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Pastoral Psychotherapy in the Monastic Area

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Life-centered pastoral psychotherapy and monastic asceticism is meant to reveal the conflicts and traumas of the soul that prevent the monk from progressing on the path he has chosen. Often life lived before coming to the monastery was difficult for many monks, and its traces are preserved in the depths of the mind, undermining the ascetic efforts necessary for spiritual progress. The involvement of Orthodox psychotherapists in the dynamics of monastic life can bring relief in the souls of monks who fail to overcome deep inner sufferings and difficult to explain without knowledge in the field of psychology. That is why psychotherapy is meant to remove them and prevent mental illness that can occur amid excessive internal tension.

Psychotherapy is an ignored field in the Romanian monastic space. The complexity of the monastic life explains this reduced exploration of the therapeutic potential of the human soul that science holds. Hundreds of books support the ascetic effort of the monk, they are a treasure of wisdom that proves to be just as valid from one generation to the next. The postmodern world often causes drift in the soul of man who wants to know God, so that the choice of monastic life responds to the degrading proposed by the rapid rhythm of contemporary society.

The motivation behind this research resulted from the desire to provide in particular the monks with a volume with relevant information to highlight the benefits of using psychotherapy in the monastery space. The choice of research topic started from the hypothesis that the access of Orthodox psychotherapists to a monastery can contribute to spiritual progress, removing internal and external conflicts. The introduction of psychotherapy in the monastic space is a novelty in our country. The difficulties faced by monastic monks at the spiritual level are often related to the experiences they had before reaching the monastery, so that mental illness is no stranger to this blessed space either. Psychotherapeutic interventions take place today mainly where a mental illness has been triggered, requiring emergency assistance from specialized public services.

Few priests have a university degree in psychology or psychiatry to help with this. The spiritual of the monastery gathers spiritual wisdom and are able to identify the inner struggles of many people, but there are complicated cases when the clergy admit to being overcome by the manifestations of mental illness, even if the people, especially the monks are servants of God at every moment of their lives.

Synthetically viewed, the introduction of „**Psychotherapy in the monastic space**” is a novelty in our country. The difficulties faced by monastic monks at the spiritual level are often

related to the experiences they had before reaching the monastery, so that mental illness is no stranger to this blessed space either. Psychotherapeutic interventions take place today mainly where a mental illness has been triggered, requiring emergency assistance from specialized public services.

The first chapter is entitled **“As in heaven, so on earth” (Mt. 6, 10). Impact of the father's figure: Paternity and family models in the discernment of the vocation**” and includes 3 subchapters, with a total of 27 sections. The first chapter captures the future monah from childhood to adolescence, the age of great decisions. Paternity in the contemporary world is, however, put in an enigmatic, discretionary key. Times and postmodern thinking recommend it as inappropriate or long-term desideratum, but which can be long overdue, hesitation of many young people today to start a family or choose the monastic path translates into a change in the classical understanding of fatherhood as a symbol of authority and love responsible. We are thus witnessing a prolonged adolescence and hence a decline in paternity and masculinity. However, the decision-making process that determines major changes in a young person's life also has a less visible role. Here one can mention winning or consolidating a healthy self-esteem. Depression and neurosis can hinder spiritual progress or camouflage it, but there are also cases where they can completely prevent the fulfillment of the monastic vocation. Many coveted young people arrive in monasteries who long to become monks or monks and yet fail to stay. A first reason for the small number of aspirants to monasticism is the secularization of society. The promotion of sexuality, pornography and immorality negatively influences young people's desire to remain in an orderly life and to follow it on the monastic path, this being the argument for which the number of monks is much higher than that of monks, as it was in the past.

Chapter Two **„A Wounded Vocation From The Beginning. Mental Illnesses in society and in the monastic area”**, composed of two subchapters with 12 sections, diagnoses the contemporary family conjugal and monastic. As a whole, mental illness is very present in the world, and the favorable conditions for their installation are found on every level of social activity or monastic. In many cases, parental brutality constellates the child's inner universe - future monah, with the risk of becoming an insurmountable threshold for one's own fulfillment of the soul. In the monastic life, the emotional baggage with which the monk candidate arrives at the monastery gate matters a lot. Mental illness also involves disorders in the functioning of the brain that change the normal way of perceiving reality. They lead to non-natural behaviors

that can indicate the onset of a disease, the state of agitation and inclination towards rebellion characterizing a large number of neuroses.

Orthodox psychotherapy and the healing of mental illness reveal the therapeutic paradigms that treat most mental illnesses that develop in a community with established life. Constituting in chapter 3 of the thesis, with 3 generous subchapters and 18 sections, it addresses mental illness from a spiritual and medical perspective. The ascetic and mystical textbooks of the Orthodox Church speak of mental illness long before secular medicine, considering that their source is the work of demons, the fallen nature of man, or from childhood or adolescence.

Two of the most relevant contemporary therapies that can be successfully applied in the monastery are: REBT, and speech therapy. Psychological counseling today increasingly integrates approaches into therapy that take into account the religious beliefs of clients. This approach started from the finding of psychotherapists that the introduction of religious practices in therapy can significantly contribute to improving health. A form of behavioral cognitive psychotherapy in which religious practices are used is called rational emotional and behavioral therapy (REBT). It starts from the assumption that a person's emotional and behavioral problems derive from a wrong thinking about the events lived and not from the events themselves. The REBT-type therapeutic paradigm is based on several assumptions that guide both the diagnostic and intervention processes, therapeutically.

Frankl's logging is based on a true philosophy of life that has three great coordinates, namely freedom of will, will and meaning of life. Based on them, the Viennese psychoanalyst builds an existentialist philosophy. Like Albert Ellis, Victor Frankl sought through speech therapy to modify and instill a philosophy of life. Frankl argued that despite the inner difficulties that man feels, he is still free to choose his way of life. However, he needs a high meaning, according to his own findings from the practice of psychoanalyst. And this special meaning is given by the will of meaning characteristic of the human being. Frankl causes people to make sense not only of life as a whole, but also of each event. The concept of meaning of life in Frankl's vision means that something that goes before man and constantly challenges him, imprints vitality on him. This also happens in Orthodoxy where the tension of God's search must not weaken throughout life. Knowing God presupposes a relentless endeavor to fulfill His commandments by which He reveals Himself to man. Amaziah is the feeling that constantly accompanies this path of the search for the Eternal, loving-human Being.

The lack of meaning of today's people leads to many mental illnesses, from depression to noogenic neuroses. The latter derive directly from the lack of meaning of life. Viktor Frankl emphasized once again the need to put the human being in a position to face questions about the evolution of one's life and to give answers that would justify the efforts daily. The fragility of today's man is proven by the large number of people diagnosed with neurosis, depression, anxiety, addictions of all kinds. Human personality changes and twists according to the times that press on it. The balance of the soul that maintains mental health needs a well-established thinking on a purpose of life. Otherwise man is carried away by the waves of unceasing change, without having an inner axis that gives him strength and a superior understanding of everything that lives on this earth.

Chapter 4 is reserved for the „**Therapeutic methods appropriate to the monastic life – between acceptance and disavuation**”, it is constituted in a true manual of psychotherapy of anxiety disorders. Each of the thoughts of wickedness, triggering inner contradictions and personal trauma is treated spiritually and with practical examples for monastic communities. As an element of maximum novelty, the therapy focused on the monah client is offered as a solution for the internal disorders in the life of the monastery. Considering that the body has self-healing powers that must be discovered by removing the constraints that prevent this recovery process, Carl Rogers proposes forgiveness as a way forward for personal healing.

These constraints refer to the ideas that a person formulates and maintains about the feelings that he considers he should not live. In this way, Rogers remarked, the person integrates much less mentally and hence distorted interpersonal relationships. Carl Rogers' intention of psychotherapy was to help the person resolve these inner discrepancies so that they would accept themselves.

Chapter 5 is entitled „**Psychotherapy of Depression in the group of monks**” and consists of 6 sections that deal with current themes for contemporary monastic life, such as: Watchfulness - bond of harmony in the monastic community; Depressive states as moments of progress analysis; Words spoken and their role in maintaining emotional balance and Physical health in the monastic area - a key element in ascetic practices. The description of psychological disorders and passions is not only reduced to their diagnosis, but also offers solutions to get out of the existential crisis, which are both medically and spiritually vertebrate.

Accepting psychotherapy as a means of understanding the other and overcoming discords, as well as fully restoring conflict-affected relationships is a large and close hand for the benefit

of the entire community. Group psychotherapy has the great advantage that it improves self-esteem at the same time and changes negative perceptions of situations and people. Participants discover during the discussions that they have many commonalities and that they can overcome certain wrong points of view that seemed definitive. Especially, it allows monks to fulfill the command of love of their neighbor without half measures.

The concrete example is chapter 6 which focuses on the „**Philocal Fathers and the healing Advice for the contemporary monastic world**”. In particular, the importance of overcoming the troubles of the monastery through personal prayer and the saving therapeutic effect of monastic votes.

The use of psychotherapy to cure mental illness among monks is justified by the fact that people who enter monasteries often bear deep suffering that turns into obstacles to perfection, and, on the other hand, the monastic vocation proves over time. Due to the complexity of today's world, abbesses and abbesses are sometimes in a position to not realize if novices are motivated by a genuine calling. The difficulty of determining whether a novice can meet the requirements of monastic life causes community leaders to accept people who are excited about following such a difficult path.

Technical progress at the planetary level invariably influences the destiny of all people, the unstoppable information flow changing minds and distorting the ability to judge existence from an optimistic perspective. Fear turns into anxiety and often into phobias that trigger mental illness for which specialized intervention is mandatory. All ages are unfortunately marked by this reality. Social instability requires unpredictable reactions at the individual and group level, such as the family. The close relationships that are determined by altruistic love are often disregarded as unviable in a world that claims competition for the sake of material accumulation. In this context, however, man's desire to seek the True God remains a life option that people around the world secretly cultivate.

Monastic life emphasizes the importance of a thought that cultivates spiritual discernment, the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts mediates spiritual progress. Life lived before coming to the monastery tends to have a much greater influence today than in the past on the evolution of the person on the narrow path of asceticism assumed within a group of monks. The wounds of the soul during childhood remain, and the encounter with the monasticism does not always heal them. Skilled clergymen are forced to admit that some of those who want to follow this path are overcome by the inner difficulties with which some people come to monasteries.

The decision to use knowledge from psychology and medicine is difficult to make in monasteries in the country, usually the installation of a mental illness is the late time when the support of specialized public services is requested. With their help, the affected monk is reintegrated into the community, who must learn how to give him the help he needs. Triggering a mental illness that receives a diagnosis from a public authority changes the pace of life of a community, schizophrenia, for example, is difficult for any patient to bear. Those who care for a person with this disease must make an effort to adapt to the requirements imposed by its evolution, and caregivers of the patient are found in situations that sometimes overwhelm them. In the monastery a certain number of monks is needed to care for a brother with schizophrenia so that general spiritual progress is not hindered.

Signs of mental illness are often visible, and sometimes difficult to notice. Monastic life is not easy at all, it presupposes a permanent modeling of the behavior of each monk in relation to the one next to him in order to reach the unity of the community that raises a single thought of prayer to God. The ascetic requirements within the monastery must be assumed responsibly from the beginning, the mental state with which the novices arrive is not identical, and mental illness is diverse and does not always agree with advanced science theories. They depend on the fragility of the person and the involvement of Orthodox psychotherapists is recommended in such conditions. Naturally, preventing a mental breakdown has advantages. The monk who can enjoy specialized support frees himself from spiritual burdens that he was not aware of and that the clergyman could not remove alone. The monastic space usually accepts such interventions with difficulty because they are unique for ascetic life, but they also begin to be addressed on the national territory because it becomes obvious that they are useful.

Depression is also common in Romanian monastic life, the monks being especially affected by this modern plague. Depressive states betray an inadequacy with Christian life, the daily conflicts that arise between monks being blurred by obedience to the rules of the monastery. But in reality, many can break out again. Living under the same roof all life is not always comfortable, many novices feel overwhelmed by the rhythm of a monastery and return to society, where life continues among lay people, going to a church where the priest helps them stay on the road to God. The choice of the monastic path is a decision that is made with the clergyman and involves a period of preparation. The condition to be met when making such a decision is that the physical and mental health of the person is very good, the monastic communities being places where they work sustainably, which is why novices must be

accustomed to physical exertion. At the same time, coexistence implies the willingness to forgive the mistakes of the other.

Humerite attitude is absolutely mandatory to resist in the monastery, physical and mental robustness is not available to anyone, so following the monastic path presupposes wisdom accordingly. Mental illness occurs in this space because austere life and communication between living things can accentuate inner problems. The acceptance of the specialized intervention within the monastic is up to the heads of these settlements. Talking to a psychotherapist may seem surprising for a monk accustomed to being taciturn, but access for Christian Orthodox specialists to monasteries can bring considerable benefits especially in overcoming internal conflicts. The involvement of a psychotherapist can change the shortcomings faced by monks in terms of negative mental states. Spirituals who are trained in psychology are rare, and the reluctance to use specialized help can be removed through dialogue with psychotherapists who participate in the life of the Church. Acceptance of specialized aid can be a decision of a single monastery or of the diocesan authorities. The preventive nature of such an approach is justified when considering the suffering that a person diagnosed with a mental illness is experiencing. Improving the inner state of monks with the help of psychotherapy is today an option that deserves attention, the science of psychology and psychiatry have identified the mechanisms of operation of many traumas that they can treat, reducing or eliminating the danger of serious illness.

The positive aspects of psychotherapy in the monastic space will intensify as it is used. The decision-making process that allows psychotherapists access belongs to the local and national church authorities who understand the benefits of this approach. The mental illness of the monks is therefore not negligible realities. The monk with depression or other mental illness needs support, and the access of faithful psychotherapists in the monastic space is auspicious. Exploring the healing potential of psychotherapy remains at the disposal of any monastic pastor.

Monasteries are landmarks in the life of a nation, the stability and peace they emanate by affecting all. The spiritual and psycho-emotional health of monks is therefore important for the church community on the national territory. This research aimed to prove the need to use psychotherapy in the monastic area, vertebrate on the teachings of the Savior Jesus Christ and the Holy Fathers.

Keywords: *Psychotherapy, monastic vocation, spiritual, community, responsibility, group therapy, client-centered therapy, speech therapy, asceticism.*

CONTENTS

Introduction	8
Chapter 1 – „As in heaven, so on earth” (Mathew 6, 10) Impact of the father's figure: Paternity and family patterns in discernment of vocation	16
1.1. Paternity in the contemporary world	16
1.1.1. Inner obstacles in choosing paternity. Influence on the relationship with God.....	19
1.1.2. The role of the father in the religious education of the child. Possible option for the choice monastic paths.....	23
1.1.3. The spiritual life of the family. Its role in children's decisions in adulthood.....	27
1.1.4. Parenting styles and effects on the adult become a monk.....	32
1.1.5. Family solidarity with the young man's intention to be a monk. The collective effort to discern the path.....	37
1.1.6. Negative family emotion. Searching for the monastic path as a healing solution.....	39
1.1.7. Path Recognition and Effort to Forgive Family Fulfillings – Again about the role of the father in fulfilling life through the monastic vocation.....	44
1.2. The child and the suffering of passions in the perspective of monastic life	46
1.2.1. The Christian family and the teaching of the Orthodox Church about passions.....	46
1.2.1.1. The Christian family today - progress or stagnation.....	46
1.2.1.2. The teaching of the Orthodox Church about passions – their influence on family life. Psychotherapeutic approach and philocaly optimism.....	53
1.2.1.2.1. Sore greed and emotional insatiability.....	54
1.2.1.2.2. Superficial debauchery and love.....	58
1.2.1.2.3. The love of silver and the lack of a lasting vision of life.....	60
1.2.1.2.4. Social anger and irascibility.....	63
1.2.1.2.5. Pathological sorrow and anxiety.....	70
1.2.1.2.6. Lying or lazy – pure boredom to live.....	75
1.2.1.2.7. Broken glory and chronic need for confirmation.....	79
1.2.1.2.8. Pride or temptation of egocentrism.....	81

1.3. Adolescence – age of major reversible decisions. Mapping of youth: divine grace and human will. Cultivation of the monastic vocation in the current context.....	85
1.3.1. Adolescence today – excess novelty and hesitation in decisions.....	85
1.3.2. Inconsistent education – leads to a problematic and lacking adolescence of meaning...87	87
1.3.3. Adolescence – an extra self-identity. The chance of assertion own personality.....	91
1.3.4. Addictions in adolescence – the influence of family and group of friends.....	95
1.3.5. Cognitive development in adolescence – its role in establishing life ideals.....	99
1.3.6. Church in adolescence – decisive influence in making life decisions.....	101
1.3.7. Adolescent thinking – bridge to success or failure. The role of the clergyman in promoting the Person of Christ.....	104
1.3.8. Adolescence and mental illness – short and long term solutions. The urgent need of grace as a healing solution.....	109
1.3.9. The ecclesial space – the role in defining the post-adolescent life path. Birth in pain of „new man”	112
Chapter 2 - A vocation hurt from the beginning. Mental illness in society and in the monastic area	116
2.1. Family and mental illness - favourable conditions for their installation.....	116
2.1.1. Parents' brutality and children's fears.....	116
2.1.2. Educational mistakes and the fight against selfishness in adulthood.....	119
2.1.3. The emotional baggage of childhood and overcoming internal conflicts at maturity.....	123
2.1.4. Children's neuroses – consequence of negative parental patterns.....	126
2.1.5. Child mental illness and Church help.....	129
2.1.5.1. Depressive adolescence and the risk of substance dependence at any age.....	134
2.1.6. Church teaching and Orthopraxia – role in disease prevention and healing mental.....	140
2.2. Daily turmoil and mental suffering in society and monasticism.....	146
2.2.1. Choice of monastic path – family or personal decision.....	146
2.2.2. Shunning of passions - an illustration of long-term healing efforts.....	149
2.2.3. Personal past – lever or obstacle for mature spiritual life.....	153
2.2.4. The work of virtues – the foundation of mental health.....	156
2.2.5. Church services – counterweight to the nervousness of the contemporary world as a source of mental illness.....	160

2.2.6. Mental illness in the monastic area in the spiritual ascent.....	163
Chapter 3 - Orthodox psychotherapy and healing of mental illness.....	175
3.1. Psychotherapy in the monastic area. Hope and indulgence.....	175
3.1.1. Divine love – the basis of resemblance to God.....	175
3.1.2. Incessant prayer - a method of detoxifying souls.....	178
3.1.3. Triggering mental suffering and spiritual remedies in the monastic space.....	181
3.1.4. Monks diagnosed with mental illness and monastic community: challenge and hope healing for the disease assumed.....	185
3.1.5. The parable of humility of the Savior Jesus Christ and the healing of mental illness.....	192
3.1.6. The monk and his mental illness – but savior of the divine Prony.....	196
3.2. Psychotherapy in the monastic area – therapeutic paradigms.....	204
3.2.1. Human enactment and ascetic struggle for deification – spiritual connection with the Savior Christ.....	204
3.2.2. Parental love – premise of virtues in adulthood.....	207
3.2.3. Dialogue in Orthodox psychotherapy - the path of love of the neighbour.....	209
3.2.4. Therapeutic paradigms in contemporary psychology.....	213
3.2.4.1. Rational emotional and behavioural theory (REBT)	213
3.2.4.2. Victor Frankl's logotherapy and Orthodox psychotherapy.....	216
3.2.5. Sick personality in the monastic space – assumption or rejection of divine will.....	220
3.3. Psychotherapy in the monastic area – the monastery as a space for healing.....	226
3.3.1. Unhappy childhood - a source of conflicts in monastic life.....	226
3.3.2. Depression in religious man – path for demonic work or virtue in the monastic path.....	229
3.3.3. Neurosis – source of inner conflict that obscures spiritual progress.....	231
3.3.4. Monastic vocation – failure or struggle. The place of mental illness in the choice of monasticism.....	234
3.3.5. Orthodox psychotherapy in the monastic space – between discretion and necessity.....	238
Chapter 4 - Therapeutic methods suitable for monastic life – between acceptance and disavowal.....	247
4.1. Conflict dependence in the monastic area – premise of spiritual involution.....	247
4.1.1. Monastic vocation and ability to communicate with peers.....	247
4.1.2. Inner traumas and monastic asceticism – between healing and escamotation.....	251

4.1.3. Client-centred psychotherapy – welcome addition to the confession of the monk.....	254
4.1.3.1. Client-centred psychotherapy – benefits for the monk.....	254
4.1.3.2. The role of the psychotherapist in the healing of the soul of the monk.....	257
4.1.3.3. The contribution of client-centred psychotherapy to the eradication of monastic conflicts.....	259
4.1.4. Group psychotherapy – postmodern solution to conflicts in split monastic communities.....	263
4.1.4.1. Christian-Orthodox psychotherapist and meeting group in the monastery.....	266
4.1.4.2. Group-centred psychotherapy and regaining monastic awakening.....	268
4.1.4.3. The benefits of group-centred psychotherapy in restoring the friendship between monks.....	270
4.1.4.4. Individual contribution of monks to the meeting group – way out from conflict.....	274
4.2. Orthodox psychotherapy of depressive disorders – urgent need for forgiveness and reconciliation with oneself and fellows.....	281
4.2.1. The depression of the faithful man in today's world – between despair and humility.....	281
4.2.2. Exaggerated self-criticism – obstacle to spiritual progress.....	284
4.2.3. Honest communication between the clergyman and the psychotherapist – a necessary complementarity in the contemporary monastery.....	289
4.3. Orthodox psychotherapy of anxiety disorders.....	291
4.3.1. Anxiety – hindrance to a fulfilled present.....	291
4.3.2. Passionate self-love – distortion of the divine commandment.....	297
4.3.3. Love of pleasure – source for inner tearing.....	297
4.3.4. Envy – work against the neighbour. The path to personal failure.....	302
4.3.5. Love of enemies – between the anxiety of imminent danger and Christic peace.....	309
4.3.6. Despair – seeking help through the abysses of the soul.....	313
4.3.7. The suffering – bears the anxiety states.....	319
4.3.8. Patience - between eschatological virtue and skill.....	324
4.3.9. The love of God – source of healing of the anxious soul.....	329
Chapter 5 - Psychotherapy of depression in the group of monks.....	335
5.1. Watchfulness – the binder of harmony in the monastic community. The therapeutic model ACT.....	335

5.2. Monastic objectives – between concrete and eschatological. Positive aspects in overcoming depression.....	339
5.3. Depressive states – moments of analysis of spiritual progress.....	345
5.4. Words spoken – the role in maintaining emotional balance.....	351
5.5. Connection to neighbour – test stone in healing depression.....	355
5.6. Physical health in the monastic area – the key element in ascetic practices.....	366
Chapter 6 - Philocaly Fathers – Healing Tips for the contemporary monastic world.....	376
6.1. Overcoming troubles in the monastery through personal prayer and psychotherapeutic help.....	376
6.2. Monastic means of combating mental illness – listening, fasting and prayer.....	387
Conclusions.....	398
Bibliography.....	402