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# **Pastoral counselling in the penitentiary environment**

Summary

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## Summary

**Key words:** persons deprived of their liberty, chaplain priest, penitentiary, moral-religious counselling, social rehabilitation, moral-religious counselling sheet, catechesis, moral-religious assistance, pastoral challenges, pastoral intervention, re-spiritualization, evangelism, re-evangelization

The doctoral thesis, „Pastoral counselling in the penitentiary environment” has the following structure: introduction, 8 chapters, conclusions and bibliography. The inner motivation for this research is highly connected to our Saviour’s exhortation from the Holy Gospel: „I was in prison and you came to Me”. (Matthew 25:36). The spiritual intervention on the persons deprived of their liberty covers a large area in the following domains: cultural, psychological, ethical, sociological, historical, ecumenical, theological and pedagogical.

The moral religious counselling represents a pastoral principle of the Orthodox Church. In the penitentiary environment the counselling has to be adapted to the specific existing factors, becoming a priestly duty for the chaplain priest. It represents one of the activities which are included in the mandatory standards for the chaplain priest, creating the opportunity to discover not only the prison population, but also the spiritual problems which they are facing. The moral religious counselling is differently seen and understood as against the Mystery of Confession by the persons deprived of their liberty, considering that the priest becomes „more human” in this type of intervention.

The main purpose of this research consists in the implementation of a unitary practice of the moral religious counselling for the persons deprived of their liberty within the units subordinated to the National Administration of Penitentiaries, but also consists in improving the quality of life among the prison population

The specific goals of this paper are identified from two main perspectives:

- 1) The persons deprived of their liberty point of view:
  - a) The educational perspective:

- Educating and teaching with the purpose of an effective, smart and pleasant time spending;
- Achieving new general knowledge, debates on predefined topics;
- Establishing adequate interpersonal relationship;
- Developing the existing abilities and skills.

b) The psychological perspective:

- Stimulation of the empathic capacity;
- Stimulation of the dialogue in order to improve the social abilities and skills;
- Managing and reducing stress.

c) The social perspective:

- Training, developing and improving social abilities;

d) The moral-religious perspective:

- Necessity of regaining the moral integrity;
- Developing the Christian values and virtues: faith, hope and love;
- Achieving new religious skills that lead to developing tolerance.

e) The emotional perspective:

- Reducing the side effects and the negative mental state associated with the incarceration in order to achieve appropriate skills that lead to an efficient and functional adaptation to detention environment, by seeding religious beliefs;
- Creating an axiological base of other's acceptance by practicing collective prayer;
- Overcoming psychological barriers and developing the existing personal skills by stimulating the individuals to get involved with different activities, such as Scriptural study and Mass attendance.

2) The chaplain priest's point of view:

- Solving the persons deprived of their liberty the moral religious problems;
- Offering solutions to the identified moral religious problems;

- Summarizing the functional pastoral strategies, not only for the purpose of social rehabilitation, but also in order to increase the quality of life in detention for the persons deprived of their liberty.

The first chapter named „Priest and Penitentiary” presents a brief history of the Romanian prisons, the specific of the detention regimes, and also the Protocol signed in 2013 between the Romanian Patriarchate and the National Administration of Penitentiaries, that regulates the manner in which the orthodox religious assistance is being assured in the Romanian prison environment. It also regulates the priest duties and responsibilities within the penitentiary.

The second chapter, „The role of the religious services and Mysteries in penitentiary” refers to the most important religious services which are held within the penitentiaries churches and chapels. (Holy Liturgy, Holy Confession and Holy Communion), and also to those services officiated along the Lent, prayers, absolution, acatist, chapel and the commemoration. The whole pastoral duty in this environment aims: prisoners self-acceptance, the acceptance of the locked environment, but also the acceptance of the other persons deprived of their liberty, reconnection with God, an appropriate relationship between the employees and the convicts and the salvation of all of the above, but also self-salvation.

The third chapter is entitled, „The moral-religious assistance provided by the chaplain priest to the persons deprived of their liberty”. The need of evangelism for the individuals deprived of their liberty represents a holy duty for the chaplain priest, therefore the catechesis in prisons pays attention towards two types of convicts: the ones who need to be converted again or those to whom the basic lessons must be learned, as they lack any kind of religious information. The fact that we can often deal with individuals who lost their faith or never discovered, it leads us to the necessity of a different approach of the catechesis.

Along with the objectives and the justification of the catechesis activities, some specific moral-religious activities are presented, as they are taking place within Deva Penitentiary: Spiritual Cenacle „Filocalia”, moral religious thematic competitions, „The Church Choir”, Liturgical project, religious debates, „The social function of the church today”, „Secular customs on the New Year”, „The Orthodox Church – tradition and continuity”. There are also presented three moral-religious on-going programs in the prison environment: „The Word that builds up” – the first and the second module (the first module consists in the importance of the Holy Scripture and the second one refers to the knowledge provided by the church services), and also the

program „Praise the Lord”(exclusively based on the religious music and forming a group that can be able to sustain and practice the liturgical activities held at the chapel or at the penitentiary church). The last part of the chapter refers to the occupational activities held by the persons deprived of liberty, under the guidance of the chaplain priest: catechesis through icons, drawing activities, painting, sculpture, music and dance.

The fourth chapter entitled „The moral religious counselling” analyses the main methods and techniques used by the chaplain priest when providing and offering specific counselling, but also the importance and the necessity of this process in order to reduce and remove the unwanted side effect associated with the deprivation of liberty: the impact of the incarceration, the lack of free will, the lack of the family and social contact, the concerns for the family situation and well-being, which can often be affected in the financial area, the lack of financial support, a high level of aggression, not having a job, the phenomenon of contagion, the tensions generated by the unsolved and unsatisfied needs, the lack of personal space etc.

The models of moral-religious counselling presented are divided into four categories:

The counselling based on the main acts committed which result in deprivation of liberty (alcoholism, self - mutilation, theft, perjury, human trafficking, trafficking or consumption of drugs, rape, fraud, murder, suicide, tattoos, sins against nature and deprivation of liberty), the counselling during the quarantine and observation period (behaviour, maladaptation/non-adaptation; informational, supportive and guidance), the moral-religious counselling for people in existential impasse (anxiety, moral conscience, depression, anger, loneliness, suffering and fear), as well as the counselling in exceptional situations (baptism, marriage and death).

„The role of external factors in the social reintegration of persons deprived of their liberty” represents the chapter that analyses the main factors outside the penitentiary that help the social reintegration of those sentenced to a measure of deprivation of liberty: the various religious denominations, other than the Orthodox ones, the family, the Army of the Lord Association and Christian volunteers. Moreover, three activities that are carried out in collaboration between the social workers and the chaplain are presented (International Women's Day, International Children's Day and World Day for the prevention of violence against women). The specific social assistance program „A day with my father” which takes place in collaboration with the Association of Christian Men, as well as the role played by going out in the community among those deprived of their liberty are discussed as well.

Chapter six is reserved for the pastoral „challenges” identified in the Romanian penitentiary context. The priesthood „with time and without time” covers several levels: the ecclesiastical, the philanthropic, and particularly the catechetical one. The main challenges are those of an ecclesiastical nature, the problems identified being related to: the lack of a singer or a sacristan, in the case of the existence of a singer, the lack of knowledge concerning the church rules as most of the time he learned to sing during the execution of his sentence, the impossibility of performing certain services in the Church of the Penitentiary (for example, it is recommended that baptism or the marriage ceremony will not be performed). The lack of a singer familiar with the Church’s rules, the low level of schooling (a significant number of people deprived of freedom have school education of up to the eighth grade, while a significant segment is illiterate) as well as the extremely low morality makes it difficult to perform religious services (for example the special services during the Holy Week).

Another identified challenge is represented by the meaning and understanding the term, „responsibility”. For the chaplain priest, being responsible refers to representing a model not only in the Christian life, but also in the matter of loving Jesus Christ (for both convicts and employees), visiting the detention rooms in order to improve the relation with the ones living in there; spiritual advice for those who ask for it (either employees or persons deprived of their liberty); setting up a library which will consist in religious literature so that the inmates have the opportunity to read books that can help them to have a better understanding of the faith and also to understand where they can find answers regarding the spiritual life; organizing spiritual evenings for the convicted persons, where they can watch religious movies, organizing outings to visit the main religious objectives in the community: churches and monasteries; organizing debates on religious issues, especially around the main Christian events; collaboration with the religion teacher from the penitentiary’s school or involving the persons deprived of their liberty in different social activities (working together with social workers from the Rehabilitation Department).

The clarity and the appropriate understanding of the message represent another challenge. When discussing with the individuals deprived of their liberty, the chaplain priest will concentrate on expressing the importance of dialogical character in Orthodoxy. The dialogue facilitates the approach and connection between human beings, eliminating the barriers that can prevent the reach of full communion. It involves respect towards the dialogue partner, and the

lack of involvement can lead to infidelity and lack of faith towards God's image in man. Christ the Saviour carried a dialogue with the people in His epoch without discriminating in any social or moral manner. How the Saviour carried a dialogue with all social classes, more so the priest has to carry a dialogue with people deprived of their liberty without discriminating. Own identity or linear dialogue with inaccurate or fluctuating identity is excluded. The sermon represents a safe and clear mean of conveying the Christian message.

The greatest challenge for the chaplain priest, when it comes to send the appropriate message through the sermon, is the one associated with the XIX<sup>th</sup> Sunday after the Whitsuntide, when he is preaching about loving your enemies, in the context of palpable resent towards prosecutors, judges, lawyers and other employees from the penitentiary. By showing pastoral finesse the priest will explain the fact that every enemy can be associated with a heavy burden that over powers you. Forgiving your enemy implies „unloading” this burden and becoming aware that there is no greater joy for man other than making one happy by offering forgiveness.

Another challenge of preaching is represented by the mean in which the priest becomes a counsellor for those who request this kind of moral-religious intervention. The main identified needs in people deprived of their liberty are the ones referring to relationships, information or the way in which they can heal themselves from their sins. The counselling success rests on the following: the space where the counselling takes place, offered solutions, mutual respect, lack of prejudice, collaboration between the „actors” involved in the process of counselling, lack of tension, prayer for one self and for the other, examples from the Holy Scripture (case study), but also priest's avoidance of giving advice outside his field of competence (e.g.: offering medical advice). As regarding the priest's persona there is a need for professionalism, warmth, pedagogics, role model for detained people, sincerity, integrity, sensibility, kindness, gentleness, patience, love, humour and optimism, necessary qualities throughout the spiritual intervention.

During the pastoral intervention within the process of moral-religious counselling there have been identified unsuccessful approaches from the chaplain priest which resulted in lack of resolve of the moral or religious problem confronting the person deprived of their liberty. The main inadequate approaches are: the estimated intervention, the interpretative intervention, the assurance intervention, the interrogative intervention, the solving type intervention and the confrontational type intervention. A correct and productive intervention takes place at the moment when the chaplain priest relates with empathy, acceptance and especially authenticity

towards the individual's problems, approaching the process of counselling from three perspectives: supportive, guidance and mediation to one's deprived of their liberty.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Chapter provides information and details about legislation that regulates the role and the activities of the chaplain priest in the prison environment. All specific orders, policies, regulations and decisions that stand at the core of chaplain priest activity are presented accordingly to the way in which they were published in the Official Journal of Romania. At the end of the chapter the job description of the priest working in the Romanian penitentiary environment is shown.

The last chapter of the paper presents a brief history of Deva Penitentiary, alongside two documents from the Hunedoara County National Archives dating 1922, documents attesting that within Deva Law Court, where the prison was located at that time, a chapel existed since 4<sup>th</sup> November 1907.

The conclusions drawn from the present paperwork highlight the weight that detained individuals feel in a penitentiary, profoundly felt from a religious point of view as well. Many lose their hope in God feeling that they have been forsaken by Him. On chaplain priest rests the responsibility to rebuild the church in the hearts of these individuals and to urge to profound meditation upon faith and personal assumption on the received punishment. The fear felt in these moments is the one that disturbs them. These moments are crucial in the spiritual "conquering" of these persons. The Redeemer's example, who experienced a more intense fear in Gethsemane garden as a man: fear of death, will help the priest to revive the faith of that individual.

Advice and encouragement offered by the chaplain priest on the whole conviction period will seek not only reconciliation with self and the place of imprisonment, but also with others and especially God:

1. Fear not! Your state of mind is of utmost importance in overcoming this period;
2. Be responsible! This is your cross on which Jesus said that needs to be carried;
3. Think of your neighbour! This can bring your redemption;
4. Make an oasis of peace from your cell! Read, pray, rest and enjoy;
5. Judge no one! Place love and mercy in lieu of judgment;
6. Bee human! If you can help people in need don't hesitate;
7. Pray More! Common prayer has more power. God will never forsake us regardless of the place or situation;



8. Bee strong! Any man is similar to a snowdrop, it lays hidden from trouble, enduring and dreaming of tomorrow. When the snowdrop feels strong it emerges from snow and it smiles to sun and life. The strength proven in this life trial will help the offender to be spiritually stronger and to smile when he will leave the prison environment.

9. I've isolated from the world but not from God! The church is closed (because I am detained and I cannot attend when I want), but the heaven is not closed. I cannot get close to people, but I can get close to God, because "separation from the world leads to shelter near Christ"

10. The biblical examples from Old and New Testament strengthen those deprived of liberty: Abraham was old; Moses was stuttering; Miriam was gossiping; Gideon was unsure; Iona run away from God; David had an amorous affair; Noah got intoxicated; Sarra was impatient; Peter was temperamental; Pavel was accomplice to murder; Marta was annoyingly agitated; Lazarus was dead; Zaheu was short and Toma was not a believer. The one conclusion is: God does not choose the perfect ones but perfects the chosen ones.

Spiritually speaking the priest will insist on the following advices throughout the whole detention period:

1. The greatest power in one's life is love
2. The most precious thing in life is faith
3. The most powerful mean of communication is prayer
4. The greatest joy is to give
5. The best treatment is encouragement
6. The most important presence in one's life is God

Daily incentives offered to detained individuals will rest on rediscovering the joy to live, even if it is in this environment:

1. Enjoy as you have awoken for a new day and you can see the sky!
2. Enjoy because even if you are in prison you have a place that you can call „home” or at „at home”!
3. Enjoy because you have someone to call and that one will be glad that you have called them!
4. Enjoy because no one can take your hope of building your dreams, as you like!

5. Enjoy that you have the chance, every day, to start over, to rediscover yourself and to become a better person!

6. Enjoy that life is offering you every day a lesson and many opportunities to learn something new!

7. Enjoy that you have a living soul, reliant on expressing the feeling of love for others!

The priest's sacred duty is that of re-birthing within the soul of these men the hope and the hopefulness that God will open the Kingdom of Heaven for them as well, if they will start on the righteous path. The church has had and will always have an important role in society's life and also in the life of every human being. This role expands on people deprived of their liberty as well, which more often, did not look for it while enjoying their freedom. The suffering experienced now can be a way to approach God and to set a good start for all things to come from now on. Inside penitentiary they have the chance to return to God, being entrusted that it is not too late for them to do this.

## CONTENT

### INTRODUCTION

1. The motivation for choosing the research topic
2. The importance and the current relevance of the research topic
3. The reasoning of the topic within the iconomy of the Pastoral Theology discipline
4. The scientific objectives assumed in the research
5. The current stage of the research
6. The methodology of the research
7. The goal of the research

### 1. PRIEST AND PENITENTIARY

1.1 A brief history of the romanian penitentiaries

1.2 The specific of the detention regims

1.3 The role of the priest within the romanian prison environment

1.4 The Protocol between the National Administration of Penitentiaries and the Romanian Patriarchate

1.5 The relation between the christian morality and the crimes committed by the persons deprived of their liberty

2. The meaning of the mystery and religious services and in penitentiary

2.1 Religious services and ceremonies in the prison environment

2.2 The Holy Liturgy

2.3 The Mystery of Confession

2.4 The Mystery of Communion

2.5 The special services and their impact towards the persons deprived of their liberty

2.5.1. The Mass and the mandatory spiritual healing of the individuals in detention

2.5.2. Special services held throughout the Lent with high impact towards the ones deprived of their liberty

2.5.3. The molitva and the release – „medication for soul”

2.5.4. The Akathist and the Chapel

2.5.5 The Commemoration and the remembrance of the loved ones gone to be with the Lord

3. THE MORAL RELIGIOUS ASSISTANCE PROVIDED BY THE CHAPLAIN PRIEST TO THE PERSONS DEPRIVED OF THEIR LIBERTY

3.1 Catechesis

3.2. Moral religious projects and activities organized in penitentiary

3.2.1 The spiritual Cenacle „Filocalia”

3.2.2. Competitions with moral religious topics

3.2.3. the moral religious activity „The Church Choir”

3.2.4. Liturgical Project

3.2.5. Religious debate

3.2.6. The social role of the church today

3.2.7. New Year secular customs

3.2.8 „Orthodox Church – tradition and continuity”

3.3 Moral-religious programmes

3.3.1. „The word that builds” 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> modules

3.3.2 „Praise the Lord”

3.4. Occupational activities

3.4.1 Catechesis through icons

3.4.2 Drawing, painting and sculpting activities

3.4.3. Music and dance activities

#### 4. MORAL-RELIGIOUS COUNSELLING

4.1 Sin and passion in the penitentiary environment

4.2. The necessity of moral-religious counselling

4.3. The main methods and procedures used during the moral-religious counselling for persons deprived of their liberty

4.4. Counselling the main crimes committed which result in deprivation of liberty

4.4.1 Alcoholism – the main cause of deprivation of liberty

4.4.2. Self mutilation – the defilement of „the temple of the holy spirit”

4.4.3 The sin of theft

4.4.4. False testimony – „an act that opposes the truth”

4.4.5. Human trafficking and its punishment

4.4.6. Trafficking and using drugs

4.4.7 Rape: the body desecrator

4.4.8 Punished fraud or imposture

4.4.9 Murder

4.4.10 Suicide: denial of „carrying the Cross”

4.4.11 Tattoos and their significations within the carceral population

4.4.12. The sins against nature

4.4.13. Freedom – the final goal of the persons deprived of their liberty

4.5. The counselling in the period of quarantine and observation

4.5.1. Behavior issues and their solving

4.5.2. Inadaptation and maladaptation

4.5.3. Informational moral-religious counselling

4.5.4. Guidance and supportive counselling

4.6. Moral-religious counselling for the persons going through existential crisis

4.6.1. The existential anxiety

4.6.2. The moral conscience

4.6.3 Depression

4.6.4. The anger

4.6.5. The loneliness

4.6.6. The suffering

4.6.7. The fear: virtue or passion within the prison environment

4.7. Counselling in outstanding situations

4.7.1. Christening

4.7.2. Wedding

4.7.3. Death

## 5. THE INFLUENCE OF THE EXTERNAL FACTORS IN THE SOCIAL REHABILITATION OF THE PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

5.1. The influence of the religious cults in prison environment

5.2. Family: the one and only relief for the ones deprived of their liberty

5.3. The programme „ One day with my father,,

5.4. The organized outings in the local community

5.5. The Army of the Lord

5.6. The role of the Christians volunteers in the rehabilitation of the persons deprived of their liberty

## 6. PASTORAL CHALLENGES WITHIN THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT

6.1. Priesthood „with and without time”

6.2. Responsibility

6.3. Accuracy and the clarity of the speech

6.4. The counselor chaplain priest

6.5. Pastoral interventions approached in the wrong manner within the moral-religious counselling

## 7. LEGISLATION THAT REGULATES THE PRIEST ACTIVITY IN THE PRISON ENVIRONMENT

7.1 Ordinance number 610 from 2006

7.2 Regulation from 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2011

7.3 Ordinance Number 1322/C/2017 from the 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2017

7.4 Decision number 500201/2017 from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 2017

7.5 Ordinance Number 4000/C/2016 from the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 2016

7.6 The chaplain priest's job description

8. DEVA PENITENTIARY

CONCLUSIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY