

EDITORIAL

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Orthodox Christian pastoral care for persons suffering with addictions

The Romanian Patriarchate has declared 2012 as ‘the year dedicated to the Mystery of the Holy Unction and caring for the sick’ in the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC). A distinctive category of the sick is made up of the psychotropic substance (alcohol, nicotine, drugs) users and the persons who display dependent behaviours, whose growing prevalence and incidence is of great concern for our society. In 2008, the ROC initiated a National Anti-Drug Program, whose stated goal was “the establishment of counselling centres, the training of professionals in the area of addictions, and information sessions embedded in the Pastoral courses of the Theological Institutes and the Religion classes taught in schools/high schools” [www.ortodoxantidrog.ro]. The implementation of this program is difficult due to lack of a specific pastoral approach. Although the Church has always been presumed to be a sort of ‘hospital’ for those who suffer from the physical and spiritual consequences of sin, her traditional way of equating addictions with passions pays little attention to both their specificity and their epidemiological aspects.

Then again, the secular approaches (psychological counselling, medical treatment) that are founded on materialistic perceptions of the human constitution, completely ignore the treasury of wisdom of the Holy Tradition, which sees the cure for addictions as a process of dispassion. Also, the third kind of approach, i.e. the ‘areligious’ spirituality of the 12 Steps and other like programs inspired by the Alcoholics Anonymous movement, whose salutary intervention becomes increasingly visible within the East-European ex-Communist bloc, raises the issue of relationship between the search for God and the sacramental and ecclesial life of the church community. Within this context, the Faculty of Orthodox Theology ‘Andrei Saguna’ in Sibiu, under the patronage of the Metropolitanate of Transylvania, has decided to organize an international conference on the role that the clergy and the parishes have in assisting the recovery of the persons that suffer from addictions, between October 16-17, 2012. Partners for this event were: the National Anti-Drug Program of the

Romanian Orthodox Church, the Saint Nicholas Counselling and Rehabilitation Centre for Persons Addicted to Alcohol and Other Drugs in Iași, and Saint Dimitrie Basarabov Program for Addiction Education and Counselling in Romania, Cluj-Napoca.

The conference, entitled ‘Orthodox Christian Pastoral Care for Persons Suffering with Addiction’, was held at the Cultural Academy of the Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus, Brașov County. The participants – approximately 60 Orthodox Christians from Romania and from abroad, both clergy, medical and well-fare professionals – gathered there to examine the way in which the best medical, psychological and social approaches of the addiction phenomenon may be assimilated into the revealed wisdom concerning passions and spiritual revival. Whereas its preset task was to explore various professional experiences and opinions, the conference came also as an attempt to identify the ways in which the Church could use in her current and prospective pastoral praxis, the integrative approach theoretical models, such as the Minnesota bio-psycho-social-spiritual model that targets the therapy of addictions, and the ‘Total suffering’ model that is characteristic to palliative care. The main topics of the conference focused on the bio-spiritual, the psycho-spiritual, and the socio-spiritual dimensions of the addiction; each of these aspects were debated upon both from a theoretical and an empirical perspective.

The international conference had as special guests a few representative figures of the Orthodox community, who are active in fields that intersect with the domain of addictions: Father Vasileios Thermos - Orthodox theologian, priest, psychiatrist for children and adolescents in private practice, member of the Committee for Marriage and Family within the Orthodox Church of Greece; Daniel B. Hinshaw, MD - Professor of Surgery at the University of Michigan Health System, and in the Department of General Surgery at the Ann Arbor Veterans Administration Medical Centre, professor of Christian Bioethics at the Saint Vladimir Theological Seminary, New York; Jane Hinshaw, MD - Clinical Instructor of Psychiatry at the University of Michigan Health System, and Staff Psychiatrist at the Mental Health Clinic at Ann Arbor Veterans Administration Medical Centre; Eugene Protsenko, PhD - Neuropsychologist, substance abuse counsellor, founder and director of the ‘Old Word’ rehabilitation program near Moscow; Radu Andrei, MD - Psychiatrist with competence in toxicdependence, chief doctor at the Department of Toxicdependence, ‘Socola’ Psychiatry Clinic Hospital, Iași, Associate Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Petre Andrei University of Iași; Floyd Frantz - Counsellor in addictions, full time missionary in Romania on behalf of the Orthodox Christian Mission Centre, founder and director of the ‘Saint Dimitrie Basarabov Program for Education and Addictions Counselling in Romania’; Father Iulian Negru – Chairman of the Department of Mission, Statistics, and Pastoral Forecast of the Orthodox Archbishopric of Iasi, founder and director of the ‘Saint Nicholas Centre for the Counselling and Rehabilitation of Persons Dependent on Alcohol and Other Drugs’, coordinator of the ‘National Pastoral Program against Drugs’ of ROC.

At the same time with the meeting at Sâmbăta monastery, and coming as a theoretical complement to it, another session of scientific communications took place at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu, with the participation of the faculty members. A selection of the main presentations at the two sessions were developed and presented here as a contribution to the début of the National Anti-Drug Program, that had to be accompanied by a reflection capable, on the one hand, to capitalize on the currently available practical experience, and on the other hand, to evaluate it in the light of the doctrinal principles of the Orthodox spirituality.

The studies are classified in four groups. The first two papers outline the general horizon of the problematics. The first underlines the cultural roots of the post-modern alienation of the subject and suggests three interwoven principles for the pastoral praxis: Love makes the only antidote to hedonism; Healthy interpersonal relationships can protect against impersonal pleasures; Embrace of reality instead of imagination (Reverend Vasileios Thermos). The second argues that the human being is structurally a dependent being, so that human dependency cannot be treated, but only redirected, either towards its ontological Source or to a variety of surrogates. This very aetiological polymorphism of addiction commands a multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary approach that will take into consideration data from the fields of Neurology, Sociology, Pedagogy, Chemistry, etc., as well as data from Philosophy and Theology (Vasile Chira).

The following series of six papers is made up of contributions from the Classical, Biblical and Patristic theology. The first one gives an overview of how Saint Peter envisages the irreducible conflict between the Christian converts and the pagan world to which they formerly belonged. The cornerstone of the conflict lies with lust: for pagans normality means living according to their desires, whereas for Christians lust and a godly life are mutually exclusive (Daniel Mihoc). An analysis of the chrysostomic writings corpus reaches the conclusion that, for the 'Repentance Doctor', the freedom that man naturally enjoys is not compromised through sin, although in passions it breeds enslavement that is both real and reversible through repentance and by the aid of grace (Reverend Daniel Buda). In a close examination of the patristic doctrine on passions, we must not overlook the theme of dispassion, which is seen as the first stage in the spiritual ascent. Yet this can be neither understood, nor attained, save through the grace's ascetic pursuit to re-captivate the soul, as though it were to be 'intoxicated' by the love of God (Reverend Vasile Bîrzu). From an Orthodox perspective, one can never stress it enough that the only and true release of the human being from passions is the incorporation in the very life of Christ, through the Holy Mysteries and the ascetic life, which means a gradual death with Christ, in order to live in Him, as a wilful life-long actualisation of the Baptism (Ciprian Streza). The way to achieving this Christocentric death/life is through obedience, an attitude that is characteristic to the child-Father relationship, be it a relationship with God or with a spiritual advisor (Reverend Ioan-Mircea Ielciu). The last piece of this section (Reverend Nicolae Moşoiu)

offers a brief synthesis of the Orthodox view of the body as an ontological stairway which mediates the ascent of man towards the Second Coming. The body is meant to be infused by the eschatological grace, since the perfecting of man is the union to the Logos made man.

The following section comprises studies dedicated to certain special categories of addicts. The first three deal mostly with adolescents, who are at an age when addictions usually settle in. The children of parents afflicted by addictions are the most vulnerable when it comes to addictions, and that is due to epigenetics (Ciprian Iulian Toroczka). The almost ubiquitous presence of the electronic medium in the realm of communication, information and entertainment proves to be a rival to the direct interhuman relations. The interaction pattern of the latter is more deliberate, more complex, and also more profound, whereas the instant, controllable and effortless interaction of the former exposes an entire generation, the Generation-Digital, to the abusive consumption of digital technology (Corina Grecu). The answer of the society to these cyberspace use disorders cannot be limited to the areas of Psychology and Sociology; it requires also a pedagogical approach. It is necessary to provide people with an education that is able to strengthen and upgrade their ability to understand and choose in order to become active protagonists in their own lives, not only in some life on a screen (Olivia Andrei). Another context that is extremely relevant from a spiritual point of view is that of the end of life, when the person enters eternity in the exact state that death finds him/her. When addiction is combined with terminal illness, the burden of suffering and the task of recovery are particularly challenging. 'Total Pain', a holistic approach developed within the palliative care, addresses all aspects of a Christian's terminal illness that is complicated by a history of addiction, and creates the possibility for real victory in the spiritual warfare of his/her last days of life. (Daniel and Jane Hinshaw)

Last but not least, the pastoral section offers a few contributions that have immediate practical purposes. The presentation of Neptic-Psychotherapeutic Treatment Guide for People with Substance (Ab)use Disorders offers also an introduction to the neptic-psychotherapy, which is primarily directed to solving problems of ontological origin. The efficacy of this salvific intervention has been confirmed by recent empirical studies, according to which neptic-psychotherapy can be used to effectively treat depression and anxiety, and is now intended to treat substance use disorders (Reverend Andrew Vujisic). Since addiction is a complex phenomenon, resulting from the interaction of spiritual, biological, social, and psychological factors, resolving the problem demands that all of these factors be taken into account. It is precisely this that the Moscow based 'Old World' Charity therapeutic program does for addicts. It represents an Orthodox adaptation of the Western experience of the therapeutic community and includes a specially organized psychological and spiritual work on the 12-Step program, a model to be replicated by/in other Orthodox settlements. (Eugene Protsenko) The pastoral intervention for people suffering with addictions has to be a social extension of the principles of asceticism. A minimal

pastoral plan is proposed to include several elements of catechumenal instruction and of the pedagogy of pastoral intervention, derived from the experience of the Blue Cross Romania and the collaboration between the Church and the AA groups (Reverend Constantin Necula). Does the parish per se have any role in the prevention and recovery from alcoholism? According to the stages in the evolution of alcoholism, the priest, the faithful, the support groups and the recovery programs can and must cooperate in order to ensure prompt interventions and the support that the addicts and their families need in their constant fight against sin and illness (Reverend Aurel Pavel). On an organisational level, the initiation of a national ROC run program to confute addictions is a salutary action, worthy to be supported, implemented and evaluated by all the church members, clergy and laymen. A first assessment of the several issues raised by the 12 Steps inspired therapeutic approach and their pastoral implications (Sebastian Moldovan) concludes the series of contributions to an event whose goal was to introduce the Theological Institutes into one of the most demanding pastoral actions of the Church.

The organisational committee would like to thank all the participants, especially the foreign guests, for the efforts they made in order to be present at the event and for their distinguished contributions to the success of the meeting. Our deepest gratitude goes to Professor Daniel Hinshaw - we thank him for his moral support and excellent theoretical and practical suggestions - as well as to Father counsellor Iulian Negru, coordinator of the National Anti-Drug Program of the ROC, and Father Nicolae Rusu, counsellor in the Social Department of the Archdiocese of Sibiu, whom we would like to thank for their constant and efficient organisational support. Also, we have to thank our tireless Assistant professor Ciprian Toroczcai, who was the main moderator of the scientific communications session that came to complete the symposium. Last but not least, our acknowledgement goes to our host, Father Archimandrite Ilarion Ursu, the Staretz of the Brâncoveanu monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus. Without his outright generosity, this event would never have happened.

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