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PATHOLOGIES OF THE ABUSE IN A PASTORAL APPROACH

Abstract

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The contemporary spiritual, marked by powerful contradictions generated by the acute tendencies of secularization, make the soul of the man a place dominated by despair which in time becomes its natural state. Being unable to live in this nature, created by himself, man looks for peace in all sorts of surrogates which do nothing else but deepen the abyss opened into his soul. The changes thus occurred require necessarily to rediscover and revalorize the pastoral resources that the Church always had and to adopt them to the psychological profile of the contemporary man. Through the resources that are at hand and also through new ones, the Church will be able to manage such new and particular situations and circumstances that are also evolutionary. Although the pastoral instruments are part of the life of the Church, the historical, political, economic conditions of the world today make them, most of the time, useless, which is why it is necessary their continuous adaption and personalization.

When I chose this subject I took into account the need of such a thesis in the Romanian special literature, which is rather poor on this matter. On the other hand, from an objective perspective, the PhD thesis *Pathologies of the Abuse in Pastoral Approach* wishes to be a scientific endeavour which answers the need for pastoral intervention for the recuperation of the persons which suffer from various addictions. On the other hand, this approach is also based on the personal interest generated by the involvement along the years in several projects of prevention and recovery in the field of addiction.

The special literature comprises a few volumes both from Romania and from abroad, especially from the Christian environment. The publications identified are of real benefit in the pastoral approach of the addicted persons in the Orthodox environment. However, there is a need of adapting them to the manner of approach of the Eastern spirituality. From this perspective, the thesis will try to adapt the pastoral methods, but also to propose new strategies of approach of the persons affected by this spiritual illness.

In elaborating this thesis I focused on fulfilling two main objectives, which correspond to the two parts of the thesis. The first of them is presenting, and implicitly, arguing the necessity of a pastoral approach in the therapeutic approach of addiction. To this respect, the stress falls on the importance of the spiritual element in all the pathology of dependency, from decay to healing. Both in addiction and in the therapeutic process it is absolutely necessary to observe the presence of the spiritual element. For the second part of the thesis, the practical one, the objective is to propose a pastoral program of prevention and recovery for the addicted persons

from the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Spain and Portugal, where I activate at the present time and whose problems are no longer a secret for me. This proposal for the program will be adaptable and may be used in other environments as well, which is why I consider that this academic approach is a beginning for a new research in the field of Pastoral Theology.

As I have already mentioned, the thesis was conceived in two parts, a theoretical one and a practical one, for a better understanding of the theme of addiction. But the main purpose is to focus the research on the practical area in order to find viable pastoral solutions, with the possibility to be applied in several environments and places, although the stress falls on the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Spain and Portugal.

The first part of my thesis focuses on the theoretical aspects of the theme I approached, thus constituting a support for the practical part of the thesis.

In the first chapter, *Addiction – conceptual bordering*, I stopped at the pathology of addiction in general, from a laic and spiritual perspective, presenting Orthodoxy as an art of the spiritual healing, in which the person that heals is the Creator of man, God himself, who left his Church the instruments necessary for healing. Addiction represents an inevitable consequence of the existential solitude which hovers over the human being, “a visible manifestation of the degradation of the human spirit, a form of rejection of God, where vulnerability in front of the demonic attacks is extreme”¹. It is a painful truth the fact that man came to believe that liberty is the power to create your own “artificial paradise” using different types of drugs. But we cannot speak of “man’s liberty to use drugs”, nor of “the right to drugs”, because the use of any types of drugs is in fact a resignation to liberty², and neither can we talk of a “liberty of passion” since we know that passions enthralls instead of setting free³. In this context, Orthodoxy proposes mainly a therapeutic method and a therapeutic education, the work of the priest being mainly a therapeutic one⁴. That is why the shepherd of souls needs to take into consideration that addiction affects all the dimensions of a human being – physical, psychological, social and

¹ Pr. Iulian NEGRU, Nicoleta AMARIEI, Floyd FRANTZ, *Pastorația Persoanelor Dependente de Alcool*, Basilica, București, 2012, p. 12.

² See *Pontificio Consejo para la Pastoral de la Salud, Iglesia Droga y Toxicomanía*, p. 23.

³ Society of Orthodox Psychiatrists “St. Theophan the Recluse” from Saint Petersburg, *Lupta cu patimile. Metode ascetice și psihologice*, Sophia, București, 2015, pp. 13-15.

⁴ † Hierotheos VLACHOS, *Psihoterapia ortodoxă*, Sophia, București, 2001, p. 182.

spiritual, so that one may observe in the addicted the fact that the relationship with God is severely affected⁵.

The second chapter is reserved to alcoholism, as a fundamental mark of addiction which has a pathology that can be found in all the other addictions within the thesis. In this part of the thesis I wished to underline the fact that, in the soul of each person there is a thirst for God, which, if not developed through an intimacy with Him, will inevitably bring along an existential discontent, that will be comforted with all sorts of “drugs”, legal or illegal. Starting from the fact that the soul wants to “come out of itself”, a natural wish originating in the longing for God, I presented the forms found by man to live a surrogate of the “coming out of self” and I stopped at the alcohol consumption. The path that can be covered by a person from the experimental consumption to the compulsive one is sometimes very rapid, even though it can extend to a period of 15 years, passing through the stages of social, functional, usual and then compulsive consumption. Studies indicate us that a person who has abused alcohol several times passes over a certain border, irreversible, and its only recovery is represented by a complete abstinence.

Speaking about alcoholism, I showed the fact that it has consequences that reflect on the whole human being, in all its complexity, with physiological effects (producing over 60 diseases), neuro-psychological (changes in behavior and personality), social (accidents, domestic violence, aggressiveness, all sorts of abuse, promiscuity, sexually transmitted diseases, etc.) and spiritual (breaking the relationship with God and sinking more and more into sin). Taking into account all these consequences it is extremely important to take some measures regarding information and prevention, both within the public and private environment, and in the space of the Church (through the direct involvement of the priests and parishes), as well as recovery measures (medical, social, psychological and pastoral), initiating a collaboration between specialists (doctors, psychologists, sociologists, priests) in an interdisciplinary team that can bring recovery where it is possible.

A very important aspect that I presented within this chapter is the fact that the most vulnerable age confronted with the rod of alcoholism is that of the youth and I spoke about the phenomenon called Botellón, a phenomenon generated by the teenagers in Spain, starting with 1980, characterized by meetings in groups of young people during weekend in various places,

⁵ Addiction is more than an illness of the body, it is a spiritual illness, see in *L'Osservatore Romano, edición en lengua español*, Madrid, 17 de agosto de 1986, p. 2.

who socialize during the night (between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m.), the consumption of alcohol being the central occupation of the time they spend together. It is important to mention the fact that this form of entertainment is adopted by some of the young people that moved from Romania to Spain and it has a tendency of externalization that is a tendency of being brought and adopted into Romania as well. For this reason in particular, the measures of informing and preventing must be very thoroughly prepared, and there are short-term and long-term programs to this respect.

Chapter 3, *Other Types of Addictions*, approaches a series of addictions, such as: addiction to technology (internet and mobile phone), eating disorders, addiction to work and addiction to shopping. The new technologies have their benefits but also their risks. Perhaps it is necessary a period of adaption of the new generation to these technologies, as was a need of adaption of the old generations to the appearance of radio and television. On the one hand it is natural, not knowing from experience the risks of a technology, to fall into an inappropriate use, especially when the user does not have the necessary discernment or suffered or suffers various inner traumas, which determine him to choose these technologies instead of drugs. That is why the studies of the experts, the campaigns for raising awareness and prevention are extremely important, because they bring into the attention of the new generation expert information that may help them for a balanced and beneficial use of all these new technologies. The technology of information and communication is omnipresent in peoples' lives. Ignoring these technologies does nothing else but raise the risk of falling into the web of many dangers that they bring, but, in the same time, it is also underlined the beneficial aspect, that through which the responsible users may benefit from all the constructive things that these technologies propose. The responsibility for the assumption of these aspects belongs to the parents and educators, and last but not least to the spiritual fathers, who have the great mission to defend their flock from the temptations of the evil, that can penetrate into the souls of those who come into contact with these technologies.

The origin of eating disorders resides in the immaterial side of the human being. These disorders originate from the soul and manifest into the body, they are somatized and have repercussions on the whole human being. Moreover, I was able to identify many similarities between the presentation of the eating disorders made by experts (doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists) and that made by the Holy Fathers of the Church – causes,

manifestations, effects, therapy. The more we progress into the investigation of various addictions, the more we realize the fact that despite of the substance or the behavior according to which the addiction is named, it has a similar manner of functioning. It starts from a misachievement of the soul and then, depending on the genetic factors, the influence of the family and of the environment, a person inclines to a certain substance or behavior, which is used to comfort that spiritual misachievement. Hence, if the real cause is a spiritual one, that is a spiritual unfulfillment, then we may understand that the healing must also follow the same path. The approach must be started from the healing of the soul through a recovery of the communion with the origin of our existence, with the God of love. The symptomatology of the eating disorders presented within this chapter of the thesis, shows the effects that are transmitted into the body and soul because of the parting of man from the communion with God. I considered necessary to present these aspects (some of them in detail) for a better understanding of the consequences of this parting of man from the communion with God with effect on the constituent parts of a person: bio-psycho-social and spiritual, but in the same time and to underline the necessity to involve an interdisciplinary team into the therapeutic act.

As any other addiction, the addiction to work has consequences upon all the aspects of human life, affecting the psycho-physical, social, professional and spiritual side. The secular society in which we live requires a permanent adaption of the person who wishes to understand work as blessing and necessary mean that helps supporting daily life and to the bodily and spiritual health. The rapid economic evolution determines some of the organizations to encourage a pathological approach of work, through excessive behavior, creating a true culture of efficiency in the pathological sense of the word, leading inevitably to the spiritual and body decay of those involved in the process of work. Unfortunately, the addiction to work received in many environments a positive connotation despite of the negative consequences that occur. The one who wishes to work in a balanced manner needs to confront the flow of the world that no longer takes into account the spiritual side of man, but only efficiency in financial profit. Man came to be defined through this perspective of efficiency. The models of prevention and treatment proposed by the laic literature are similar to the other addictions, starting from the information campaigns, to the support groups, help associations (Workaholics Anonymous) as well as the appropriate conciliation and psychotherapy. The priest needs to know very well how this addiction functions, in order not to confuse it with the work done with passion. He will know

that the person who lives in real communion with God knows how to relate correctly to work, understanding the necessary manner of involvement.

The addiction to material goods, understood from the patristic perspective of argyrophilia and pleonexia entered into the human nature after his fall, when the spiritual powers became ill and man oriented towards this world. Although it was first mentioned clinically as addiction in a textbook of psychiatry from 1915, we must understand that it was described more than a millennium and a half earlier by the Holy Father of the Church (Saint John Cassian, Evagrius Ponticus, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great, John Climacus and others) and their description is a true textbook of pathology. We wish to present an aspect that must not be ignored in our times, taking into account the number of shops dedicated to the merchandise of religious objects that increased vertiginously (in Romania in the years after the Revolution from 1989). Even today we can find many religious shops both traditional and on-line, as well as actual fairs of religious objects, with international participation, in which we may find all types of religious objects and of all “firms”. We even have religious brands that are promoted with serious marketing strategies (catalogues, posters, specialized sites), destined to the presentation of the religious objects, that sometimes compete in terms of design, promotion and conditions with laic sites. One may think that is a person who suffers from this addiction buys religious objects it is not subjected to this addiction. But the reality is different. Even if someone focuses compulsively on buying religious objects, of any type, presenting the symptomatology of this addiction, it is still a passion. Passion can be seen in the manner of buying and not in the nature of the objects bought and so the one who is addicted to the compulsive buying of religious objects needs the same type of recovery as those who buy other types of objects. The presentation of the consequences upon an individual’s life that emerge from this addiction does nothing else but show the necessity to reconsider the values in our lives.

The second part of the thesis presents a few practical methods through which the Church can become involved into the prevention and therapy of the addicted persons. The Church has a great responsibility for the persons who suffer from addiction because it has the purpose to help man free himself from the tyranny of sin and come into communion with the True God. Starting with His first words in Nazareth, Lord Jesus Christ showed that He had come to proclaim

freedom from the chains of illness and death⁶. Depending on the necessities of time, the Church has always responded to the problems which humanity confronted, and so in the case of addictions it is called to contribute to the liberation of the ill. The Church has the purpose to fight against the marginalization of the addicted, whatever their age is, to help them reintegrate into community and to give them back, through the grace of Christ, the completion of living with God. To this respect, the Church needs to create adequate educative structures that will contribute to the transmission of the message of Christ and to help, through various programs, the persons who are vulnerable to addictions or those who are already caught into the cycle of addictions (whatever they may be).

The last chapter, the fifth, crowns our approach with the proposal of a concrete model of pastoral program of prevention and recovery from addiction, a program that will be applied within the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of Spain and Portugal.

After the research I did on addiction I came to a series of conclusions and solutions that we propose to the ecclesiastic environment since they are extremely necessary. The Church must permanently prove that it activates anchored into the realities of the daily life and it must offer solutions for the problems with which society, and its believers are included, has to deal. To this respect, defining the addiction without underlining the spiritual element impoverishes the perspective on this phenomenon, which spreads more and more into the world today, and more than that, it strips it of its profound meaning. Addiction is the passion that leads to disorder in all the aspects of life, especially in the familial one. Everything is affected from the relationship with God, with oneself, with the family, to that with the friends and colleagues, with those you know and those you don't know. The family of the addicted, as a functional whole, starts to change within, the addicted being a part of the whole that changed in behavior, manner of relating and perception. In order to deal with these changes, the family must adapt, but, unfortunately, those things that change are to everybody's detriment. Speaking about the "roles" played by those who live close to an addicted person, one may observe that each "character" will find a way of surviving and will model its choices according to what he experienced in his own house. Obviously, the life of such a person will be influenced by the role played into the "story of life", on the manner of thinking, on the experiences, behavior and manner of relating to the

⁶ *Luke 4:18-19*: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor".

world, to oneself and to God. The role of the ecclesial community – priest and faithful – is essential in the recovery on the one hand of the addicted and on the other hand of the family of the addicted.

Two very important aspects refer to the fact that the normal daily human activities may evolve through a passionate approach until they reach the stage of addiction and that addiction is “contagious”. For this reason, only contriteness as true change of mind can bring healing to the addicted. The laic process of recovery that is recommended for the healing of those suffering from addictions obviously supposes a process of restructuration of the thinking, of the manner in which the addicted sees life, in the understanding of reality, troubles, failures that they come across. But, the true change of mind is brought by contriteness, for it is the very urge with which our Lord Jesus Christ began His preaching – “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). It is the true change of the manner of understanding reality and of living in communion with God.

Last but not least, the laic methods of recovery must be impregnated with spirituality by those who use them in order to contribute to the complete recovery of the addicted. The full recovery from addictions doesn't mean only a healing of the visible effects or learning a balanced behavior, whatever that may be, but it is the recuperation of the relationship with Christ. The addicted may come to a psycho-physical balance through various techniques and the illness may come into remission, which is not a small thing, of course. But, we are interested in the eternal perspective, which is the real recovery, the reconstruction of the spiritual life of the fallen one, the return to the Father.

The presentation of the consequences that affect human life after addiction does nothing else but present the necessity to reconsider the values in our lives. A life lived assumed with God changes the life principles, the understanding of the world, of existence in itself and from here it helps man's physical and psychological state of health.