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**PASTORAL MANAGEMENT
OF PSYCHO-EMOTIONAL INTERACTIONS
FROM THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT**

Ph. D. Thesis Abstract

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In the thesis introduction it was shown that the family is the basic unit in the social-historical structure of human communities. It gives identity, continuity and stability to human society, on all the coordinates of space and time, therefore encompassing various geographical areas and temporal insertions.

The purpose of approaching this topic aims to maintain the family within normal operating parameters (it's role and social status), as well as to present the role of the work of the Church. Therefore, the general objective of the research is the realization of a framework for the pastoral management of emotional-affective interactions in the family environment, by calling for the combination of Christian teaching with the appeal to scientific knowledge and the application of techniques and relevant good practices of the disciplines that put the individual and society at the center their study.

From a thematic point of view, the present work proposes to be placed in the field of applied pastoral psychology, proposing the harmonious combination of Christian teaching, which aims at the spiritual health and well-being of man, with the science of psychology, which offers models for understanding the nature of the human psyche and methods of identification and intervention for disorders manifested at the family level. Thus, the research wants to position itself at the point of convergence of Christian teachings (based on the Holy Scriptures, in the teachings of the Holy Fathers and Christian writers) with the scientific knowledge provided by the various branches of psychology (child psychology, educational psychology, couple psychology, psychotherapy etc.). The approach seeks to extract useful information for the assistance, counseling or self-education of Christians who face disharmonious situations in their family coexistence or who are concerned and seek to improve their model of coexistence and marital relationship, as well as the atmosphere for raising and educating children. The care for the spiritual and mental health of the individual is seen from the perspective of its existence and social manifestation within the family, the basic unit of human society.

The specific objectives of this research work are represented by :

- Highlighting the importance of the Christian-Orthodox family, as a basic microgroup of society ;
- Highlighting the Orthodox Christian family model and the necessity of each family member's relationship with God;

- Knowing the causes of relational-family disorders and presenting the specific and differentiating aspects of these disorders;
- Prevention of toxic relationships within the family and the role of the pastoral approach in their healing;
- Pastoral management and psychotherapy of relational disorders in the family environment. Protecting the child from disturbing traumas in his ontogenetic development;
- Presentation of the legal situation of the management of inter-relational disorders within the family;
- Providing a panoply of complex information to parents to help them in the essence of the proper exercise of their social role and status as a parental model of high moral-religious standard ;
- Orienting staff in the field of development and mental health (psychologists, psychiatrists, psychopedagogues, etc.) towards their professional "arming" with the "weapons" of faith, hope and love, in the most complete and authentic sense, for healing purposes;
- Gathering a rich bibliographic material for the specific activity of Church servants, pastoral counselors, psychologists, psychopedagogues and Christian pedagogues, religion teachers or family doctors, as well as other specialists engaged in the work of safeguarding somato-physiological, mental and spiritual health of children, teenagers and young people, the future generations of our society.
- Rendering the complexity of the therapeutic process of existing disorders in the family environment by combining psychotherapeutic methods.

The bibliographic sources used are varied: from the field of theology, pastoral psychology, psychopedagogy, pedagogy, psychiatric medicine or psychosociology. So, for example, in the sources of the wisdom of the Holy Fathers, from the Pateric or from the Philokalia, beneficial advice is given about the purification of the heart, about understanding the mysteries of the path of sanctification of people, through their good coexistence, through the love from hearts cleansed of sin, which determines harmony in interpersonal relations, regardless of whether it is a macro-social group or a micro-group, essentially a family social environment. Pastoral psychotherapy has its roots in the works of the Holy Fathers, in the teachings of the Desert Fathers, in their writings,

in their Apophthegms left in the form of short histories, sayings, sentences in moral spirit, conclusions of their ascetic life and spiritual experiences. During the research, the multitude of information was also used in the field of psychology from the study of the child's development in ontogenesis.

The research methodology is based on the consultation of numerous specialized studies, from the theological field, as well as from the field of psychology, pedagogy, psychopedagogy and sociology, psychiatric medicine. Pastoral psychotherapy is a center of existing psychotherapeutic methods, it brings the sick closer to our Creator, the sinful and lost man on the paths of life to the true Healer of His creation. Through the methodologies of Pastoral Psychotherapy, especially through the Holy Mysteries of the Church constantly supplemented by prayers, by a Christian life according to the Christ model, the other forms of therapy are also ennobled, with which Pastoral Psychotherapy can be intertwined in such a way that the health of the spirit human and inter-human relations can be restored, and peace in our souls and in our communities be fully restored to the Glory of the Heavenly Father.

The present research aims to fall within a series of delimitations that allow keeping the clarity of the studied theme without suffering from excessive branching, thus offering the possibility of developing this study at a detailed and relevant level. Thus, a number of adjacent or related themes and scenarios were identified that can be included in further research: the narrow family environment; the situations of illness, suffering, death or those of divorce, remarriage and widowhood, serious psychopathological conditions, psychiatric conditions as well as crimes and serious acts falling under the Criminal Code were not studied. The investigations and therapeutic methods suggested are those which are congruent or compatible with Christian dogma.

The topic of pastoral management of psycho-emotional interactions in a social microgroup, such as the family, primarily includes the existence of a Christian value model for human inter-relationships, model studied in chapter I. *The Christian-Orthodox family, basic micro-group of society*, chapter II. *Inter-personal relationships of cognitive and psycho-emotional-volitional nature, established within a family micro-group* and chapter III. *The Christian family model and the prevention of toxic relationships within the family. Pastoral approach*. Within these chapters, the structure and characteristics of a family, value manifestations and intra-family educational valences were studied (with separate consideration of the role of the mother and father as parental models in the educational formation of children) as well as the anchoring of the family in the

contemporary social-historical reality, with all the challenges brought. Communication interactions are studied thoroughly, both those established between adults (with impact on the whole family) and those between adults and children and, last but not least, the communication interactions between family members and God through prayer and the development / cultivation of this relationship of the child with the Divinity. The Christian family model is demonstrated to be viable through the manifestation of authentic Christian behavior norms, the respect of values, the development of moral-religious consciousness with an emphasis on prayer, the grace of God in man, the power of piety and the courage to be a Christian. The bond of a well-organized family from the point of view of Christian value manifestations and intra-family educational valences is unconditional and authentic love, a reflection of Trinitarian love in the human environment. From here comes understanding, kindness, gentleness, patience, empathy, tenderness and dedication. Apart from these gifts of the Holy Spirit, temptations can intervene that disturb the peace and harmony of intra-family relations.

The prevention of these disorders is achieved through a decent life program, in the Orthodox Christian spirit, with religious life in connection with the program of the church to which each family belongs, with active involvement in the religious programs of the respective parish, with participation in the Holy Liturgy, doing pilgrimages to the great places of spiritual awareness, during the Holy Holidays or during the periods of introspection throughout the church year. The healing of disorders that destructure a family on a psycho-emotional level is achieved first of all through the pastoral counseling from the clergy, through which the observance of the coordinates of a moral-religious education and the formation and consolidation of spiritual skills is reiterated; secondly, it is possible to resort to pastoral psychotherapy sessions, carried out either by the spiritual priest or by a priest specialized in this field, who can coordinate the necessary path to be taken by people experiencing disturbances in their emotional-affective and spiritual life.

After the analysis of the family environment, it is necessary to study the possible disturbances of harmony existing in this microgroup, studied in chapter *IV. Inter-relational disorders in the family environment. Psycho-pastoral counseling measures* and chapter *V. Causes of relational-family disorders. Aspects of pastoral psychotherapy*. One of the most common disorders, with major influences on the quality of family life and with significant effects on children's development, is negative affective tension in the family. The toxicity of this situation will leave traces over time, which can be manifested both by the neurosis of the children and, often,

by the spiritual distancing of these children from the parents who assaulted them. Hostile and punitive reactions from adults cause resentment in the child's soul and deep mistrust of peers, which leads to the blocking of communication and the isolation of the child from parents, siblings, peers. At a more harmful level, domestic violence in its various forms causes harmful effects in the abused child, such as the psycho-physiological process of somatization or other forms of the pathogenesis of toxic relationships. In the early period of ontogenesis, at more or less young ages, children can form, through subconscious reactions, different psycho-physiological conditions that are not caused by any organic injury, but only by disturbances in the emotional, mental life, by the accumulation of negative emotional experiences. The spectrum of manifestations is wide, being able to take the form of physiological reactions (muscle tension, nervous tics, bruxism, dyspnea, hyperventilation; tachycardia, arrhythmias, increased blood pressure), emotional reactions (frustration, hostility, anxiety, inner tension, nervousness, restlessness, depression, dissatisfaction, feeling of helplessness, negative self-evaluation, emotional lability, guilt, alienation, etc.), cognitive reactions (impairment of long and short-term memory, decreased ability to concentrate, increased rate of errors and confusion, decreased ability to make decisions, avoidance and denial reactions, inhibitions, reduced creativity, irrational obsessive ideation, reduced tolerance for criticism, etc.) or behavioral reactions (decreased performance, professional instability, absenteeism, avoidance, escape reactions, passivity, aggression, intolerance, disagreement with peers, deterioration of interpersonal relationships, insomnia, suicide or many other inappropriate reactions). In the case of repeated abuse in dysfunctional families, the "post-traumatic pattern" may develop in the child. Long-term adverse effects can include behavioral dysfunction, amnesia, even hallucinations, nightmares, and pathological features of multiple personality. These diseases acquired through somatization tend to establish themselves permanently in the life path of today's child and tomorrow's young person, in such a way that his existence remains marked by these diseases that arose from ignorance or from indifference or educational aggressiveness.

Another disorder with particularly serious effects is depression, seen as a trap of deconstructing physical, mental and spiritual health. Depression, as a pathological condition, depends on a vast set of factors that, combined among themselves, act synergistically in triggering this extremely widespread disease: predisposing factors, determining factors and triggering factors. The consequences of this state setting in are varied: depression can cause multiple somatizations, can simultaneously harm the health of our mental life and destructure the

relationship with God and unbalance the relationship with fellow human beings. Always the ravages of depression leave a shadow of diabolical gloom over the beauty of God's creation. Therefore each parent should work responsibly, wisely, with unconditional love and with a lot of courage on these aspects towards restoring the brightness of children's lives.

Two related disorders that are favored by the manifestation of domestic violence are rebelliousness and aggression in children. Rebellion seen as psycho-social non-integration can have dire consequences. It can lead to various forms of juvenile delinquency. Aggression can manifest itself from a young age, in the form of tantrum-type crises (crises of aggression, anger, violence, either against the environment or against oneself). If these tantrums are persistent and remain intense even after the age of 4, i.e. after the child has acquired language, if they occur both during the day and at night, then a medical evaluation of the child and the application of a specialized, psycho-medical, psycho-pastoral therapies, psychotherapeutic sessions at a psychology office or psychiatric therapies, depending on the existing case file.

Last but not least, as a consequence of abuses, addictions can appear. These are self-induced psycho-physiological conditions of slavery to certain substances or to certain behaviors that have become habits of the psyche and the body, without which the respective persons can no longer find "well-being". Addictions to drugs, alcohol, nicotine or virtual space are described together with their predisposing, facilitating or triggering factors, and the prophylactic and psychotherapeutic measures appropriate for each type of addiction. In addition to these, pastoral counseling measures are presented, with an emphasis on faith, hope and love as Christian virtues and coordinates of spiritual development. Another suggested tool is represented by pilgrimages.

The causes of the appearance of relational disturbances are varied: the problematic personality of the aggressor in the family (without representing a triggering factor, the behaviors manifested being varied), the personal psycho-physiological configuration of resistance/non-resistance to disruptive factors (which all individuals face), depression of one or both parents (as a harmful factor and negative imitative model for children), repressed traumatic experiences or events of the aggressor from his childhood and adolescence (thus being able to unfortunately perpetuate an altered relationship model), stress (which can be a generative, potentiating and resulting factor of inter-relational disturbances). Being so present in people's existence, stress benefits from further analysis in the sub-chapter dealing with stress management, with an emphasis on coping strategies and personal resilience.

The third section of this thesis deals with the prevention and therapy of the disorders experienced in the area of the social microgroup represented by the family, studied in Chapters VI. *Pastoral management and therapy of relational disorders in the family environment* and VII. *Intervention programs in pastoral psychotherapy and in psychological and psychiatric therapy*. The first of the two described chapters starts with the study of the stages of the child's development, as seen through the prism of the family education and the institutionalized, formal one (also presenting some known pedagogical models, adapted to the children's developmental stages). In the development process, the formation and development of moral consciousness and the ability to socialize are studied separately as an essential result of affective relationships between children and adults. The actions of the external authority source, well coordinated on an educational level, will become for the child a source of life duties, according to the physiological and psychological ages. The affective, moral and social evolution of the child follows the procedural laws of cognitive evolution, since the affective, moral, social and cognitive aspects of behavior are in fact inseparable. Thus, the psycho-pastoral management of the emotional balance of children in the family depends on maintaining a balanced between the educational requirements and the emotional dedication of the parent towards the child. The achievement of this balance depends in turn on the existence of some edifying attributes and qualities for parents, which can be cultivated by strengthening spiritual enthusiasm, developing intuition and value discernment from a Christian point of view and augmenting inter-human empathy, elements which were granted separate study.

The second chapter in this section deals with pastoral psychotherapy as well as other types of psychotherapy investigations and methods. Pastoral psychotherapy methods can be divided according to their mode of implementation in individual or group pastoral psychotherapy (forms of pastoral-socio-pedagogical psychotherapy), according to the age criterion in pastoral psychotherapy activities for children, pre-adolescents, adolescents and young people or pastoral psychotherapy approaches for parents from dysfunctional families. The other methods of psychotherapy include therapeutic interventions from analytical psychology, specific approaches of cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy and aspects of the psychotherapy of the most common mental disorders that destructure the harmony of the family micro-group (treatment of depressive states, anxiety, uncontrolled anger or overcoming and eliminating harmful thoughts, feelings and negative affective states). Beneficial changes in attitude and behavior for the suffering patients are the product of varied psychotherapy interventions, as well as pastoral psychotherapy.

Last but not least, for the formulation of this thesis it was considered useful to present the relevant legal aspects in chapter *VIII. Legal aspects. Juvenile delinquency*. Situations of imbalance of psycho-emotional interactions within the family environment that manifest in society can vary from disharmony to acts falling under the Criminal Code. Domestic violence is defined in the New Penal Code of 2014 as "any physical or verbal act or action committed intentionally by a family member against another member of the same family, which causes physical, mental, sexual suffering or material damage". It is thus necessary to know the legislative framework that governs the area of responsibility of the institutions and authorities that are responsible for managing these situations and the compliance by assistants, counselors, clergy or therapists. Measures to combat juvenile delinquency are briefly reviewed and divided into prevention measures, intervention measures and post-intervention recovery measures.

In conclusion, pastoral psychotherapy with its advice, exhortations and teachings can achieve prophylaxis, but also therapy of disorders of all kinds. The measures and techniques specific to pastoral psychotherapy are primarily addressed to ministers within the Church, as a useful tool in their spiritual and counseling practice. Pastoral psychotherapy can also work alongside the interventions of cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy or psychoanalytic therapy. At the same time, this working relationship can manifest itself in a double sense, by orienting the staff from the field of mental health towards their professional "arming" with the "weapons" of faith, hope and love, in the most complete and authentic sense, in order to enable healing.

Regarding achieving harmony within a family, the attitude of each member of the family towards the others is decisive. The art of raising a child is the noblest but also the most difficult one. To master it requires unconditional love, humility, patience, trust, Christian courage, piety, sacrificial spirit, self-forgetfulness and putting the vital needs of the other - of the partner and particularly of the child first. All these qualities, if we analyze them carefully, are actually gifts of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this is what it is necessary for true parents to possess: to harbor righteousness in their souls, in order to enjoy the gifts brought to the human being by the Holy Spirit. In this framework, the role of pastoral psychotherapy is saving and precisely because of this so necessary for every suffering soul. Ideally, a psychotherapist would have a thorough knowledge of the Christian perspective on man, health and illness, and a clergyman would have a rich knowledge of psychopathology, in order to differentiate the conditions, their causes, and their different treatment possibilities. In complex cases of pathogenic situations, of complicated

pathological conditions, it is necessary to have the possibility of a complementary collaboration between specialists, in teams of therapists with different specializations (spiritual priests, psychologists, psychopedagogues, psychiatrists, etc.), "in the name of healing man" .