

Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology
“Isidor Todoran” Doctoral School

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

***The Formative-Therapeutic Dimension of Sacred Music in the Maturation of the Person.
Pastoral Considerations on Detachment from Parents***

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Keywords: Maturation, detachment from parents, sacred music, liturgical singing, attachment, emotional dependency, personal autonomy, family, pastoral care, spiritual father, identity, wounded self, freedom in Christ, Christian anthropology, developmental psychology, communion.

1. Motivation and Relevance of the Topic

This thesis grows out of a constant pastoral observation: many young people remain prisoners of a lack of authentic love in their relationship with their parents, living a “prolonged adolescence,” lacking direction and the responsible assumption of their own lives. The theme of “detachment from parents” is not reduced to a psychological problem, but is treated as a major theological tension: how the human being, created for communion, can become a free, responsible person capable of mature love.

The author starts from the conviction that, in the priest's mission, love alone is not enough unless it is accompanied by discernment and concrete instruments of intervention. Few manuals of Pastoral Theology succeed in combining the theological dimension with a psychological knowledge of the person, even though the contemporary priest is called to understand the dynamics of attachment, emotional dependency, and the emotional needs that block spiritual maturation.

The relevance of the research is supported by the identity crisis facing the contemporary family: the lack of religious and emotional education among parents, the phenomenon of “prolonged adolescence” (young people emotionally dependent on their parents until the age of 30–40, unable to detach without guilt, fear, or a sense of betrayal), and the unconscious transfer of filial dependency onto the relationship with God, which distorts the image of the heavenly Father. Based on direct pastoral experience, the author observes that in many communities — especially where religious and intellectual education is weak — parents no longer know even the most basic principles of raising a child, and out of a misunderstood love end up “smothering” their children, hindering their autonomous development.

The thesis argues that the Church is called to become a space for the restoration of the human being, both spiritually and emotionally, through a pastoral ministry conscious of these psychological challenges. If the Church mobilizes in this direction, it can form whole generations capable of mature love, inner balance, and authentic communion — and the priest's mission ceases to be merely moralizing and becomes healing, oriented toward reconciling pastoral theology with the emotional realities of contemporary man.

2. The Place of the Topic within Practical Theology

The topic is integrated into the field of Practical Theology, treating sacred music not as an aesthetic or historical object, but as a living reality with a direct impact on the affective structure, the conscience, and the capacity to assume one's identity. Healthy detachment from parents does not presuppose breaking communion, but transforming it: the passage from dependency to freedom, from possession to communion, from control to responsibility.

In Orthodox theology, freedom is not independence, but the capacity to love without constraint; spiritual maturation is thus identified with the attainment of a free love. The role of the spiritual

father is that of mediator of the passage from symbiosis to autonomy, who supports the process of inner maturation through listening, discernment, and prayer. Liturgical singing and the beauty of worship are introduced as a possible instrument of emotional soothing and regulation, without, however, constituting the central object of the research.

The author insists that the analysis does not aim to demonstrate a speculative thesis, but to offer a framework for reflection and action for present-day pastoral care. Within this interpretive framework, the priest is repeatedly described as a “physician of the soul” — a figure who, through discernment and tact, can intervene in restoring the young person's inner balance, gradually guiding him toward full freedom in Christ, without replacing the role of the specialist when the situation requires it.

3. Research Objectives

- Conceptual clarification of “detachment” on both the theological and psychological planes, as a passage from infantile attachment to free communion with God and with others.
- Identifying the causes that block emotional and spiritual maturation within the contemporary family and social context.
- Establishing a pastoral model for accompanying young people and parents, one that supports the formation of emotional autonomy and personal conscience.
- Developing a practical toolkit for the priest, meant to facilitate the restoration of fallen human nature, both emotionally and ontologically.
- Promoting an integrative pastoral theology, in which psychology complements, rather than annuls, the theological dimension.

The final stated goal is to form priests who are aware that the spiritual education of the faithful passes through the healing of their emotional life. Through these objectives, the thesis seeks to move beyond mere theoretical analysis and become a practical guide for shaping a pastoral ministry adapted to the present-day challenges of the family and the younger generation, at a time when — the author stresses — the causes that determine or block children's maturation have multiplied considerably compared with the contexts described by classical theological and psychological literature.

4. Current State of Research

The author situates the thesis at the intersection of psychological and theological thought, taking as a reference point Stavros I. Baloyannis (Pastoral Psychology), who shows that psychology and theology complement one another in interpreting the life of the soul marked by suffering. On the theological plane, the theme of maturation is found indirectly in the work of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, in the *Philokalia*, and in the homilies of St. John Chrysostom.

On the psychological plane, the research draws on the contributions of John Bowlby, Erik Erikson, Rudolph Schaffer, and Franz Ruppert regarding attachment and the dependency–freedom conflict, alongside the clinical perspective of Jasmin Lee Cori on maternal emotional neglect. The thesis identifies a gap in Romanian Pastoral Theology literature — the absence of operational models through which the priest can concretely intervene in the emotional maturation of young people — and sets out to fill this gap through a concrete pastoral toolkit, updated for the context of 2026.

5. Research Methodology

The research employs a theological-documentary and analytical-comparative methodology, based on the qualitative analysis of patristic, theological, and psychological texts, within a hermeneutical approach. It does not have a strictly empirical component (no surveys, structured interviews, or psychometric assessments), but relies on direct pastoral observations with an illustrative and contextual role.

The central terms — “healthy detachment,” “emotional autonomy,” “secure attachment,” “emotional dependency,” “conscious presence of the parent” — are operationalized through the comparative analysis of theological and psychological sources. The research is delimited to the context of the Romanian Orthodox Church, with an emphasis on the urban environment.

Assumed limitations: the thesis does not develop a systematic interconfessional comparative analysis, does not address in depth severe psychiatric pathologies or cases of extreme abuse (which fall within the competence of specialized clinical intervention), does not constitute a treatise on musicology or clinical psychology, and does not aim to develop an exhaustive dogmatic theology of the person and of freedom.

6. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized into five chapters, preceded by an Introduction and followed by Conclusions and a Bibliography, following a trajectory that moves from the psychological foundations of the person, through family dynamics, to the challenges of contemporary society, to the spiritual and pastoral dimension of maturation, and finally to an analysis devoted entirely to the formative-therapeutic role of liturgical singing. Each chapter largely preserves a dual structure: a psychological or social analysis of the phenomenon under discussion, followed by a section devoted to the formative role of sacred music in relation to that phenomenon — an architecture that ensures the interdisciplinary thread running through the thesis.

Chapter	Main Focus	Level of Analysis
I	Psychological and anthropological foundations of maturation: the sense of inferiority, the Freudian perspective, the identity crisis, the “wastefulness” of parental love.	The individual person
II	The family as the matrix of attachment: paternal deficiencies, family climate, personal autonomy, leaving home.	The family
III	The pressures of contemporary society: addiction, hyperconsumerism, the “wounded self” syndrome, reconstructing the self.	The social context
IV	The pastoral care of maturation: the pedagogy of the Church, the role of the spiritual father, liturgical music, the mind–heart–will balance.	The Church and spiritual life
V	An analysis devoted to the formative-therapeutic dimension of liturgical singing: sacred music, autonomy, separation anxiety, comparison with Byzantine music.	Sacred music as a therapeutic instrument

Chapter I — Psychological and Anthropological Foundations of Maturation

The chapter opens with an analysis of the therapeutic role of sacred music in human becoming — liturgical singing being presented not as a sonic ornament, but as a living form of participation in prayer, as “a theological language in itself,” and as an instrument of purification and inner balance that engages the mind, the heart, and the body together in a unified experience of communion. The particular role of the human voice is emphasized, needing no intermediary instrument to convey the affective vibration of prayer.

The psychological mechanisms of maturation are then examined, starting from the anomaly of the maturation process and the genesis of the sense of inferiority — showing how unfavorable comparisons in childhood (kindergarten, school, family) and rigid parental upbringing produce fear of failure, withdrawal into oneself, and chronic mistrust. The Freudian perspective on maturity is presented, defined as the capacity to be alone and to manage one's own emotions — a capacity whose roots are planted as early as the infant's first interactions with the mother. The

chapter then follows the affective fusion between mother and child, the transition from the instance of the Ego to the Superego, and the psychological particularities of adolescence as a stage of identity restructuring.

The second section (1.2) traces inner maturation from the psychological self toward the spiritual person: the Pauline and anthropological dimension of the “heart” as the center of the person, where music becomes spiritual work; self-knowledge as the beginning of the maturation process; the role of “Sioux childhood” as a catalytic experience for defining gender identity; the emotional balance achieved through “measured communion”; the role of the father as “catalyst” of the son's maturation; and the importance of developing a harmonious personality as the guarantor of authentic maturation.

Section 1.3 treats maturation as a victory over inner disorder. It addresses: music as a call to prayer and interiorization; the paralysis of the body and the uncontrolled impulse of sexual pleasure; the principles of sound child-rearing in the vision of St. John Chrysostom; the shaping of personality as a benchmark of development; play as a response to environmental stimuli; the education of youth in Western antiquity as a possible model for our own time; the passage from interaction with tools (instruments) to mature social interaction, as theorized by Vygotsky; and the identity crisis as the threshold of maturity, in Erikson's terms, who views maturation as a continuous process, marked by a succession of crises that the individual must assume and overcome in order to consolidate the identity of the ego.

The chapter closes with an exegesis by Andrei Pleșu on the Parable of the Prodigal Son, from which “the three kinds of wastefulness” are drawn — the wasting of wealth, the wasting of parental love, and the elder son's “wasting of righteousness” — as contrasting models of authentic parental love: the father in the parable “wastes” the social standard of his time through a converting forgiveness, restoring to his son honor, authority, and freedom, instead of the punishment prescribed by the Law of the Old Testament.

Chapter II — Family, Attachment and Educational Dynamics

The chapter places the family at the center of the maturation process, as an “icon” of the growth of the person. It examines: the role of music as a methodological and clinical mediator between the family environment and personal autonomy; the family as the “first religious school,” in which the child learns the earliest forms of relating to the sacred; paternal deficiencies and their direct influence on the child's maturation; the way in which a parent's appreciation, or the lack of it, either strengthens or, conversely, weakens the child; the causes of delayed maturation in contemporary families; and verbal conflicts between child and parent as a symptom of dysfunctional communication.

A substantial part is devoted to the relational pathology of the family: the figure of the “domineering mother” as a generator of childhood neuroses; vanity, analyzed as an act of compensating for inner weaknesses; the distinction the author draws between the ideal of a

“perfect mother” and the necessary reality of an “involved mother”; the family climate described either as a strengthening factor or as a source of “crippling” the personality; the risk that the family, contrary to its natural role, may become a risk factor in the child's development; and the warning that “a spoiled child becomes a consumed adult.”

The chapter closes with the theme of personal autonomy, presented as the natural result of healthy relationships with the family and with God, with an analysis of the child's “leaving home” as an ideal threatened by the risk of relational failure, with a reflection on the risk that social networks may sabotage, rather than sustain, authentic family connections, and with a presentation of the family as a space of calling and human maturation. The final section (2.1.17) explicitly links the theme of healthy attachment to the capacity for liberating love, insisting that the family's influence in forming secure attachment remains the matrix from which the adult's entire relational capacity develops.

Chapter III — The Challenges of Maturation in Contemporary Society

This chapter shifts the focus from the family to the broader social context, analyzing the pressure of the modern world on human becoming. It discusses: the therapeutic role of the music of Mozart and Bach as an instrument of emotional rebalancing under conditions of contemporary stress; the negative impact of present-day society on the child's mental health; the conflicts between symbiosis and autonomy in psychic maturation; the harmful factors generated by “progressive society”; listening, described as a “border virtue” capable of both building and destroying relationships; the dilution of masculinity in the face of contemporary cultural pressures; and timidity viewed as a form of masculine error.

Particular attention is given to the mechanisms of addiction: hyperconsumerism and the internalization of addictive mechanisms, the paradox of a freedom that turns into inner captivity, advertising suggestion and the inducement of compulsivity as modern instruments of manipulation, as well as the invisible roots of dependency — the thesis arguing that persons deprived of authentic love are the ones who detach with the greatest difficulty from their family of origin, emotional dependency being interpreted as a direct symptom of the lack of mature love.

The second section (3.2) treats the restoration of the human image along the path from trauma to freedom: liturgical music is presented as a possible path from trauma to inner freedom; the fear of losing the relationship and the absence of trust in God are analyzed as the psychological foundation of insecurity; the “wounded self” syndrome in children and the methods by which it can be prevented; the polarity between maturity and infantility as a structural ambivalence of the unmaturing person; and, finally, the reconstruction of the self along the path symbiosis → will → self-esteem, described as a psychological journey from survival toward full autonomy.

Chapter IV — The Spiritual Dimension and the Pastoral Care of Maturation

The most extensive chapter of the thesis synthesizes the pastoral dimension of the research, explicitly articulating the connection between attachment psychology and the theology of the person. Section 4.1 treats the pedagogy of the Church as forming the person from within: the pedagogical impact of music within the Church, religious education as a catalyst of spiritual maturity, the Church understood as a “school of prayer,” the role of the Church as a guiding light in the process of Christian maturation, the discernment of the spiritual father as the foundation of effective pastoral care, the therapeutic dimension of the spiritual father in the crisis of maturation, and the parallel drawn between psychotherapy and repentance in the act of maturation, as two complementary paths of restoring the person.

Section 4.2 addresses healing through presence: the role of the spiritual father in relational restoration, the psychological sensitivity required for pastoral ministry with young people, the emotional balance of young people as a premise for fruitful pastoral work, the crisis of hope among young people and the priest's role in rebuilding spiritual trust, as well as pastoral visits, presented both as a means of community strengthening and as a direct extension of Christ's teaching work in the lives of the faithful. Concrete pastoral instruments are also proposed for supporting the autonomy of young people raised in environments with emotionally intrusive parents.

Section 4.3, the most extensive in the entire thesis, develops the theme of the becoming of the complete human being in the balance between mind, heart, and will: liturgical music as a space of integration of these three dimensions, freedom in Christ as a form of maturation of personal conscience, intelligence as an element of the “mosaic” of personality, the shaping of self-control in future adults, the conditions and environments that prepare the ground for solid self-confidence, masculine autonomy, family, school, and church as triggering factors for a defined personality, as well as the role of the village and the parish as generators of “social capital” — the parish being described as the greatest such generator. A special place is given to the theme of sexual abstinence before marriage, treated as a holy commandment with a profound impact on personal balance, in light of St. Basil the Great's teaching on the virtue of children, as well as the theme of the passage from the relationship with parents to communion with God through prayer.

The final sections (4.4–4.5) treat affective maturation as a form of spiritual assumption: the psychotherapeutic and theological interferences in the restoration of contemporary man, the role of liturgical singing in overcoming the crisis of meaning, the restoration of healthy attachment through the relationship with the spiritual father, the role of suffering and freedom in the process of healing, the Church as an unshaken support for the family in crisis, emotional dependency as a concrete blockage of emotional maturation, and the symbiosis–autonomy conflict as a persistent obstacle to psychic maturation. The chapter closes with the theme of the broadened Church as a communal space of becoming, in which religious education and

liberation from symbiotic relationships converge toward mature spiritual belonging, and the family becomes, in the thesis's own terms, a “school of intimacy with God.”

Chapter V — The Formative-Therapeutic Dimension of Liturgical Singing in the Process of Inner Maturation

The final chapter is devoted entirely to the analysis of sacred music, synthesizing and deepening the thematic thread present transversally throughout the previous chapters. It begins with the relationship between intelligence and personal autonomy as complementary axes of development, in order to then build an argument about sacred music as a “space of affective transition” between the family environment and the ecclesial community — a sonic and symbolic zone through which the child or young person manages the gradual detachment from emotional dependency on parents.

The following are analyzed in detail: the role of church singing in detachment from infantile attachments and in strengthening personal identity; the psycho-emotional resonances of sung psalms in the formation of moral conscience; the continuity and affective rupture between the childhood lullaby and the liturgical hymn; therapy through religious music applied specifically to managing separation anxiety from parents; and the role of rhythm and melody as ordering landmarks for inner balance.

The chapter also includes a section with more technical theoretical foundations — the psychological mechanisms of the relationship between music and emotion, with traditional roots and an opening toward contemporary neuroscientific grounding — followed by a comparative analysis between Western classical music (structure, aesthetic function, and therapeutic role) and Byzantine sacred music (identity, modal structure, and spiritual therapy). The thesis concludes with a synthesis of the sound characteristics that induce profound inner states and with a direct comparison between the two musical traditions, emphasizing their complementarity in the process of the person's affective and spiritual maturation.

7. Results and Original Contributions

A first result of the research is the demonstration that maturation cannot be reduced to biological development or social adaptation, but represents a complex inner reorganization, involving affective integration, the assumption of responsibility, and the formation of a free conscience. Detachment from parents is identified as the critical moment of this process — the passage from dependency to autonomy, from childhood to adult life — and its blockage or distortion is directly linked to the emotional and spiritual fragility frequently encountered among young people in contemporary communities.

The thesis highlights the determining role of the family's emotional climate: insecure attachment, emotional control, parental perfectionism, and overprotection create an environment in which love is confused with possessiveness, and care with control — generating symbiotic relationships that block inner autonomy. From a psycho-spiritual perspective, these dynamics do not remain confined to the relational plane, but transfer into religious life, where they can generate spiritual dependency or difficulties in assuming a personal relationship with God.

The thesis's central original contribution is the integration of sacred music into the analysis of the maturation process: liturgical singing is presented not as an ornament of worship, but as a formative factor which, through rhythm, melody, and repetition, creates a framework of affective safety, supports emotional regulation, and offers inner continuity during periods of transition. Participation in communal singing is described as a healthy relational model — belonging without constraint, a communion that respects individuality — as opposed to symbiotic family relationships, as well as an instrument for the passage from a passively inherited faith to a personally assumed faith.

At the same time, the thesis defines the priest's role not as a mere transmitter of norms, but as an active support of maturation: through spiritual discernment, he can help bring dysfunctional family dynamics into awareness, working with both parents and young people, without replacing the psychology specialist, but creating a framework for reflection and responsibility free of pressure and blame.

On the level of pastoral applicability, the thesis proposes interventions at three levels — family, community, and liturgical life: the priest is called to identify dysfunctional relational patterns, helping parents assume their own emotional maturation and avoid projecting their own fears onto their children, while young people are supported in developing discernment, clarifying their values, and gradually assuming their inner freedom. Healthy detachment from parents is thus directly correlated with the integration of personal identity and with assuming a mature, personal relationship with God — as opposed to an infantile faith, passively inherited from the family environment and marked by fear or conformity.

The thesis explicitly states that sacred music cannot substitute for the conscious process of maturation, nor does it automatically heal emotional wounds — its role is complementary, within a broader pastoral endeavor, conditioned by discernment and personal responsibility.

Another element of originality lies in the way the thesis articulates the theological and the psychological plane without subordinating one to the other: attachment psychology is used as an auxiliary instrument for understanding affective and relational dynamics, not as an exhaustive explanatory framework, while the theology of the person remains the ultimate interpretive framework for freedom and communion. The author thus avoids two opposite risks — reducing spiritual life to a purely psychological process, and, conversely, ignoring real emotional wounds under the pretext of a premature spiritualization — proposing instead a natural synergy between the two disciplines, applied directly in the concrete field of pastoral care of young people and the formation of personal conscience.

8. Conclusions of the Thesis

The thesis's central conclusion is that detachment from parents emerges as an indicator of emotional and spiritual health and as an expression of authentic love: only through maturation can the child who has become an adult love without fear, without constraint, and without the permanent expectation of being rescued. Maturation is described as a deeply relational process — not an isolated individual one — that unfolds within the family, the community, and liturgical life, the Church being the space in which this process can naturally take place, through pastoral care and worship.

A first concluding thread concerns the family's emotional climate: insecure attachments, emotional control, parental perfectionism, and a lack of affective coherence keep the child in a state of subtle dependency, in which love is confused with possessiveness, and care with control. From a psycho-spiritual perspective, a person raised in such a climate frequently develops a fear of separation, guilt associated with autonomy, and a constant need for validation — traits that do not remain confined to the relational plane, but also transfer into religious life, where they can generate spiritual dependency, excessive attachments to authority, or difficulties in assuming a personal relationship with God. The thesis thus emphasizes that emotional and spiritual maturation are deeply interconnected, each conditioning the other.

A second concluding thread concerns the thesis's original contribution: the integration of sacred music as a formative factor of maturation. The research shows that, through rhythm, melody, and repetition, liturgical singing offers a framework of affective safety and inner continuity, functioning as a space of mediation between infantile attachments and the assumption of a mature identity. Participation in communal singing is described as a healthy relational model — belonging without constraint, respecting the individuality of the participant, as opposed to symbiotic family relationships — and as an instrument for the passage from an externalized, passively inherited faith to an interiorized, personally assumed faith. The thesis insists,

however, that sacred music cannot substitute for the conscious process of maturation, nor does it automatically heal emotional wounds: its role remains complementary to a broader pastoral endeavor, dependent on discernment and personal responsibility, under the risk of becoming, in their absence, a mere emotional refuge.

The priest is portrayed as a “physician of the soul” — a discreet and attentive support, a mediator of light, who helps the family and the community sustain the transformation from dependency to free communion. The author emphasizes that the thesis aims to contribute to deepening the reflection on the mission of contemporary pastoral care, at a time marked by emotional fragility and identity confusion, in which the Church is called to form persons who are free within, capable of mature love, responsibility, and authentic communion — with God and with others — in a spiritual experience in which sacred music, healed relationships, and assumed freedom meet.

9. Key Concepts Operationalized in the Thesis

Through the comparative analysis of theological and psychological sources, the thesis's methodology operationalizes a set of central terms, used consistently throughout the chapters:

- Healthy detachment — the passage from infantile emotional dependency to a mature form of communion with parents and with God, without breaking the relationship, but through its transformation.
- Emotional autonomy — the person's capacity to manage their own emotions and to make committed decisions, without a constant need for external validation.
- Secure attachment — the type of early affective bond that gives the child the sense of safety needed to explore the world autonomously and, later, to detach naturally from parents.
- Emotional dependency — the state of relational captivity in which the person remains bound to parental figures (or their substitutes) by a continuous need for approval, control, or protection.
- Conscious presence of the parent — an involved yet non-intrusive parental attitude that supports the child's maturation without smothering them through control or overprotection.

These concepts function as guiding threads running through the chapters of the thesis: Chapter I grounds them psychologically and anthropologically, Chapter II analyzes them within concrete family dynamics, Chapter III confronts them with the pressures of contemporary society, Chapter IV integrates them into the pastoral and spiritual perspective, and Chapter V deepens them specifically through the lens of sacred music as a formative-therapeutic instrument.

10. Note on the Bibliographic Apparatus

The thesis rests on an extensive bibliographic apparatus of more than a hundred titles, structured along two complementary strands. The theological strand includes patristic and liturgical sources (the *Philokalia*, the writings of St. John Chrysostom on the education of children, the works of St. Basil the Great, the writings of Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae), contemporary pastoral theology studies (Valer Bel, Teofil Tia, Emil Cioară, Benedict Vesa), and works dedicated to the relationship between the family and the life of the Church.

The psychological strand brings together reference authors on attachment theory and personality development — John Bowlby, Erik Erikson, Sigmund Freud, H. Rudolph Schaffer, Franz Ruppert — alongside clinical and popular literature on emotional neglect, emotional dependency, and maturation (Jasmin Lee Cori, David P. Celani, Kenneth M. Adams, György Gáspár, Georgeta Mihai). The bibliography also includes sources specifically dedicated to sacred music and its therapeutic role — from Sebastian Barbu-Bucur and the Byzantine musical tradition to works of Western music therapy (Leslie Bunt) — thereby supporting the interdisciplinary character the research claims for itself.

11. Practical Relevance for Parish Pastoral Care

Beyond its theoretical dimension, the thesis sets out a declared practical purpose: to offer priests a concrete toolkit for use in catechetical work, confession, or pastoral visits, when facing young people caught in dynamics of emotional dependency on their parents. The pastoral observations — though they do not carry the status of clinical or empirical validation — are synthesized in the thesis in the form of models of pastoral accompaniment, useful to priests who encounter similar situations in their own communities.

The author insists that pastoral discernment must avoid two extremes: on one hand, moralizing that ignores the young person's real emotional wounds, and on the other, excessive psychologizing that would reduce the priest's mission to that of a therapist. The model proposed by the thesis is an integrative one, in which the priest remains a “physician of the soul,” supporting the emotional maturation of the faithful as a natural part of their work toward full freedom in Christ, without substituting for specialized clinical intervention when it is needed.