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The meaning, the relevance and the necessity of Pastoral counselling in the conceptual perspective

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Abstract

More and more people are struggling with existential problems as secularization, the lack of the meaning of life, the lack of interpersonal communication and communion, spiritual and moral crisis, isolation, individualism, depression, addictions of alcohol, drugs, absence of care, suicide.

In order to offer some answers for these problems, the Church proposed experienced people who possess skills of psychology and religion, called chaplains, who offer Pastoral counselling to those who are interested in this kind of helping.

Pastoral counselling is a unique form of counselling which uses spiritual and psychological resources in order to help people to find possible solutions to acquire the balance of life.

Keywords

Theology, Psychology, Pastoral counselling, Pastoral Care, pastoral counselor

*The meaning, the relevance and the necessity of Pastoral counselling...***1. The meaning of Pastoral counselling: terminology and distinctions between Pastoral counselling and Pastoral Care.**

In post war pastoral literature (since 1920), one can find “care” and “counselling” as synonyms, “their gradual distinction reflects the emergence of Pastoral counselling as a specialized ministry”.¹

Pastoral counselling is a specialized type of pastoral care. According to the Dictionary of Pastoral Care: “*Pastoral care* is a branch that derives from the biblical image of shepherd and refers to the concern expressed within the religious community for persons in trouble or distress” and “*Pastoral counselling* is the utilization by clergy of counselling and psychotherapeutic methods to enable individuals, couples and families to handle their personal crises and problems in living constructively”.²

The American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC), the first association of Pastoral counselling in the world (1963), describes Pastoral counselling in its constitution as the “exploration, clarification and guidance of human life, both individual and corporate, at the experiential and behavioral levels through a theological perspective”.³

The pastoral office has from its beginning a meaning of therapeutic relationship. The most frequently used Greek word related to healing in the New Testament is “therapeuo” (θεραπεύω), that means both “to serve” the divinity and “to care for, treat (medically), heal, restore”.⁴

“Therapeia”(θεραπεία) means in the Greek a helping, serving, healing relationship and a “*therapon*” (θεράπων) is one who helps, serves and heals. The Latin translation for “*therapon*” is “ministerium”, from which the word of “minister” (helper, servant) comes.⁵

If religious counselling and other secular therapies use particular practices, Pastoral counselling “is identified by its representation of the community that authorizes it, through a relationship to a pastor accountable

¹ *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling*, General Editor Rodney J. Hunter, Published by Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1990, p. 849 (in this paper quoted as *DPCC*).

² *Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, Edited by Alastair V. Campbell, Published by The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1987, p. 198 (in this paper quoted as *DPC*).

³ <http://www.aapc.org/about-us/brief-history-on-pastoral-counseling.aspx> - American Association of Pastoral Counselors (20.01.2015).

⁴ Howard Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counselling—Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth*, Published by SCM Press LTD, London, 1984, p. 55.

⁵ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Counsel*, Published by Crossroad, New York, 1989, p. 7.

to that community”,⁶ so it is important to understand Pastoral counselling as “a spiritual counselling and not as a psychotherapy or therapeutic counselling”.⁷

A pastoral counselor is a pastor who, “as a part of his or her ministerial responsibility, offers counselling to persons in need”.⁸

Pastoral counselling is essentially interdisciplinary, so the pastoral counselors “must learn to be as skilled in the methodology of psychology as they are in that of theology”.⁹ Pastoral counselling combines “the tradition of pastoral work with the insights of the behavioural sciences”.¹⁰

Thomas Oden, one interpreter of modern Pastoral counselling, said that “Scripture is the most reliable source of understanding of God’s own caring for humanity and the world”.¹¹

According to Howard Clinebell, the first president of AAPC, the relationship between the practice of pastoral care and counselling and the biblical heritage is like a two-way street: “the insights from the heritage illuminate, inform and guide the practice of these pastoral arts and this practice brings to life basic biblical truths by allowing them to become incarnate and experienced in human relationships. In counselling, the biblical truths are illuminated by being applied and tested in the arena of human struggles and growth. So, in this sense, pastoral care and counselling are ways of doing theology”.¹²

Healing of sickness is a central motif in the New Testament. The parable of Jesus about the shepherd who left the ninety-nine to find the one lost sheep shows his deep concern for the individual in need (Matthew 18, 12-14)¹³. His response to those who criticized him for eating with sinners: “Those who are well have no need of physician, but those who are sick”

⁶ DPCC, p. 850.

⁷ Mary Anne Coate, *Sin, Guilt and Forgiveness. The hidden dimensions of a Pastoral Process*, Published by Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 1994, p. 180.

⁸ DPCC, p. 859.

⁹ Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, *Theology and Pastoral Counseling. A new Interdisciplinary approach*, Published by William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1995, p. 5.

¹⁰ Michael Jacobs, “Pastoral Counseling and Psychotherapy”, in: David Willows and John Swinton (eds.), *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care. Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary context*, Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2000, p. 90.

¹¹ Thomas C. Oden, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹² Howard Clinebell, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹³ *The Holy Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, Cambridge University Press, 2010.

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(Mark 2, 17) showed his ministry's orientation.¹⁴ So, Pastoral counselling is a "ministry of the church, a dimension of the church's unified ministry in the name of Christ"¹⁵. It is a unique form of counselling which uses spiritual and psychological resources for healing the whole person: mind, body and soul.

2. Modern elements of Pastoral counselling:

Background, beginnings and development

Thomas Oden sees the roots of it in the Church Fathers¹⁶, but the historical foundations of Pastoral counselling can more clearly be seen in later centuries.

Historian Brooks Holifield presented a variety of interrelated factors that contributed to the emergence of the Pastoral counselling movement, as: the growing interest since about 1870 in applying psychology to the work of ministry, the flowering of psychology of religion (William James, Sigmund Freud), the increasing use of psychological and counselling insights after the post-World War I, the surge of interest in psychology and the use of psychological and counselling approaches in ministry by pastors beginning in the 1920s.¹⁷

In 1925, *Doctor Richard Cabot*, a physician and adjunct at Harvard Divinity School, published an article in the "Survey Graphic" suggesting that every candidate for the ministry receive clinical training for pastoral work similar to the clinical training offered to medical students.¹⁸

In the 1930s, *Reverend Anton Boisen*, one of the founder of the *Clinical Pastoral Education*, placed theological students in supervised contact with patients in psychiatric and general hospitals.¹⁹

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁵ John Patton, *Pastoral Counselling: A Ministry of the Church*, Published by Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1983, p. 10.

¹⁶ See: *DPCC*, p. 857.

¹⁷ Brooks Holifield, *A history of Pastoral Care in America: from Salvation to Self-Realization*, Published by Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2005, p. 30.

¹⁸ http://www.spiritualcare.ca/association/download/cpehistory_stokoe.pdf - Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (19.01.2015).

¹⁹ <http://www.aapc.org/about-us/brief-history-on-pastoral-counseling.aspx> (20.01.2015).

One of the most important persons in the Pastoral counselling field was *Seward Hiltner*, who expressed in his book, “Religion and Health” (1943), the influence of clinical training for clergy and also the concern for the relation of religion and health. His second book, “Pastoral Counselling” (1949), was the most authoritative document in this regard.²⁰

In 1942, R. Rogers spoke for the first time about the “relationship therapy”, in which the person is the most important.²¹ The approach centered on the person is most widely used today in Pastoral counselling.

The appearance of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) in 1963 was significant for development of modern Pastoral counselling. This association has served “as a forum for discussion and debate about the nature of Pastoral counselling and its relationship to religious groups and to secular psychotherapy”. The first president of AAPC, Howard Clinebell, wrote the book “Basic Types of Pastoral Counselling”.²²

Arthur Caliendo, Senior Minister Emeritus, Marble Collegiate Church, New York City said that nowadays: “It only makes sense that religion and psychology - each of which is concerned with the fullness of the human experience - should be recognized as partners, because they function as partners within the human psyche”.²³

In the last chapter of the thesis I will try to present some perspectives and future directions in Pastoral counselling.

Basic elements in Pastoral counselling: structure, evaluation and process

Structuring and evaluation are done in the counselling process “to develop the context in which it takes place, these two stages help to determine whether the concern of the counselee is proper to be managed with the pastor or with another helping person”.²⁴

So, a pastoral counselor must cooperate with other specialists in order to offer the best solutions. The first stage of Pastoral counselling, *structuring*, emphasizes “the structure or the context of the counselling

²⁰ DPCC, p. 857.

²¹ Eugen Jurca, *Spovedanie și psihoterapie (Confession and psychotherapy)*, Published by Rotonda, Pitești, 2008, p. 14.

²² Howard Clinebell, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²³ <http://www.aapc.org/about-us/brief-history-on-pastoral-counseling.aspx> (20.01.2015).

²⁴ DPCC, p. 852.

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and the development of the relationship between pastor and the counseled person".²⁵

Evaluation or diagnosis is also a contextual issue, because it is very important for a pastoral counselor to help the people "to be aware of their real religious/spiritual personality", during the counselling process. The pastoral counselling relationship offers experience with a specialized person, who can be a "parent" for the people.²⁶

It is very important to help persons to find personal solutions, as the Greeks say, "counsel is a sacred thing", whereas "bad advice is worst for the adviser" (*malum consilium consultori pessimum*), so the counselor must be very careful.²⁷

In this perspective, Robert R. Carkhuff and William A. Anthony presented in the book "The skills of helping" the essential helping skills that counselors need to learn:

1. „*attending and caring behavior*, including frequent eye contact, expressing interest by one's posture and one's facial expression,

2. *inviting the person to talk* about significant issues by open-ended questions and brief comments or gestures,

3. *careful listening and observing* of non-verbal messages,

4. *following the person's lead*, avoiding switching topics, especially in the early stages of counseling, staying with the here-and-now flow of the relationship,

5. *empathetic responding* by paraphrasing the main thrust of the significant feelings and issues one has perceived and their meaning to the person,

6. *clarification* by summarizing the highpoints of what the person has communicated and thus checking out the counselor's understanding of their meanings for the person,

7. *exploring* areas that the person has not discussed by asking focusing questions,

8. *confronting* as needed and appropriate in the context of affirming the person,

9. *understanding* the meanings, issues and dynamics of the problem and *making recommendations for help* based on this diagnostic insight".²⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

²⁸ Robert R. Carkhuff and William A. Anthony, *The skills of helping*, Published by Human Resources Development Press, Amherst, 1979 apud Howard Clinebell, *op. cit.*, p. 93-94.

The pastoral counselor must hear and understand the life-story as it is presented and must start to reinterpret it in a new perspective, in the light of faith and community, because the pastoral counselor represents “a community and belief system which claims relevance for all of life and not just its crises. So it is difficult sometimes to identify when termination occurs. After this, pastoral counselees can maintain a relationship to the counselor and through their relationship with the religious community”.²⁹

The practice of counselling by pastors “must be seen not only as one expression of Christian concern to respond to human needs in general, but also as a part of the distinctive pastoral work of making Christian faith effective in the lives of people”.³⁰

Providers, recipients, aim and limits of Pastoral counselling

The providers of Pastoral counselling can be observed from the importance of the ministry in the Church. All Christians have a responsibility of caring for others, as though they were Christ: “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Matthew 25, 46) and they must follow the example of the “Good Shepherd”, Jesus Christ, because pastoral care is not only for clergy, but also for every Christian, as a mission.³¹

Pastoral counselling is not itself a profession but “a function performed by persons whose profession is ministry”.³²

Pastoral counselors, ministers and laypersons, have a unique mission: “the church’s ministry is not viewed by the Christian community as being closed up in the sanctuary, but as being extended into the whole community”.³³

Such representative persons can be or not in a specific offices in the Church, but they are authorized by the pastors, so they are experienced

²⁹ DPCC, p. 852-853.

³⁰ John B. Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, Published by Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1979, p. 4.

³¹ *DPC*, p. 188.

³² John Patton, *Pastoral Care in context - An introduction to Pastoral Care*, Published by Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1993, p. 55.

³³ Howard W. Stone, *Crisis Counseling*, Published by Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987, p. 69.

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people who possess skills of psychology and religion. They are called “ministers”, “priests”, “presbyters”, “pastors”, “deacons” or “confessors”.³⁴

Clebsch and Jaekle spoke about the *recipients* of Pastoral counselling and they said that this mission referred to “a common human experience, impinging on those within and outside the membership of churches, who suffer from distress and who lost the hope of life. The ministry of Pastoral counselling is directed to troubled persons and is aimed at supporting and helping them as individual persons”.³⁵

So, the main *aim* of Pastoral counselling is to support the people who are in having existential problems and who need help.³⁶

Pastoral counselling has also some *limits*, because there are many agencies that are acting for people who want to overcome the existential problems. Sometimes “the most caring pastoral act is referral to other persons or agencies better qualified to act”.³⁷

Every pastoral counselor, however skilled, fails to help some people: “as in Jesus’ parable of the sower, the seeds in counselling do not always fall on receptive soil; the counselor’s job is to keep sowing, trusting the God-given growth forces in people and relationships and remembering that he or she is an imperfect instrument for communicating healing resources beyond her or himself”.³⁸

Functions of Pastoral counselling: healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling

Clebsch and Jaekle, authors of the book “Pastoral care in historical perspective” have identified four main pastoral functions of Pastoral counselling: healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling.³⁹

1. *Healing* is that function in which “a representative Christian person helps another person to be restored to a condition of wholeness, improvement of spiritual insight and welfare. Pastoral healing involves the recuperation of the person’s soul seeking to be healed from a specific problem”. In the

³⁴ William A. Clebsch, Charles R. Jaekle, *Pastoral care in historical perspective*, Published by Jason Aronson, New York, 1994, p. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁶ *DPC*, p. 189.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Howard Clinebell, *op. cit.*, p. 428.

³⁹ William A. Clebsch, Charles R. Jaekle, *op. cit.*, p. 43-59.

healing ministry there are a lot of methods such as: anointing, prayers, exorcism (using of sacred words and holy rites), medicine, sacramental ministrations, psychological methods.

2. *Sustaining* consists of helping a person to endure and to overcome an existential problem. Pastoral sustaining has four tasks: the first task of *preservation* “helps the people to keep their faith, even if it is very less”. Second, this function “offered the *consolation* that actual losses could not nullify the person’s opportunity to achieve his destiny in God”. Third, *consolidation* “of the remaining resources available to the sufferer creates a new mobilization for people”. Finally came *redemption*, that “helps a deprived person, who has embraced his loss and regrouped his remaining resources, begin to build an ongoing life that pursues its fulfillment and destiny on a new basis”.

3. The pastoral function of *guiding* consists of assisting persons to make difficult choices. Guidance employs two modes: “deductive guidance draw out the own resources of experiences and values for different decisions while inductive guidance lead the individual to adopt a set of values and criteria by which to make his decision”.

4. The *reconciling* function seeks to re-establish broken relationship between people and between people and God. This function employs two modes of operation: *forgiveness* and *discipline*.⁴⁰

Christian pastoral care has employed the mode of *forgiveness* “in the sacramental acts of confession and absolution, for the restoration of right relations with God and the other people”.⁴¹ Without the ability of countenance “the possibility of forgiveness may be seriously impeded in their search for some peace of mind”.⁴² Therefore Confession and repentance may be considered necessary preconditions to forgiveness as a reality in the life of human being.

After forgiveness, *discipline* can be regarded as a way of “helping persons from difficult situations in order to re-establish good relationships”.⁴³

In order to understand the need of Pastoral counselling it is important to know that sometimes suffering is related to spiritual problems.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *DPCC*, p. 9.

⁴² Mary Anne Coate, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁴³ *DPCC*, p. 9.

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At present, the biggest existential problem for human being is the absence of community as a result of the lack of interpersonal communication. Communication has become impersonal, the individual is promoted and not the person (so it is lost the personality of the human being, in communion), the individualism and self-sufficiency are emphasized (at the expense of community life and solidarity). Many people are confused, demoralized and suffer from internal disturbances. They suffer loneliness, isolation, depression and even suicide. In these times of economic and moral crisis, suicide cases rise (for example, in 2011, in Romania there were 2.874 cases of suicide⁴⁴). This can be interpreted as a direct result of the fact that many people don't find the meaning of existence in communion, in exchanging and sharing with the others, the solutions for existential problems.

These problems can be managed with the help of Pastoral Counselling, a unique form of counselling which uses spiritual and psychological resources for healing persons who are in existential crisis. Pastoral counselling is not a profession, but a type of care offered by the Church, a function performed by chaplains.

⁴⁴ www.legmed.ro, National Institute of Legal Medicine "Mina Minovici", Romania (6.12.2014).