p. 81, 2-3]; and it establishes the crucial connection between his concepts of *telei sis* and ecclesiology [1, p. 12-13, 189, 228]. Ashwin-Siejkowski points out that the relationship held between Clement's notion of the perfection and the church contributes the insight towards the understanding of the Clement's unique theological project much deeper and broader [1, p. 12-13, 189, 228].

The strengths of the study lie in its fresh presentation of Clement of Alexandria, emphasizing the Hellenistic Judaism influence on his thought [1, p. 2-3, 10, 39], and in its in-depth acquaintance with Clement's writings and the more extensive intellectual context of the time [1, p. 12].

However, a few limitations of this work must also be considered: one related mainly to the investigation of the later reception of the project and its influence within Christian thought [1, p. 230-231] and another dealing with occasional heuristic exaggeration of differences between Clement and other thinkers that may obscure points of continuity or mutual influence.

Although not without defects, this work will enrich the scholarly tradition in theology that revises an appreciation of Clement's thought regarding the doctrine of Christian perfection. Perspectives offered here with respect to overcoming the Jewish and Greco-Roman dichotomy within the Christian idea may further contemporary discussions on theological anthropology, spirituality, and the church's responsibility for spiritual development. The work's investigation into the profound influence of Hellenistic Judaism and the interconnectedness of *telei sis* to coexist with ecclesiology presents a very different yet much more nuanced picture of Clement's theological endeavor.

The book "Devine perfection and human potentiality: The Trinitarian Anthropology of Hilary of Poitiers" by Jarred Mercer.

Jarred Mercer's book "Devine perfection and human potentiality: The Trinitarian Anthropology of Hilary of Poitiers" present a fresh reinterpretation of Hilary of Poitiers's theological vision through the concept of "trinitarian anthropology" [6, p.12]. The author believes that the consistency of Hilary's thought depends on his understanding of the relation of the divine to the human [6, p. 12]. According to the type of God that Hilary argues for, there must be a certain type of human being, and how finite

humanity exists determines how that humanity may know and speak of the infinite God [6, p. 12]. This model seeks to reveal both the overall picture and the distinctive features of Hilary's thought that may remain hidden [6, p. 12].

The way the book is structured parallels the main lines of Hilary's argumentation in *De Trinitate*, which is a kind of progressive unveiling of humanity in origin, destiny, potentiality and perfection [6, p. 6-7].

The method the author employs is mainly exegetical, focusing on key scriptural passages on which Hilary relies in his constructive developments and polemical engagements. The author carefully places Hilary's arguments in contemporary theological troubles and studies his relation with important figures such as Tertullian, Novatian, and Origen [6, p. 7-8].

Throughout the book, the key themes explored are:

1. God's power and Human power. According to the book, Hilary uses divine generation as the starting point of the perfection of human potential [6, p. 13]. Through the interpretation of John 1:1-4, Hilary believes the nature of humanity is within the eternal generation of the Son and originates from this [6, p. 8].

2. God's Infinity and the progress of Humans. The book looks at Hilary's view of God's infinity and the contribution of this interpretation to our theological understanding. Hilary begins with God's infinite being to ground his understanding of divine unity, rather than traditional analogical arguments [6, p. 55-56]. This has important consequences for Hilary's view of humanity because it shows that man who is created in the infinite life of the Son, is meant for eternal becoming into God [6, p. 263].

3. Unity of God and Human Participation. The book discusses Hilary's stress on God's condescension in revealing to us God's ultimate unity [6, p. 9]. Through his reading of John 10:30 and 14:9, Hilary argues that humanity's finitude necessitates a material revelation of God in the person of Christ [6, p. 9]. This revelation helps humanity rise above its limitations and progress towards a vision of three-in-one God [6, p. 9-10].

4. Divine Image and Human Destiny. The book analyzes Hilary's understanding of the divine image in humanity, and how it shapes human destiny [6, p. 10]. The author emphasizes the significance of the suffering of Christ and man, which gives Hilary the opportunity to develop a theological anthropology which allows room for human perfection through participation in the divine life [6, p. 10].

The book makes essential contributions to the field of theology. It offers a re-conceptualization of Hilary's thought regarding "trinitarian anthropology" which emphasizes the nexus between

the divine and human elements in Hilary's theological scheme. By this, the author has demonstrated the singularity of Hilary's thought as a creative theologian, rather than merely a derivative thinker, offering substantive contributions to the fourth-century theological debate. Mercer provides a wider and more nuanced interpretation of Hilary's thought through a careful viewing of the historical and theological context in which Hilary's teaching was incorporated.

The prime strengths of the book lie in lucid and engaging argumentation, sweeping analysis, and original contributions to the field. The author's extensive treatment of the key scriptural texts and theological influences of Hilary offers a very rich grasp of his thought.

However, a primary limitation of the book is in its exclusive focus on *De Trinitate* which ignores insights drawn from Hilary's other writings [6, p. 6-7].

The work's novelty lies in the way it treats Hilary's theological vision through "trinitarian anthropology". From this perspective, it manifests the coherence and originality of Hilary's thought while opening up horizons for his engagement with the serious theological debates of the fourth century. Through meticulous analysis and insightful interpretations, the work represents an incredibly important contribution to the study of Hilary of Poitiers and early Christian theology.

The Ph.D. dissertation, entitled "Humanity's Desire for Perfection: A Defense for Christian Theism", by Billy Camp.

In his book "Humanity's Desire for Perfection: A Defense for Christian Theism" Billy Camp advances new grounds for the apologetic of Christian Theism. Both the need of ensured perfection of the required moral state and man's inability to attain this have been combined in one consideration. The tension between desires and achievements points to a need for divine assistance - an argument that smoothly reaches the teaching within the Christian doctrine on unity with Christ [2, p. 8].

The book systematically goes on for six chapters, one flowing into the other to develop an argument. Chapter 1 brings forth the fundamental problem that drives the whole book which is the persistent disconnect between moral theories and actual human behavior.

Camp introduces key concepts and methodological approaches, focusing on perfectionism and unity with Christ [2, p. 1-22]. At such a foundation, Chapter 2 gives a robust defense for moral realism as an argument about the objectivity of moral facts, knowledge, and obligations. Camp explores how those exist objectively and how others are affected universally by them in human experience [2, p. 23-71].

This naturally flows to Chapter 3, where he weaves together moral realism with theism by drawing on the insights of some prominent thinkers such as Aquinas, Kant, Sorley, Taylor, and Lewis to demonstrate how a theistic framework provides the most plausible explanation for the existence and nature of objective morality [2, p. 72-105].

The argument expands further in Chapter 4, where Camp develops what he terms a “tripartite argument for Christian theism” [2, p.21]. This sophisticated approach incorporates natural law theory, divine-complement theory, and virtue ethics to show how Christian morality adequately deals with the complexities of human moral experience [2, p. 106-126].

Chapter 5 provides a new pitch for Camp's argument, focusing on the Christian doctrine of the perfect unity of humanity and the awesomely authoritative nature of this doctrine on the whole of justification, sanctification, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit [2, p. 127-163].

The whole work is rounded-off and brought to completion in Chapter 6 by building up critiques at the end of the synthesis and discovering where research must be done thereafter [2, p. 164-173].

As for themes that run through the dissertation, they have interestingly oftentimes presented a somewhat consistent picture. Camp makes a strong case for the argument that morality is objective; moral facts, values, and obligations are best grounded in theistic framework [2, p. 21-26]. He suggests that men's craving for moral perfection, together with their implicit realization about the existence of objective moral standards and failure to achieve them, gives rise to that [2, p. 3-4].

This then allows him to criticize secular ethics for being inappropriate to conceptions of moral objectivity or for laying bare laudable solutions to the ideological moral affair [2, p. 8]. According to Camp, the answer lies in union with Christ, through which Christians receive the grace and fortitude necessary for moral transformation.

Camp's methodology creatively unites philosophical analysis, theological reflection, and engagement with historical moral thinkers while drawing consistently on philosophical arguments and biblical and theological insights.

The overall approach makes a number of notable contributions to theological scholarship. First, it supplies an original apologetic argument based on humanity's desire for moral perfection. Second, it connects moral apologetics to the central doctrines of Christianity. Third, it enables a well-rounded theological view of sanctification through being one with Christ.

The strengths of this work arguably lie in its original and thought-provoking thesis and comprehensive integration of philosophy and

theology. Some areas did remain somewhat under-research. The description of competing theistic viewpoints from other religions, in more detail, could have lent the research more weight. Also, while the psychological ramifications of human perfectionism are addressed, this could have been examined in more depth.

That being mentioned, “Humanity's Desire for Perfection: A Defense for Christian Theism” certainly constitutes a significant contribution to theological scholarship. Camp's argument based on the universal human experience and further amplified through careful philosophical and theological analysis, generates a compelling case for Christian theism.

The clarity of presentation and the high level of integration of various disciplines within this thesis make it acceptable for scholarly inquiry, students, or anybody engaged in the interaction of morality and faith. Although the inclusion of other competing theistic perspectives and psychological considerations would have further developed the work, it still holds in significance the contribution it makes concerning the understanding of human moral experience and the transformational power Christian faith instils.

The book “The Perfectibility of Human Nature in Eastern and Western Thought” by Harold Coward.

Coward's book ambitiously explores human perfectibility in relation to various philosophical and religious traditions, presenting a comprehensive comparative treatment of them regarding the way various cultures and belief systems understand human potential and perfection [3, p. 1-6]. The study, carried out within the framework of a two-part investigation, providing analyses of the Western and Eastern perspectives.

The work applies a comparative methodology, undertaking a close analysis of primary texts taken from different traditions [3, p. 1-6]. In this methodological inquiry, Coward treats some of the fundamental concepts shaping the idea of human perfectibility, such as human nature, perfection, sin, grace, karma, rebirth, and liberation [3]. The core of the argument emerges through the comparative discussion on diverse understandings of human perfectibility between Eastern and Western thought [3, p. 2].

The key finding of this study shows that there lies a stark dichotomy: man, according to the Western traditions, is regarded “as finite, flawed, and not perfectible” [3, p. 2], needing divine grace for spiritual growth [3, p. 187]. In contrast, Eastern traditions, especially Indian, regard human nature to be perfectible, allowing for many rebirth opportunities before actualized liberation (release from rebirth) [3, p. 2, 189-190].

The structure of the work reflects its comparative approach. Part I discusses Western thought,

beginning with Western philosophy and psychology, then moving into the specific Jewish, Christian, and Islamic perspectives [3, page of contents, p. 6].

Part II shifts focus on the discussion of Eastern thought, particularly those traditional schools arising in India: Indian philosophy, yoga psychology, Hinduism, and Buddhism [3, page of contents, p. 6].

This comprehensive investigation culminates into a synthesis of findings and recommendations for future research [3, 185]. The work certainly makes a number of important contributions to theological scholarship. Its comprehensive and comparative analysis of human perfectibility through diverse traditions sheds light on how differently human spiritual development can be approached. The book deserves particular credit for periodizing its attention to Eastern-per-particular Indian-thoughts since it is an important supplement to the Western theological scholarship. The work also lays bare dense explorations into how perfection is understood differently by differing traditions.

The breadth of networking with philosophies, cultures, and religions in Eastern and Western traditions related to human perfectibility is perhaps the most important trait of Coward. He orients himself consistently, though sometimes not at length, in relation to primary texts from each tradition, allowing for trustworthy and accurate interpretations.

The work could have been more enhanced by better engagement with contemporary theological and philosophical scholarship. Also, there is a tendency, sometimes present in the book, to be sweeping in generalizations when dealing with Eastern and Western thought, losing important nuances in this area.

The scientific novelty and value of the book, nonetheless, lie in its synthesis of differing perspectives on the perfectibility of humanity and an explicit articulation of fundamental differences between Eastern and Western perspectives on human potential [3, p. 193]. Its findings are certainly not new, but the ease with which key concepts are presented makes the work a wonderful resource for comparative religion and philosophy students and scholars alike. The insights it provides into the nature of man and the different routes toward perfection remain significant components of the dialogues of spirituality, ethics, and humanity today.

The book "Human Perfection, Transfiguration and Christian Ethics" by Robin Gill.

In the book "Human Perfection, Transfiguration and Christian Ethics" Robin Gill offers a bold new vision of human perfection that defies received wisdom. Perfection, Gill insists, should not be considered an unsustainable ideal, brief glimpses of which can be seen everywhere from the arts to the spiritual

arenas of human endeavor. His work suggests that perfection is dynamic and contextual, and that it is most often inscribed by people outside of the individual [4, p. i].

The book is built in three parts that interrelate, a reflection of how comprehensive it is. Part I explores human perfection in its varied expressions in church memorials, the arts, sports, and literature. Gill presents examples of artistic perfection identified in the context of musical performance, painting, sculpture and novels, contending such works elicit the notion of perfection within their respective contexts because they embody the possible highest attainment at the time of composition [4, p. 9-10, 35, 63].

Staying in the same ballpark, but moving from secular to sacred contexts, Part II delves into Jesus' perfection — drawing on passages from the New Testament, concentrated among the Synoptic Gospels. In this section, a careful study of the word *teleios* (perfect) is done, Jesus' teaching of perfection is explored, and various perspectives on how Jesus embodied perfection during his earthly ministry is analyzed [4, p. 11, 101, 119]. Part II naturally leads into Part III, which looks at the Transfiguration as a critical event when Jesus' perfection is divinely validated. In particular, this section proposes the Transfiguration as a template for a proper embrace of human perfection in Christian ethics while also problematizing what it means for the transformation of human action in the world vis a vis global challenges such as nuclear proliferation, religiously-motivated violence, or environmental degradation [4, p. 8].

The methodology used by Gill is unabashedly interdisciplinary, connecting dots among theology, biblical studies, history, literature and art, and socio-psychology. He examines artistic and cultural expressions to see how ideality is understood in a secular context [4, p. 10], makes close investigations of biblical texts [4, p. 11], interacts with theological discussions of ideas like theosis and sanctification [4, p. 8, 113-114], and employs biographical analysis to spotlight incidences of extraordinary moral and spiritual traits [4, p. 10].

Several key themes are present throughout the work. Gill argues that perfection is always dynamic and contextual so that static or absolute definitions cannot be justified [4, p. 9]. He points out that perfection is not what one says, but what one observes [4, p. 8]; it is a process, not an end state [4, p. 222]. United with God's glory, the Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-9 presents the great promise of faith as transformative, and the perfection of Jesus demonstrates the model of Christian ethics [4, p. 11, 140].

The book is a major contribution to theological scholarship in several respects. It broadened conventional notions of perfection [4, p. i], provides a liaison between a secular versus theological notion [4,

p. i], proposes new thought on the ethical meanings of the Transfiguration [4, p. 8], and suggests inter-faith conversation as a means for addressing global problems [4, p. 223].

Gill's book shows notable strengths with its emphasis on its interdisciplinary approach [4, p. i], use of diverse and engaging examples [4, p. 10, 35], and an accessible thought-provoking writing style [4, p. i]. But it also comes with limitations. The book's largely Eurocentric orientation toward Western artistic and theological traditions [4, p. 10, 17, 35] and lack of sustained attention to non-Christian accounts of perfection [4, p. 223] tends to limit its reach and potential.

Regardless of its limitations, however, the book "Human Perfection, Transfiguration and Christian Ethics" is still a valuable addition to the theological literature. Its inventive treatment of the concept commonly perceived as impossible is necessary both for current ethical analysis [4, p. i] and for preventing stagnation in our morality today. If the work benefited from broader inclusion of non-Western and non-Christian perspectives, its implications for human potential and Christian transformation could become more significant [4, p. i]. In this way, Gill's work urges readers to question their expectations for perfection while motivating them to look for examples of perfection in their lives and to create a more equitable and compassionate world [4, p. 223-224].

The book "Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human" by Michael Hyde.

In "Perfection: Coming to Terms with Being Human" Michael J. Hyde offers a thoughtful reflection on perfection and its profound role in humanity. Before embarking on the more traditional chronological approach of the following chapters, Hyde also adopts a more provocative structure that inspects perfection through the prism of various disciplines, including Western religion, philosophy, science, and art [5, p. xv].

At the centre of the book is the argument that we need to shake off our complacency with the idea of perfection and to look squarely at how it is shaping our lives. Wrestling with it is not just an academic exercise, Hyde argues, but a vital part of the well-being of both us as individuals and us as a whole people [5, p. 4, 6].

Methodologically, Hyde adopts an existential and phenomenological perspective, rooting his inquiry in embodied human experiences of life while heightening the significance of perfection on an ontological dimension [5, p. 25]. He enhances his analysis with a number of disparate case studies from the Terri Schiavo to the works of David Hume in philosophy, demonstrating the multifaceted nature of perfection and how it can express itself in practice [5, p. xiii, xv, 2].

As this interdisciplinary panorama unfolded, multiple overlapping themes came into laser-sharp focus. Hyde discusses the paradoxical quality of perfection, how it can be the proper motivator of creative energy and yet not so, the source of destruction [5, p. 3-4, 20]. He suggests that his contradictory nature needs to be recognized as we seek, and strive towards perfection. Moreover, he disputes conventional conceptions of rhetoric, locating it not as another item of ornamentation or manipulation, but as an important instrument for articulating and presenting truth generally, and as it pertains to perfection that we know and seek in particular [5, p. 12, 17]. Moreover, Hyde highlights the complex connections among perfection, truth, beauty, and otherness, and illustrates how our interactions with diverse people, ideas, and experiences inform our understanding of perfection and what it means to us [5, p. 50].

The book provides important contributions to theological scholarship, especially regarding the nature of God as the perfection from which all types of human perfections are derived, and the difficulties involved with coming up with words about divine perfection [5, p. 12, 19-20]. For example, Hyde engages the Kabbalah and its concept of "raising holy sparks" as a way to deal with worldly imperfection where humanity plays an active role in the process of perfecting the world over time [5, p. 31, 52].

The work's strengths lie in the following. The interdisciplinary approach is amazing in bringing together different fields that intertwine in an effort to shed light on perfection. In addition, Hyde's need for rhetoric your way is a richer approach to perfection, as the things one can understand through perfection are always geared towards communication.

But the book has its limits. Its intentionally provocative rather than systematic character could find some readers wishing for more historically thorough approach to perfection [5, p. xv]. Also, post-ontological and post metaphysical ideas may be too remote for readers seeking real-life examples or actionable advice. Although the book does not discuss measurable scientific results, its scientific innovation comes from how it epistemologically applies the phenomenological and rhetorical analysis of the concept of perfection, elucidating our attachments to communicative access to this ideal. The value of the work lies in its being able to cultivate a deep understanding of human beings and our ongoing pursuit of perfection.

The book "Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity" by Candida Moss.

In the book "Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity" Candida R. Moss offers a transformative study of how early Christians thought reflected on the resur-

rected body. Disputing the widespread notion that early Christians all thoughts of resurrected bodies in strictly ideal terms, Moss shows instead a much more nuanced and diverse conception shaped by contemporary concerns about identity, bodily integrity, utility, and aesthetics [7, p. 17].

Moss's methodological hypotheses engages in close reading of New Testament verses as well as engagement with early Christian texts, including those of Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Pseudo-Justin [7, p. 17-18, 26, 73, 75]. For the sake of cultural contextualization, she references ancient medical texts, philosophic treatises, and artistic expressions as resources interspersed throughout, [7, p. 29, 30, 34, 49, 78, 90].

Throughout this meticulous analysis, four major themes emerge, structuring her investigation. Moss begins by discovering the notion of identity via Jesus's body, after resurrection, with an emphasis on the "mark of the nails." Reading these marks as scars rather than open wounds she allows for a greater appreciation of how early Christians understood continuity of identity through resurrection [7, p. 26-31].

The second theme, integrity, arises in her treatment of Mark 9:43-48, in which self-amputation is set out as better than sin. This analysis complicates contemporary internal understandings of heavenly corporeal completeness and perfection [7, p. 57-67], exposing how early Christians struggled with the relationship of earthly impairment and heavenly change.

Functionality is the third overarching theme, as Moss examines how early Christians conceptualized bodily functions in the afterlife. Her examination of doctrines regarding marriage in heaven and the ultimate fate of bodily imperfections reveals various and at times inconsistent perspectives as to the significance of physical functions, notably that of reproduction, in the resurrected body [7, p. 69-88].

The fourth theme reflects on aesthetic forms, specifically through the examination of white robes in Revelation. Moss shows, though, that modern readers tend to read these garments as symbols of purity and perfection, but their meaning in the ancient world was more complicated, as it reflected social and economic realities [7, p. 97-109].

Several key contributions to theological scholarship are made by the book. It questions deep-seated notions of perfect bodies in the afterlife, presents crucial historical context for early Christian ideas, and provides fresh takeaways on popular but often misunderstood biblical passages. These contributions are bolstered by Moss's meticulous scholarship, including close reading of primary sources and comprehensive engagement with secondary literature. Her provocative observations and mastery of multiple disciplines, including biblical studies, his-

tory, philosophy and art history, add to the worth of the work.

However, there are some drawbacks to the book. Its narrow concentration on certain New Testament texts and early Christian authors might not offer a comprehensive view of early Christian doctrine. Moreover, while Moss does well to contest traditional interpretations, she could have provided a more concerted engagement with modern theological understandings of resurrection.

Despite these limitations, the work is an important step forward in our knowledge of early Christian understandings of the resurrected body. Moss' exploration of the richness and diversity of these ancient views, as well as their historical and cultural settings, offers important contributions for anyone studying early Christianity, theology and religious studies. Her diligent scholarship and incisive analysis have much to offer to discussions about resurrection and its significance for shaping bodies earthly and the afterlife.

The book "The Perfectibility of Man" by John Passmore.

The book "The Perfectibility of Man" discovers the development of the concept of human perfectibility over a long historical and intellectual landscape from Homer to the present [8, p. 9]. The author admits that an undertaking this ambitious has much to recommend it, but is also quite limited; as he describes this work as "a mosaic" made of the pieces excavated from other scholarship [8, p. 9].

The main objective of the book is to follow the development of the concept of human perfectibility through various schools of thought and religions [8, p. 9]. This book systematically examines how various cultures and thinkers have understood, first, human potential, second, the possibility of its realization, and third, the barriers to perfection.

Its methodology consists in historical and philosophical analysis of key texts and thinkers. It thoroughly explores the arguments, assumptions and historical circumstances that have informed discussions of perfectibility. What characterize the author's way of studying is a thorough working with primary sources, detailed scholarship, and a dedication to following the ideas and their historical genesis.

Chronologically and thematically organized, the book enables a broad and subtle exploration of perfectibility. It begins by looking at Greek ideas of perfection, both of the Olympian sort and the philosophical sort, from Plato to Aristotle. Then it shifts to Christianity to discuss how Christian thought struggled with the idea of perfection based on the Fall and the need for grace [8, p. 68].

The tension within Christian thought receives a good deal of attention, especially the Pelagian controversy and the ascetico-mystical traditions

that developed as alternative routes to perfection [8, p. 73, 117].

The other part of the book explores secular notions of perfectibility, principally the Enlightenment notion of reason, education and scientific progress [8, p. 200-201].

The book ends by exploring rejections of perfectibility, from 20th-century dystopian visions to the critiques by thinkers who have pushed against the customary notion of perfection.

There are several prevailing themes throughout the book:

1. The conflict between human potential and human limitations. The book discusses the persistent debate as to whether the human race is inherently capable of reaching a state of perfection or if these limitations, either due to original sin or other factors, prevent just this from happening [8, p. 81]. It explores this tension through different philosophical and religious contexts.

2. The function of divine grace. The book explores divine grace in Christian understandings of perfection. It explores the nuances of theological arguments regarding the balance between human efforts and divine grace, illuminating the variety of perspectives within Christianity [9, pp. 99-100].

3. The evolution of Protestant thinking on perfection. The book explores Protestant understandings of perfection, paying special attention to figures such as Luther and Wesley. It begins by noting the stress on grace but at the same time recognizes that a state of Christian perfection may be attainable in this life [8, p. 134, 137].

4. Asceticism and mysticism in Christian perfectibility. It traces some of the implications of renunciation of worldly desires, the pursuit of mystical union with God as the basis of perfection in certain Christian traditions, especially the ascetic-mystical [8, p. 74, 118].

5. Secular perfectibility. Throughout the Enlightenment, the idea of perfectibility became divorced from religious sources of moral betterment, and was increasingly rooted in secular sources, in social reform and education to achieve advances in human development [8, p. 155, 163-164, 201]. It examines the promises and perils of these secular visions.

6. How scientific progress influences ideas of perfectibility. The work treats how scientific advances (especially Darwinian evolution) influence popular understandings of human nature and human potentialities [8, p. 200-201].

7. The critiques of "humanity" by mystical perfectibilists. Passmore contemplates the mystical attitude, which sees human relationships and human pursuits as fundamentally flawed and transient, instead urging a renunciation of "humanity" in favor of a union with a divine or absolute reality [8, p. 286].

In several key ways the book adds to theological scholarship:

1. A nuanced, comprehensive historical overview. Passmore offers a deep and thoughtful account of the development of perfectibility, revealing the elaborate interaction of theological, philosophical and social ideas.

2. Critical analysis of key theological arguments. He takes on the arguments of leading theologians, examining their premises, outlining their strengths and weaknesses, clarifying their implications for how we understand human nature and the possibilities of moral progress [8, p. 78].

3. Bridging the gap between religious and secular perspectives. The book contributes to the conversation of bridging the gap between theological versus secular approaches to perfectibility, demonstrating how both religious and irreligious frameworks have understood and critiqued the idea [8, p. 77-78].

4. A critical examination of the Pelagian controversy. The work provides a re-evaluation of the Pelagian controversy, arguably one of, if not the most re-curring and impactful discussions throughout the history of Christendom [8, p. 101]. It highlights the complexity of the issues involved and their long-term influence on Christian thought.

The most striking strength of the book is how comprehensive its scope is and how deep its analysis goes. It has an enviable sweep through historical epochs, philosophical schools, and theological outlooks, giving a panoramic view of the notion of perfectibility. Meticulous scholarship underpins the book. A familiarity with primary sources is on display as the author quotes liberally from the words of major thinkers to illustrate his arguments. This discipline of engaging with the original texts adds credence to this book and provides solid ground for its analysis. The book avoids simplistic interpretations, presenting a balanced and nuanced account of the different perspectives on perfectibility. The author appreciates the complexity of the fundamental questions at stake, considering both the merits and flaws of differing stances.

The book "Jesus, Sin, and Perfection in Early Christianity" by Jeffrey Siker.

The first in-depth inquiry into how early Christians conceived of Jesus as a sinless entity [9, p. 1]. This pioneering study explores key incidents in the life of Jesus, which were associated with sin in the beginning: the birth from a virgin Mary, the baptism by John the Baptist, the public ministry, and the crucifixion of him [9, p. 1]. Siker analyzes how, out of their resurrection faith, early Christians gradually remade their understanding of Jesus' existence into perfection of divinity, and in so doing changed the message of sin itself: [9, p. 1]

The structure of the book reflects its analytical intent, opening with an introduction outlining its aims and methods [9, p. 1-10]. Siker first gives a full eschatology of sin in early Judaism and Greco-Roman contexts [9, p. 25-62], then traces how each key moment in Jesus' life (both in his ministry and in his death) has been retroactively re-read from a reading that involved sin to the current reading that suggests his sinlessness [9, p. 63-246]. It ends with a reflection on the implications of Jesus' sinlessness for modern-day Christian theology [9, p. 257-286].

Siker's methodology is shaped by this dual purpose – descriptive and constructive. Tracing the historical trajectory of belief in Jesus' sinlessness [9, p. 2], he also participates in modern theological discussions over the pertinence of the notion [9, p. 22]. His historical-critical methodology analyzes the New Testament Gospels as products of their social and theological contexts [9, p. 11-25], using extra-biblical Jewish and Greco-Roman material to provide cultural background information [9, p. 12]. Importantly, Siker notes the limits of historical reconstruction and identifies the Gospels as theological renderings, not strict records of a historical objective account [9, p. 11-25].

There are key themes that surface throughout the work. Siker argues that belief that Jesus did not sin arose retroactively after the resurrection [9, pp. 6-8, 22, 257], as early Christians reinterpreted his life in light of their newfound faith [9, p. 7], developing a greater understanding of his divinity [9, pp. 9-10, 284]. This process involved the redefining of what sin is [9, p. 1], with deeds that were once transgressions against Jewish law being reconstituted as perfectly righteous [9, p. 10, 22].

In addition, Siker probes the essential tension between claiming Jesus' full humanity, ontological and moral, with divine sinlessness [9, p. 10, 14, 286], asking whether diminished human existence through sinlessness may ultimately compromise Jesus' human endeavour [9, p. 87-88, 279, 286]. Siker asks us to think of sinlessness as a metaphor and not a literal truth [9, p. 39] pointing out that it is clear that sinlessness would depict Jesus' perfect obedience to God and representation of divine love [9, p. 277]. This metaphorical reading preserves a greater appreciation of Jesus' human character while maintaining the exclusive role of Jesus [9, p. 277-278].

The book contributes significantly to theological scholarship in its historical-critical approach to Christology [9, p. 11-25], its nuanced understanding of sin in early Judaism and Greco-Roman culture [9, p. 15, 25-62], and its engagement with contemporary theological debates [9, p. 17, 257-286]. Its strengths are in detailed historical research [9, p. 1], incisive and perceptive analysis [9, p. 10], and contemporaneous theological relevance [9, p. 17].

However, there are limitations to the work. Its focus on early Christianity could benefit from a broader historical perspective [9, p. 11], and its engagement with non-Christian perspectives on sin, righteousness and divinity could be more extensive [9, p. 12].

Nonetheless, Siker's research constitutes a great leap forward in the field of early Christian thought, presenting the first detailed study of the origins of the doctrine of Jesus' sinlessness [9, p. 1]. His use of the historical-critical method and acumen expose and challenge age-old assumptions, showing that the study of Christian history is still vitally important for a Christian faith and practice today.

Conclusions:

1. This study investigates human perfection from the perspective of Orthodox theology, focusing on how Christological imperatives and theological anthropology work together to cultivate spiritual perfection and unity with God.

2. Such triadic divisions of literature—primary, secondary, and peripheral sources—emphasize the necessity of contextualizing theological inquiry in foundational Orthodox literature, while illustrating the insight and constraints of comparative and peripheral views.

3. Orthodox theology holds that human perfection is fundamentally deification (theosis) of which the humanity of Christ is the pattern of spiritual development.

4. Orthodox thinkers such as Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas pointed to the transformative work of divine energy and grace, characterizing perfection as a dynamic uniting with God instead of some human accomplishment.

5. This is one of the limitations of peripheral sources which, as much as they provide valuable information and comparative perspectives, give little insight into Orthodox Theology, nor are they properly integrated into the Orthodox belief system.

6. The analysis advocates for greater inclusion of modern Orthodox philosophy, as well as deeper exploration of psychological and philosophical dimensions of moral aspiration and perfection.

7. The literature review demonstrates how crucial Christocentric framework in Orthodox theology prepare the ground critically and constructively for studies on human perfection within theological and interdisciplinary perspectives in the future.

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Summary

Shpakovych V. V. Literature review on the phenomenon of human perfection in orthodox theology. – Article.

This is an integrated literature review spanning the concept of human perfection in Orthodox theology. It includes key primary, secondary, and peripheral sources for its examination of the theological basis and implications.

The study first investigates Christ's human nature as the basis of spiritual development while the concept of deification (theosis) underlines the notion of human perfection.

Elucidation of the Christocentric imperative underlying Orthodox thought is achieved by reviewing seminal works such as Alexis Torrance's study of Byzantine theological anthropology and supplementary analyses of early Christian thinkers such as Maximus the Confessor and Gregory Palamas.

Secondary sources, including studies on Clement of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers, are engaged for a better understanding of what Orthodox perfection entailed, while peripheral sources provide comparative perspectives mainly from the non-Orthodox standpoint.

This article reviews the strengths and weaknesses of these primary texts and other texts, highlighting the need for rigorous synthesis of modern Orthodox scholarship and further inquiry into the religious and philosophical dimensions of human moral aspirations.

By distinguishing the writings into primary, secondary, and peripheral sources, the article provides a methodologically workable path for prioritizing engagement with foundational texts on the human perfection phenomenon while setting them in wide theological and historical contexts.

The article concludes that the Orthodox vision of human perfection, based on Christology and theosis, offers a distinct and dynamic perspective linking historical theology and contemporary ethical reflection, that, in turn, feeds into an ongoing dialogue about human potential and divine transformation.

Key words: God, Christ, human being, human perfection, Orthodox theology, deification, literature review, source, existence, personality.

Анотація

Шпакович В. В. Огляд літератури про феномен досконалості людини у православній теології. – Стаття.

Це комплексний огляд літератури, що охоплює концепцію людської досконалості в православному богослов'ї. Він включає ключові первинні, вторинні та периферійні джерела для дослідження теологічної основи та наслідків.

Дослідження спочатку вивчає людську природу Христа як основу духовного розвитку, тоді як концепція обоження (theosis) підкреслює поняття людської досконалості.

Прояснення христоцентричного імперативу, що лежить в основі православної думки, досягається шляхом огляду основоположних праць, таких як дослідження Алексіса Торранса про візантійську богословську антропологію та додаткового аналізу ранніх християнських мислителів, таких як Максим Сповідник і Григорій Палама.

Вторинні джерела, зокрема дослідження Климента Александрійського та Іларія Пиктавійського, залучаються для кращого розуміння того, що означає християнська досконалість, тоді як периферійні джерела надають порівняльні перспективи переважно з неправославної точки зору.

У цій статті розглядаються сильні та слабкі сторони цих первинних текстів та інших текстів, підкреслюючи необхідність ретельного синтезу сучасної православної науки та подальшого дослідження релігійних і філософських вимірів людських моральних прагнень.

Розрізняючи твори на первинні, вторинні та периферійні джерела, стаття пропонує методологічно працюючий шлях для визначення пріоритетів взаємодії з основоположними текстами про феномен людської досконалості, включаючи їх у широкий теологічний та історичний контексти.

У статті робиться висновок, що православне бачення людської досконалості, засноване на христології та теозисі, пропонує чітку та динамічну перспективу, що поєднує історичне богослов'я та сучасну етичну рефлексію, що, у свою чергу, живить постійний діалог про людський потенціал і божественну трансформацію.

Ключові слова: Бог, Христос, людина, людська досконалість, православне богослов'я, обоження, огляд літератури, джерело, буття, особистість.