
FROM ADDICTION TO VIRTUE THROUGH BEING AND LIVING IN CHRIST A PHILOCALIC VIEW

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Abstract

In the modern society, despite all technological progress, addictive behaviour has become a real concern for scientists, practitioners and theologians. The tendency of pain reduction and awareness, the search for enhanced sense of control and self-esteem satisfaction, the wish for escaping the social and psychological problems of the modern world are the most common causes of addiction. The modern science has no yet solutions for it. What in the last decade of the 20th century was seen as addictive behaviour, in our days is considered as normal conduct. The only way out from this labyrinth is living a true Christian life by keeping the commandments and leading an ascetic life, by which man triggers the grace received at the Holy Baptism, strengthens his own nature, guards the freedom gained by him in the Baptismal waters and escapes from all addictions acquired in a sinful kind of living.

Keywords: addiction, virtue, life in Christ, ascetic life, Philokalia

1. Introduction

In this article I intend to show that modern addictive behaviour can not be corrected out of the life of the Church, ignoring the bipolarity of the Christian living, i.e. the 'being into Christ', that is actually a definition of man's communion with the Saviour's pure humanity in the Holy Mysteries, and the 'living in Christ', that expresses the development of this new existence by abiding in the divine commandments, through a clean conscience, and a life of asceticism and restraint. All addictive behaviour is the consequence of a sinful life. I want to prove that the only and true release of the human being from addiction is the incorporation in the life of Christ, through the Holy Mysteries and the ascetic life. Thus, the force of His humanity becomes the force of our humanity. That is why our ascetic struggles signify a gradual death with Christ, an unfolding of power, a demise of the obsolete man and a wilful extension of the Baptism. It is not only an imitation of Christ, like in the West, but a heroic mortification of the flesh with and in Christ.

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2. What is addiction for the modern science?

In a strong medical and psychological sense, the term addiction was defined as “a complex disorder whose principal diagnostic feature is a repeated compulsion to take a certain substance or indulge in certain behaviour despite negative consequences” [1]. It is generally agreed that there are two types of addiction: *physical*, when people become addicted to substances like drugs or alcohol, and *psychological* or *behavioural*, when people become addicted to activities like gambling, watching television or shopping.

The fact is that within the last 20 years the scope and the sense of this term has been expanded to include any substance use or reinforcing behaviour that has an appetitive nature, has a compulsive and repetitive quality, is self-destructive, and is experienced as difficult to modify or stop [2].

The continuing expanding of the application of the term ‘addiction’ in the modern and secular society is a real concern for scientists and practitioners. New behaviours appear, new narcotics are used and if what is labelled ‘addiction’ becomes too broad, and the word addiction risks to become devoid of meaning. However, according to Carlo C. DiClemente, “a broader range of behaviours labelled as addictions would be justified if common features exist across a similar set of behaviours that increase our ability to understand addictive problems and expand society’s capacity to intervene” [2, p. 3sq.].

Our days, modern scientists apply this term on all types of excessive behaviour, such as on drugs (e.g. alcohol, narcotics, caffeine), food, exercise, gambling [3], and television viewing [4, 5]. Newer types of addictions that have been studied include: internet addiction [6], online sexual addiction [7] and addictive consumer behaviour [8].

All the studies made on this topic show that the main motives for addictive behaviour are: reduction of pains and awareness (i.e. escape); enhanced sense of control, power, and self-esteem (i.e. compensation); and the simplification, predictability, and immediacy of experience (i.e. ritual). As an addicted person increasingly begins to rely on the object of addiction for physical or emotional gratification, he or she tends to neglect other, healthier aspects of life. This is the main concern for the future of the modern consumer society [9]. Addiction has turned into a general disease and it is so widespread that to be addicted or not has become more a question of relative interpretation. What in the last decade of the 20th century was seen by Science as addiction, in our days is considered as normal behaviour. This point was reached by the fact that the modern society has no solutions to cure addictions because it is.

The criteria for dependence (i.e., addiction) are outlined in the American Psychiatric Association’s (1994) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), which lists seven symptoms: (1) tolerance (a need for more of the substance to achieve the same effect, or a diminished effect with the same amount of substance); (2) withdrawal (a substance-specific syndrome that results if the substance use is reduced or stopped that is unrelated to another physical illness, or use of the substance or to a related one to reduce withdrawal

symptoms; (3) the substance is taken in larger amounts over longer time than is intended; (4) persistent desire and/or cu efforts to cut down are experienced; (5) a great deal of time is spent in obtaining, using, and recovering from the substance; (6) important activities such as school, work, or time with friends are given up or reduced; and (7) the individual continues use of the substance despite physical or psychological problems [4].

3. The concept of passion and addiction in the Orthodox spirituality

As it has been proved above, the medical and psychological world has found it increasingly difficult to define addiction, as the modern society evolves towards an ever maturing human degradation, and towards the enslavement and entrapment of men inside a passiveness that is rather uncharacteristic for their nature or for their souls' strife for perfection. There is an excessive value placed on what is seen as the only possible form of life for man, i.e. his biological life, and on his psycho-somatic health – which is understood as something the man possesses almost exclusively materially – that places the whole focus on the body. Therefore, the biological death is a petrifying issue, the absolute end of life. Thus the man, fearing that something might endanger, limit, or suppress his 'possession', says nay to and runs away from any kind of suffering or pain. Analgesia is thereby crowned as a value of the modern civilisation and a social prospect, and the man awaits salvation from any and every pleasure the modern society can bestow on him. The continuous sampling of these pleasures drives the man into a 'passive' state marked by a dormancy that is both physical and spiritual, a state that the Orthodox worship labels as 'passion' [10].

“Passions represent the lowest level the human being can descend to. Both their Greek and their Latin names — namely, *πάθη* and *passiones* — prove that the man is enslaved by them in a state of passiveness. In fact, they overwhelm the will to the point where the passion driven man is no longer master of his own will, but rather a creature 'dominated', 'enslaved' and 'ridden' by passions.” [11]

The Orthodox asceticism and mysticism deem the passions as the source and root of all addictions. The passions emerge in the human soul as a consequence of sin, which is essentially the irrational alignment of the spiritual powers to something other than God, or rather a disposition exclusively bent towards the material aspects of an energy that the man is meant to use in his search for the spiritual. “But to include it in a definition, Saint Maximus asserts, I will say that evil is nothing else but the deviation (*ἔλλειψις*) of the workings of the powers (faculties) that were planted in the human nature, from their purpose. Or again, evil is the unadvised movement (*αλόγιστος*) of the natural powers towards something other than their purpose, following a misjudgement...” [12]

The primary reason for the emergence of passions in the soul is the disregard of or lack of knowledge regarding God. This causes the mind to cloud and fasten onto the senses, and makes it taste the worldly pleasures and joys.

When the mind subjects itself to the senses, all the other spiritual powers follow lead. In this fashion, the whole soul becomes contaminated, its normal movement ceases and there appear the passions, which in turn breed corrupt habits or addictions. And, as the human soul is integral, although it has many faculties, its malaise does not spring only from the malfunction of the mind alone, but also from that of any other of its facets. Here is how Saint Maximus the Confessor describes the inception of sin inside the soul, as a result of man's separation from God and of the forthcoming of a second and passion induced nature: "Afflicted by the unawareness of his own cause, while under the counsel of the serpent, the man considered that God was he, whom the divine commandment had bid humans to regard upon as a life-threatening enemy. Thus, by breaking God's command and staying away from the divine knowledge, the man interblended his entire thought power into all of his sensibility, and so he embraced the composite passion-breeding conscience of the sensible things, which lead him to perdition. Therefore, he became «like the beasts that perish» (Psalm 49.12) ... and even exceeding those in irrationality, he has persuaded the natural innate reason to dwell into what is contrary to nature. Hence, the more the man cared for the knowledge of all things perceived solely through senses, the more he mustered the ignorance of God. The deeper his ignorance grew, the greater was his need to experience the earthly goods around him through senses. Yet, the more experience he engulfed, the more exalted the passion of self-love became. And the more he attended to his passion of self-love, the more intricate the concoction of his ways to produce pleasure, which is both the dread and the goal of self-love. Hence the great and innumerable multitude of cankerous passions that have crept into the lives of men. That is why our life is filled with moans, as we unknowingly honour the inclinations that deplete it and cultivate those that corrupt it. That is how our integral nature became fractured into numberless grains, making us, humans sharing the same nature devour each other like reptiles and beasts. For in seeking to acquire pleasure and keep away the pain, due to self-love, we devise unimaginable sources of destructive passions. Therefore, when we devote ourselves to self-love through pleasure (φιλαυτία), we breed gluttony, pride, vainglory, conceit, love of money, avarice, tyranny, boastfulness, arrogance, thoughtlessness, madness, self-opinion, self-importance, contemptuousness, abusiveness, uncleanness, light-mindedness, profligacy, lawlessness, frivolity, inattentiveness, idleness, aggressiveness, mockery, loquacity, ill-timed talking, licentiousness of tongue, and many more of the kind. And when we give self-love a boost through pain, we breed anger, envy, hatred, enmity, remembrance of evil, calumny, idle gossip, plotting, gall, despondency, slandering of Providence, slothfulness, loss of heart, depression, a conscienceless soul, ill-timed crying, lament, sorrowfulness, complete breakdown, grudge, jealousy, and all the other traits of a nature that lacks the causes for pleasure. Finally, when for any reason pain is mingled with pleasure, thus giving birth to perversity (for this is how some people call the encounter between the opposite faces of evil), we develop

hypocrisy, irony, wiliness, affectation, flattery, the desire to be liked by people, and all the other vices that are contrived by this evil mixture.” [12]

This impressive list of passions reveals the complexity and composition of the human soul, and the ultimate goal of its creation. Any irrational activity of the spiritual powers makes the health of the human soul and body deteriorate. The human being, lapsed into illness due to the sampling of earthly pleasures, becomes addicted to these ephemeral stimuli, hence the whole ailment of those suffering from these disorders.

This entire list of passions, designed by Saint Maximus, indicates the fact that the main characteristic of any passion and addiction is the display of a bottomless craving of the human soul, which cannot find satisfaction, no matter how hard it tries. It is the craving for eternity that was planted in the human soul at Creation, and that can be settled only by the love of the Creator of all things [11, p. 56].

The torment of this evermore dissatisfied eternity is caused both by the passions and addictions themselves, and by the objects employed in the quest for self-satisfaction. The objects that the passions search for are of no use, because they are finite, and therefore inadequate for the infinite craving of the human soul. The impassioned man is in a continual pursuit of nought, for he endeavours to settle his craving with the worthlessness of perishable things that are unable to satisfy him with their pleasures, hence his constant desire to repeat the act of producing the pleasure. In fact, the ensuing passion and addiction transform everything into objects of pleasure that must be completely at the convenience of the selfish ego.

The Patristic Tradition recognizes a paradox in the emergence and evolution of passions, and in the ensconcing of the addiction in the soul. For, instead of being an expression of the cardinal sovereignty of the human being, the passion, seen as a tireless race for the worldly things, is rather a force that directs the man disregarding his will, the sign of a lapse of his being into an obvious state of passiveness. Meanwhile, the human nature still has to manifest its inclination towards an outside centre, willingly or unwillingly. So it rummages the outside world in order to find something it needs inside. Due to the passions, this outside centre shifted from God to the world. In this manner, the passions and all their following addictions are the result of an intricate disposition of the human nature, or of a nature that gets entangled in a knot of contradictions, after having lost its uncomplicated and linear inclination: On the one hand, it is the expression of human selfishness, which attempts to fill the void in the soul, and thus make everything revolve around its own ego; on the other hand, it proves a lack of knowledge and perception of the truth about the final sense and purpose of worldly things. Therefore, “the passion is a result of the desire for egocentric sovereignty, and also a force that reduces the man to the state of an object that is unwillingly carried to and fro. It searches for the infinite, but then again, it only finds the nought” [11, p. 57].

4. How addictions are born from passions and sins in the human soul?

The Orthodox Philokalic Spirituality pays so much attention to the human will, because through every sin that becomes a passion and then an addiction the human being is losing his freedom and becomes slave to the irrational movements of the flesh and subject to many demonic temptations.

In order to explain the deviations and the limiting of the human freedom caused by sin, Saint Mark the Monk, in his treatise on Baptism [13], makes a very detailed analysis of the development of sin and of the enslavement through addictions of the human being. At the core of Saint Mark's analysis lies the distinction between the demonic impulsion and man's assent. Particularly, the author elaborates on the seven stages of the birth of sin:

1. The provocation (προσβολή) is an imageless stimulation in the heart. It comes from the demon and attacks us from the outside, irrespective of our free will. Even Adam was tempted in Heaven; temptations dare our will, but they are not sins, yet they can become as such. Man must in his power maintain constant watchfulness so to reject each provocation as soon as it emerges into his consciousness.
2. The thought, a momentary disturbance of the intellect (λογισμός) - once the provocation or temptation is accompanied by images, the process takes on a sinful character. That the images appeared in our minds means that somehow we had already given them our assent. The provocation is no longer 'image-free' but has become a logismos or thought; a man is morally responsible for having allowed this to happen. The careful distinction made by Saint Mark is remarkable, the provocation first comes from the devil but the dialogue with it and the assent is up to us.
3. The dialogue or conversation (ὁμιλία) - without yet entirely assenting to the demonic provocation, a man may begin to 'entertain' it, to converse or parley with it, turning it over in his mind pleurably, yet still hesitating whether or not to act upon it.
4. The Communion or coupling (συνδυασμός) - is a step beyond mere dialogue with the demon. It is the man uniting and converging with it, it is him accepting the provocation, but without giving his assent yet.
5. The Assent (συνκατάθεσις) - at this point, there is no doubt as to our moral connivance and culpability. There is now no doubt as to his moral culpability, even if circumstances prevent him from sinning outwardly, he is assessed by God according to the intention in his heart, as this is the fundamental principle of the spiritual law. The assent followed by action brings along the end of temptation in all of its breadth and length.
6. The prepossession (πρόληψις) - is the involuntary presence of former sins, done after Baptism, in the memory of man. By yielding to a provocation that has repeatedly assaulted the man's heart, his soul becomes somehow predisposed to it, and that makes his resistance to such temptations very difficult. The prepossession is the equivalent of habit. Yet, however great the force of old habit, we still have the power to resist temptation.

7. The passion, the vice (πάθος) - is a prepossession that has not been controlled. At this stage, the dominion of sin is far more pronounced and generates the bondage to sin. The vices develop because of our indifference, unfaithfulness, unawareness and our former free assent [14].

In light of this analysis, Saint Mark attempts to explain the moral struggles of the newly baptized and the lack of total freedom of those who, after having been liberated from sin, freely succumb to it again. For this lapse, we cannot blame Adam or the devil. The reason for our post-baptismal enslavement does not incur from a lack in or inefficiency of the Mystery of the Holy Baptism. It is rather hidden in us, in our way of employing our freedom [15]. If our freedom has genuinely liberated by the Baptism, and if it is limited now, it is solely our fault. The prepossession that dominates us and our inclination towards sin is not hereditary, but personal. This way, Saint Mark answers in all truthfulness to all the struggles that Christianity goes through nowadays.

5. 'Being and living in Christ'- the only way to escape from passions and addictions

The true freedom is brought to the human being only by Christ, through the Sacraments. The Baptism breeds ελευθερία, for it releases the man from his hereditary weakness of the will, caused by Adam's fall, and grants him the fullness of his free will's integrity through the grace it bestows upon him. After Baptism, neither God nor Satan urge the man's will, says Saint Mark the Monk [13, p. 278], if the man still sins even after the Baptism, that does not happen because the Mystery is not perfect, but because he slights the commandments and wilfully gives himself to pleasures: "The man is liberated by Christ's gift, but his will abides to the things he loves, as the will is free... Through Baptism, He has mightily taken us back from our slavery when He abolished sin through His Cross and then He has given us the commandments of freedom. Yet He has let us freely choose whether to abide or not in those commandments." [13, p. 279]

The depth of Saint Mark the Ascetic's theology is obvious here, there are two stages in every Christian's life. The first stage is that of the mysterious and hidden presence (μυστικῶς) of the grace in the human soul, brought about through the Mystery of the Holy Baptism; the second stage is that of perceiving it by doing righteous deeds (ενεργῶς). The passage from the first to the second stage can be done through abidance in the commandments – ἐργασία τῶν ἐντολῶν – which is a theme expression throughout all of Saint Mark's writings [15]. The ethical and ascetic imperatives of the Gospel and of the primary apostolic tradition are for this great philokalic Father conditions of keeping the gifts received at the Holy Baptism. Freedom is one of the greatest of these gifts; through it the human being can freely abide in 'the commandments of freedom', which keep the man away from being enslaved by sin, the devil, addictions or death: "He [the Lord] has mightily taken us back from our slavery when He abolished sin through His Cross and then He has given us the commandments of

freedom. Yet He has let us freely choose whether to obey or not those commandments. Therefore, if we abide in the commandments we show our love towards He Who has freed us, and if we disobey, then we prove ourselves enslaved to our passions and pleasures.” [13, p. 278]

While the passions are born within the man's mind and cease to be within his will, the fight against them follows the opposite course, i.e. it starts within the will and ends inside the mind. It starts with the submission of man's will to God's will, and with the observance of the holy commandments, which illuminate the human mind and weaken the workings of the passion. Then, it proceeds to the purification of the mind and to its untangling from the emotional attachment it holds to the world and its ephemeral pleasures.

The Eastern spiritual tradition shows that the human soul can be freed from any addiction and weakness caused by sin, only through ascetic life and the fight against the conceptual and passional images of things in the man's soul.

While analysing the term of impassioned conceptual image, Saint Maximus the Confessor records: “The whole purpose of the monk's warfare against the demons is to separate the passions from conceptual images. Otherwise he will not be able to look on things dispassionately. A thing, a conceptual image and a passion are all quite different one from the other. For example, a man, a woman, gold and so forth are things; a conceptual image is a passion-free thought of one of these things; a passion is mindless affection or indiscriminate hatred for one of these same things. The monk's battle is therefore against passion. An impassioned conceptual image is a thought compounded of passion and a conceptual image. If we separate the passion from the conceptual image, what remains is the passion-free thought. We can make this separation by means of spiritual love and self-control, if only we have the will.” [16]

Then, how can a man free himself from the impassioned conceptual images? The answer is simple: “If we separate the passion from the conceptual image, what remains is the passion-free thought” [16]. Man's entire fight against the evil one amounts to the separation of passions from their conceptual images and the elimination of all suggestions and temptations that come from the devil, who continuously attempts to distort the soul's perception of worldly things, by enticing it with ephemeral and telluric pleasures. The man must liberate himself from the remembrance or representation of things, as well as from his impassioned inclinations towards them, through ascetic life and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. It does not follow that the man must fight the things themselves, or their conceptual images, but he must stand against the passions intertwined with those images. When the passions are separated from the conceptual images of things, then the man will look upon things in an impassioned manner. Yet, for this to happen, the man must practice the virtues and self-restraint, he must keep the commandments and be patient during times of trials and tribulations.

By abstaining from pleasures, the man takes the first step towards the freedom from any kind of passion and addiction, which allows him to strengthen his sin afflicted nature. The second step is marked by the patience he shows in times of sorrows, trials, and tribulations, when he manages to free his nature from its irrational dispositions towards pleasure and its impulsive running away from pain, thus becoming completely free from and unswayed by the conceptual images and the impassioned temptations of the world. Conversely, this kind of dispassion that self-restraint and patience lead to, represents both the spiritual cleanness, and a state free from passiveness, therefore a complete self-control and liberation of the spirit. Dispassion is neither a negative trait, nor a neutral state of the human nature. It is a network made up of all virtues, whose gradual achievement signifies nothing other than the man's constant advance towards God, Who is the sole giver of all virtues. The virtue epitomizes manliness (it derives from the Latin *vir*, man), and engages a great effort of the will, without which the impassioned nature cannot be freed. Therefore, the dispassion is not some passive state, but rather a rest in God, and a centring of the human soul within the realm of the good and the spiritual [11, p. 140].

6. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this analysis made here on the distinct point of view concerning addictions between the modern science and the Philokalic Spirituality is the outline of the fact that the fight against the passions and any kind of addictions is not possible outside the Church, as it is only by the grace bestowed by God through the Holy Mysteries, that the man can escape from any kind of addiction and reach the state of dispassion. The Church does not deem dispassion as a negative term, for it neither implies the letting of oneself adrift, nor points to a lack of spiritual sensitivity or heartlessness, nor does it mean inactiveness. All the natural powers and faculties of the man are good and useful in his quest for spiritual improvement and perfection. The Orthodox Spirituality pays a great attention to the passions of wrath or fierceness and concupiscence - according to classical psychology, these form the impassioned part of the soul - which must not be mortified or destroyed, but straightened and reoriented. That is why, for the Orthodox Christian tradition, dispassion does not entail the mortification of the impassioned part of the soul, but rather its conversion from the bad dispositions into good inclinations. Therefore, the dispassionate man is he who sheds all of his bad habits and dresses himself into good practices.

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