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The report between spiritual son and the person counseled in the perspective of *Metanoia* and *Katharsis*

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Abstract

The religious behaviour of modern human being is characterized by existential searches, indifference, stereotypes and evasions. There are some existential challenges but also some opportunities for the contemporary human being. After I presented the relationship between Confession and psychological counselling in the perspective of communication and spiritual communion, but also the report between the Confessor and Psychologist, in this article I will try to emphasize the report between spiritual son and the person counseled in the perspective of *Metanoia* and *Katharsis*.

Keywords

Confession, spiritual son, the person counseled, *Metanoia*, *Katharsis*

1. Existential challenges and opportunities for the contemporary human being

Most of the times the modern human being guides his life according to different interests that are followed during period that goes on faster. Agitation is what characterises the state of permanent dissatisfaction and con-

The report between spiritual son and the person counseled...

tinous search for transient things. In a consumer society people are urged to trust only what's real, distinguishable and consumable. For the modern man, the body is his main matter while the soul is being neglected easily. The life of the modern man is limited to fulfil wealthiness. But most of the times this "wealthiness" hides a spiritual "evil". In a life where spiritual concerns are neglected the sin is considered "in trend". False freedom takes to spiritual mutilation, to losing spiritual perceptiveness of choosing good and avoid evil, to lack of time for examining the consciousness. The persistence in errors and sins leads the modern man to go from bad to evil, to forget about his suffering fellows.

This abnormality of the immoral state blind the spiritual eyes of people thus misinforming them regarding reality, making the transcendent look unfashioned and useless.

Praying to God, reminding yourself that He exists may look noncorresponding when reincarnation, astrology, tarrot and esoteric experiences are being practiced. When evil becomes materialised, when that material "good" is threatened by economical crisis (but mostly spiritual crisis) then some impulses could appear, certain answers to financial and spiritual problems.

The solution for the problems? An old solution but present, always actual and moral: God. The modern man considers that God owes helping him even if he doesn't listen to Him. Many times the ways of communication and communion with God are avoided because they require some sort of stable normality. The solution for problems is often disconsidered, thus the method of westernized neo-pagan influences being more "handy" which don't solicitate so much and don't give the sensation of quick and safe completion. But when disease, suffering or even death appears in the life of modern man, he makes himself aware that, even for a little while, God is the real and authentic solution to existential crisis.

The modern man wishes to believe and behave religiously but he doesn't know how and that is why even if he considers faithful he is indifferent regarding spiritual life. If he has something on his mind and that thing bugs him and forces him to be unsure of himself, he thinks that it is easier to get used to it thus not taking any action under the principle: "time heals everything". He rarely calls for a psychologist or even rarely ask help from a priest.

Discernment must guide the modern man's life to help him understand the importance of true humbleness, feeling of repentance in the Mystery of Confession.

In the Orthodox Tradition, through Confession believers have the safety that God speaks to them through the confessor's advice, counselling and helping them in key moments of life. In order to communicate with God and to feel Him close to us, we need to wish to speak with Him.

In order to confess you need to have faith in God and repentance.

“Repentance isn't discouragement but ardent awaiting, not the sentiment that you stuck somewhere but the one that you found an exit, not of self hatred but affirmation of self ego, the one from God's image. From repentance we don't have to understand a way to keep our heads down and checking our own imperfections but keeping your view up towards God's love; not backwards with feelings of sorry but forward with trust. To follow not what you didn't manage to be but what you can still be with the help of Christ.”¹

The spiritual father must use practical pastoral techniques in order to help the modern man, being responsible for the salvation of believers, elders, teens and kids. The priest has a double responsibility for teens: to bring them to Church and to “bring the Church to them”.² It's indicated to know even the names of those who don't come to church so that the priest would visit them trying to sort this matter in good terms.

The spiritual father must know the aspects of pastoral psychology and adolescent pedagogy in order to evaluate in a correct way each teenager's situation. Teenagers need attention they wish to be listened and understood³ that is why the spiritual father has the duty to communicate and reckon his responsibility to guide and form them with the help of God.

In the ecclesial context, the opening of the believer towards God through repentance is correlated to the opening towards his fellow. “Through re-

¹ KallistosWare, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, Traducere de sora Eugenia Vlad, Editura Christiana, București, 1996, p. 73.

² Arhim. Teofil Tia, *Elemente de Pastorală Misionară pentru o societate post-ideologică*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2003, p. 387.

³ Pr. Lect. Dr. Ion Rizea, “Priorități actuale ale preotului în formarea și educarea morală a tinerilor”, în *Mitropolia Olteniei*, 2006, nr. 5-8, pp. 45-53.

The report between spiritual son and the person counseled...

pentance the believers are renewed in Christ and placed in the position to act as responsible factors in the process of Christian communion”.⁴

The spiritual father contributes to the healing of his spiritual sons through showing himself as example of life and through prayers. “Fulfilling God’s will he shows his sons through his deeds, his behaving and way of being, how it’s worthy to live and fulfil God’s will”.⁵

The Mystery of Confession presumes assuming repentance and justification and even participation from the spiritual father and the believers which work together in the father-son privacy with wisdom and reasoning.

2. The spiritual son and the person counseled

If the confessors have the duty to take care of spiritual sons salvation, the apprentices have responsibilities for their confessors. The spiritual sons must have an attitude of obedience for the confessor. To reach that authentic relationship, of spiritual help, of personal valuing, safety, closeness, the apprentice needs perseverance, trust, respect, kindness, humbleness and prayer.

Spiritual life is influenced by the relationship with the confessor. Any important decision from life has useful consequences in our spiritual growth only if it has the blessing of the confessor, if it’s made under the power and protection of the spiritual grace given by God through that blessing.

Saint John Climacus says according to this:

“all of us who want to leave Egypt need a Moses, as a mediator with God, which by taking care of our actions to spread his arms to God so that we pass the sea of sins, led by him, and banish Amalek, the leader of passions. Those who trusted themselves and thought they don’t need any leader were wrong”.⁶

⁴ Pr. Prof. Dumitru Popescu, “Pocăința ca refacere a legăturilor credincioșilor cu Dumnezeu și cu semenii”, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, 1971, nr. 9-10, p. 1028.

⁵ Jean Claude Larchet, *Teraputica bolilor spirituale*, Traducere de Marinela Bojin, Editura Sophia, București, 2001, p. 9.

⁶ Sfântul Ioan Scărarul, “Scara dumnezeiescului urcuș”, în *Filocalia*, vol. 9, Traducere, introducere și note de Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1980, p. 48.

Saint Symeon the New Theologian presents the role of spiritual father by exhorting: “Brother, call God earnestly to show you a man that could nicely herd you, who you must listen to as God Himself and do everything he says, even if they seem contrary and hurtful... do everything he says and you shall save yourself”.⁷

Saint Symeon left us a special prayer to ask for a suitable confessor which heals our souls:

“O Lord, who desirest not the death of a sinner but that he should turn and live, Thou who didst come down to earth in order to restore life to those lying dead through sin and in order to make them worthy of seeing Thee the true light as far as is possible to man, send me a man who knows Thee, so that in serving him and subjecting myself to him with all my strength, as to Thee, and in doing Thy will in his, I may please Thee the only true God, and so that even I, a sinner, may be worthy of Thy Kingdom!”⁸

After an apprentice found a spiritual father, he must listen to him. The spiritual sons’ listening to his father is not imposed but freely consented. The confessor doesn’t destroy his apprentices’ will, instead he receives it from them as a gift”.⁹

Obedience is an option based on trust and especially on love, for the relationship between apprentice and spiritual father is a relationship of mutual love in Christ.¹⁰ Among obedience and love, prayer for the confessor is also needed. Not only the confessor must pray, but the apprentice has the duty to pray for his spiritual father. Both benefit from this mutual prayer. Their prayer goes to God; both meet God and receive an answer to their prayers from Him.¹¹

If the spiritual son must see the confessor as a real parent, the person who’s coming to the psychologist must accept counseling where he communicates and is being listened.

⁷ Sfântul Simeon Noul Teolog, *Cateheze, Scrieri II*, Studiu introductiv și traducere de diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2003, p. 223.

⁸ Idem, *Discursuri teologice și etice, Scrieri I*, Studiu introductive și traducere de diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., Editura Deisis, Sibiu, 2001, p. 280.

⁹ K. Ware, *Împărăția lăuntrică*, p. 72.

¹⁰ Andrei, Episcopul Alba Iuliei, *Spovedanie și comuniune*, Editura Episcopiei, Alba Iulia, 1998, p. 238.

¹¹ Sfinții Varsanufie și Ioan, „Scriori duhovnicești”, în *Filocalia*, vol. 11, Traducere, introducere și note de Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Episcopiei Romanului și Hușilor, 1990, p. 183.

The report between spiritual son and the person counseled...

The modern man has too many ways to communicate, but he is less “communicated” (C. Noica), he is participating in a

“dialogue of the deaf, where everyone talks but no one listens. At a given time the man can no longer hear himself. Today, mass communication methods have dismissed silence and personal reflection... The importance of listening when in need of help is emphasized by all psychologists. Therapy starts with listening; to hear it is required to shut-up. A good therapist must be skilled in listening himself and self-knowledge, he must to be quiet within himself so that he could listen... There is a silence that means it is nothing to say and another that everything remains said”.¹²

Many psychologists believe that the man's psychological health consists in not having inner psychological conflicts, but to dispose a psychological balance. “Contemporary psychology treats as sickness the inner conflict or even hidden feelings, traumatized experiences from the subconscious.”¹³ But the Holy Fathers teach that

“sickness is not represented only by hidden feelings that cause inner conflicts, but the deterioration of the spirits powers, mainly death and darkness of the mind. The mind cant see God, doesn't have communion with God and by falling ill it creates all the diseased conditions. Healing the soul requires enlightenment of the mind.”¹⁴

Both psychological and spiritual, the solution is not in concealment, but just in psychotherapeutic / sacramental confession of the problems that cause spiritual discomfort.

To achieve the desired result the psychologist must take note of the four types of human temperament:

- *sanguine* (lively, active, quick to react intuitively exaggerated, high working capacity, resistant to harsh conditions, rich verbal expression, sociable, affectionate, cheerful, optimistic, good organizer);

¹² Eugen Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, Editura Rotonda, Pitești, 2008, pp. 159-164.

¹³ Mitrop. Hierotheos Vlachos, *Psihoterapia Ortodoxă - continuare și dezbateri*, Traducere de prof. Ion Diaconescu și prof. Nicolae Ionescu, Editura Sofia, București, 2001, p. 210.

¹⁴ H. Vlachos, *Psihoterapia Ortodoxă - continuare și dezbateri*, p. 210.

- *choleric* (impulsive, aggressive, noisy, susceptible, irascible, communicative, speech precipitated explosive emotionality, irrepressible self, excessive gesticulation, yielding to standby; discontinuity in acts of attention, memory, thinking);
- *phlegmatic* (calm, slowness in response, pensive, worried, peaceful, self-control, poor emotional externalization calculated gestures);
- *melancholic* (reserved, sober, sad, pessimistic, introverted).

The persons' temper is "given" since his birth, which is influenced by environmental living conditions offered, but also education.¹⁵

In a man's personality all four tempers are met more or less. When some characteristics are "unnatural", help is needed. When the patient/penitent truly wants to be helped, he has all the chances to help himself through an attitude of acceptance and openness. Many people say: "I'm not insane", "I don't need a psychologist" or "I have no sins, I'm not going to the priest for he's also a sinner", but all they do is deceive themselves, refusing they're treatment and healing. They must realize that the priest and psychologist are not villains, but benefactors, and when the man needs help he must not hesitate to look for it and find it. When the man wants help fully convincing and with faith, then he succeeds, for "everything is possible to the believer" (Mark 9, 23).

3. The report between *Metanoia* and *Katharsis*

The Mystery of Confession is also called the Sacrament of Penance for it expresses restoration, personal transformation, repentance, confession and a new way of life through reconciliation with God. *Metanoia* (penance) designates a true return of our mind, of the whole perception towards God, a return to God. The Christian that repents reaches a new way of thinking, at "Christ's thought" (1 Cor. 2, 16). The renewal of mind therefore doesn't mean only regretting the past, but the total transformation of perspective, changing the manner we report to God, our peers and ourselves. Penance is not limited to remorse and self-pity, but life means refocusing on the Holy Trinity. Thus, repentance is a positive thing, not a negative one.¹⁶

¹⁵ Scarlat Niculescu, *Arta de a reuși în viață - Ghid practic de psihologie socială*, Editura Omnia, București, 1991, p. 76.

¹⁶ E. Jurca, *Sposedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, pp. 200-202.

The report between spiritual son and the person counseled...

The Saviours' urge: "Repent!" means: "change your minds, your way of thinking, talking and behaving, change your life and way of being!".¹⁷

Father Constantin Galeriu was stating that in Romanian the word "repentance" emphasizes regret, pain for the mistakes committed. The word "penitence" (in latin *poenitens, -ntis*), emphasizes the juridical aspect, the conscience of fault, fear of punishment. But the greek "metanoia" doesn't only mean repentance, regret of fear of punishment, but more like a radical change of beliefs, a move beyond sin, by seizing to commit it and the start of a new life, a renewal of mind, a "rebirth", "second baptize".¹⁸

The difference between psychotherapy and confession is that the first one is a treatment and the second is a Sacrament. Psychotherapy aims for psychological healing; confession, the spiritual. First follows the catharsis (unleashing, release, discharge accumulated tension by disguising emotional trauma or through certain psychological blockages), obtained through awareness and therapeutic confession. Through Confession divine forgiveness is granted through the sacramental absolution, through "the hand" (blessing) of the confessor, respectively God's grace. If psychotherapy refers to life here and now, Confession transcends space and time and prepares the believer for eternity.¹⁹

We cannot talk about substituting one another or by canceling one by the other, but more of an exceptional complementarity: psychotherapy recovers personality, confession renews mind and life. The purpose of the first is changing of certain behavior or restructuring personality, whereas confession is spiritual healthiness and opening new perspective in life on the Way to Truth and Life. The Sacrament goes beyond a simple emotional discharge.²⁰

Sadly, the term of forgiveness is missing from the psychological language, being complemented by notions such as "self-acceptance, reconciliation between ideal and actual selves, reconciliation, peace with yourself and the world".²¹ All these notions can't express the forgiveness during Confession, forgiveness that means reconciliation with God and regaining the status of son of God.

¹⁷ E. Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, p. 204.

¹⁸ Pr. Prof. Constantin Galeriu, "Sensul creștin al pocăinței", în *Studii Teologice*, nr. 9-10, 1967, p. 681.

¹⁹ E. Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, p. 205.

²⁰ E. Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, p. 208.

²¹ E. Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, p. 208.

The confessor must approach an interdisciplinary, complementary vision and work with the psychologists and be well documented in the psychological disciplines (psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, psychiatry, etc.) to be also efficient with people with mental problems.

“If the confessor has psychological knowledge, then it will be able to discern between hysterical behaviors and powerful spiritual experiences, between hallucinations and visions, between immaturity and emotional gift of tears, between neurotic guilt and moral guilt. Psychologists must also have theological knowledge in order to correctly counsel the religious people that need therapy”.²²

The man needs a confessor (and psychologists, if that’s the case) in order to find his true purpose in life.

“Without sense, the man finds itself in a closed world of nonsense. When a man suffers, nothing more unbearable than not finding any sense of his condition. Looking for the sense is a true adventure. Very often, patients look for the cause in the past, believing that if they will find it, they shall be cured. But accountability is the first and most urgent work that humanizes the man”.²³

The similarity between the methods and ways of approach used in psychology and those used during spiritual guidance, must not be ignored. A good psychologist uses the same techniques and approaches problems the same as a confessor and we must bear in mind that the Holy Fathers - “perfect psychologists and researchers of human behavior” - brought the grace of Christian life in psychology with them.²⁴

So, the sacrament of Confession is a true cure against depression - so common nowadays and publicized as a result of spiritual crisis, facing many people – offering forgiveness, recovery and restoring spiritual balance, so necessary for the healthiness of human being, which can only be fulfilled through dialogue (as a communicative being) and in communion with peers and God.

²² E. Jurca, *Sposedanie și psihoterapie – interferențe și diferențe*, p. 205.

²³ Pr. Amédée Hallier; Dominique Meggle, *Monahul și psihiatrul – Convorbiri despre fericire*, Traducere de sora Eugenia Vlad, Editura Christiana, București, 1997, p. 82.

²⁴ Arhiep. Hrisostom de Etna, *Elemente de Psihologie pastorală Ortodoxă*, Traducerea de Daniela Constantin, Editura Bunavestire, Galați, 2003, p. 196.

The report between spiritual son and the person counseled...

For the repentance to become permanent it is required to be anchored in the liturgical life. Practicing Confession must become something usual in our life, repentance being a spiritual retrospective of life. Confession is a step in the stairway towards perfection, through Confession the man relinquishes communication and communion with God.

The solution for financial and spiritual problems which the people from the contemporary society are being confronted with, is communion with God through the Mystery of Confession (thus the believer reconciles with the heavenly Father, with his fellows and thyself) and the Mystery of Eucharist in which we get in communion with God “towards forgiveness and afterlife”!