

Educational Counseling and Religious-Pastoral Psychotherapy in Prisons. Structural Guidelines for the Approach and Recuperative Intervention

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Abstract: *On the foundation of Christian doctrine, Rumanian Orthodox Church created and maintained a living relationship with the prison environment for the moral and social rehabilitation of inmates. Continuously adapting, the Church became receptive to the new challenges and sought to take on new responsibilities, including religious and moral counseling and education. The present paper, which is intended to be a guide for the chaplain priest today, exposes an in-depth analysis of the psycho-spiritual processes involved in delinquent behavior; presents an informative material for the most common psychopathologies specific to this space and proposes psycho-pastoral techniques with a sanogenic role.*

The originality of this study is the use of materials specific to classical counseling and psychotherapy in a pastoral context. Thus, attitudes such as unconditional acceptance, empathy, congruence, collaboration and abilities such as active listening, observation, feedback, summarization, etc. are scriptural justified and constitute the therapeutic reference frame. Christian counseling and pastoral psychotherapy, with a role in reaffirming God's image in man, are consistent with the theoretical foundations of two empirically sustained contemporary approaches: cognitive-behavioral therapy and logotherapy. The common goal of building the relationship between psychology and theology is „the new man" (Ephesians 4, 24), rehabilitated man, transformed by personal effort and free choice, both spiritually and cognitively and behaviorally. The efficiency of the chaplain priest in his psycho-pastoral and educational interventions is conditioned by the correct appropriation and implementation of the theoretical elements, but also by the effort directed towards achieving this change in his own person. The guide does not mean replacing the psychologist's work but completing.

Keywords: christian counseling, chaplain priest, penitentiary, rehabilitation, moral education.

Introduction

The Savior Himself puts a great emphasis on those imprisoned, identifying Himself with them without insisting on the reason why they arrived there, as we do in the contemporary world to justify our indifference to them. „They are there for a reason, they deserve it!"- this is our automatically settled and unconscious thought. The Savior's warning shows us that He focuses His entire attention on the recovery of the sinner, not on the rigorous punishment with the means of earthly justice

Therefore, He generates an emphasis shift, in the eyes of the Savior the delimitation of a human from evil is more important, the exorcism of evil from one's being instead of the cruel punishment of the evil done. We must take into account this ontological corrective attitude. Evil must not be avenged, perpetuated into history, but annihilated, melted, dissolved. And this is done through an intervention to reconstruct the personality of the

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perpetrator, the "generator" of evil, not by focusing on punishment. This is the task of the priest, the true disciple of the Savior who understands his purpose. Knowing the fact that the formation and development of the moral, relational-value dimension of human personality is one of the priorities of most contemporary educational systems, we consider that an exemplary mobilization of human and material resources in the various educational institutions is required towards ensuring efficient moral education determined not only by analyzing the characteristics and problems of contemporary society, but also by the data history provides, especially since the decline of a society can start once it is incapable to manage and perpetuate traditions, values and culture.¹

Pastoral counseling and religious psychotherapy in the penitentiary

A terminological distinction is required: what is the difference between counseling and psychotherapy? Our guide is intended to be a counseling and not psychotherapy guide, for advising and educational-value training and not ultra-professional intervention, reserved for those with masters-doctoral specialization in psychotherapy.

Counseling is an interpersonal communication relationship used to help people with various problems, with the objective of finding a way to solve the problem someone is facing (a solution that implicitly implies the recognition of the truth about himself, a step forward in self-knowledge).² A communication relationship and a transfer of knowledge is established between the counselor and the beneficiary, which is very useful for the one who requested the aid.

We have therefore a transfer of knowledge and information³ from the counselor to the beneficiary. Psychotherapy implies on the other hand a transfer of energy from a psychotherapist to the beneficiary and it involves superior skills for the psychotherapist, adequate training (long-lasting, with adjacent practice), and on the part of the beneficiary superior emotional involvement. From the standpoint of the nature of the disorder,

¹ Adriana Denisa Manea, "Influences of religious education on the formation moral consciousness of students," in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, CIL (2014), p. 518-523.

² D. Ilișoi, A. Lesenciuc, E. Ciupercă, C. Ciupercă, A. Szilagyı, D.M. Pașca., *Consiliere și comunicare interpersonală*, 2010, București, Antet, p. 7;

³ Therefore, from the point of view of the depth of the relationship between the two, psychotherapy is deeper, longer lasting (several consecutive meetings) and is often also related to a medical act, whereas counseling is limited to more obvious aspects and easier to solve, even with a single appointment. (N.N.)

psychotherapy deals with disorders at the clinical level, while counseling "treats" less difficult, non-clinical or subclinical aspects.⁴

Moreover, counseling is a pro-active action that can be taken to prevent future slips and to train the beneficiary in advance for a positive approach of obstacles or problems, while psychotherapy is always post-factum, to repair, remedy and recover after suffering a defeat, injury, or failure and after a weakness has been expressed.

Over time counseling (or advising) has been practiced in various fields (by different specialists), especially in religion, pursuing the same objective: the well-being⁵ of the person, the fortification of the humanity. Spiritual (or clerical, pastoral) counseling is basically a therapeutic approach that uses psychological and spiritual resources to solve the internal or external conflicts of applicants. The training of the counselor (in our case the pastoral counselor) must be both psychological and theological.⁶

In a secularized and highly materialist world, there is a tendency to despise (or at least neglect) all that is religious, spiritual. Despite this, scientific studies in psychology, sociology, neurology and medicine support the importance and effectiveness of spiritual counseling in the overall orchestra of counseling practice, the latter being older than all others which we can subsume to the general concept of "laic counseling."

Thus, the involvement of the clergy in the problems of the sick, oppressed, aggrieved, lonely, imprisoned, etc. is a divine commandment (Matthew 25, 31-46), and it has been a respected requisition since the beginnings of Christendom⁷. The objective of this research is to standardize the pastoral practice of the priests responsible for the recovery of detainees.⁸ The purpose of pastoral counseling is to help detainees become honest people, able to help themselves, to manage on their own after being released, to integrate well into society. This implies their immanent development, in self-understanding, knowing themselves and the others (including the

⁴ R. Nelson-Jones, *Manual de consiliere*, București, EdituraTrei, 2009, p. 15; Ioan Popa-Bota, "Manifestarea Valorilor și a Cunoștințelor Religioase în Propriile Atitudini și Comportamente: Direcții Orientative de Praxis Misionar-Educațional în Predarea Religiei pentru Gimnaziu," in *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 302.

⁵ By this we understand psychological comfort, peace with yourself, inner peace, self-acceptance, reconciliation with others, predisposition for love, etc.

⁶ Teofil Tia, M. Pașca, „*Psihologie Pastorală. Reperele psihologice ale consilierii pastorale*”, Alba-Iulia, Reîntregirea, 2007, p. 112.

⁷ One term, with a great echo amongst those with theological training, says everything: "Vasiliada". (N.N.)

⁸ The concept of "recovery" is polyhedral, assuming: attaching them to true values, reforming the perspective about life, adapting to the exigencies of living in society, giving up the recourse to violence, etc. (N.N.)

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surrounding reality). In other words, to be helped to acquire a constellation of values to guide them in their lives.⁹

The history and effectiveness of pastoral-religious assistance in prison

The role of the priest and the importance of counseling (religious included) in prisons fluctuated over time, depending on the dominant culture for a particular geographic space. Therefore since 1930 the priest (religious pastor or leader) becomes more and more involved in the rehabilitation process¹⁰, his capital role in the penitentiary being publicly proclaimed. We quote a speech from the American Penitentiary Association Congress from 1945: *We fully endorse the attempt at vocational guidance and education in our penal institutions. But we are convinced that without God, the philosophy of morality and ethics which stem from such a concept, such a rehabilitation is not possible.*¹¹

In the Romanian penitentiary system, the religious service is regulated since 1874 by the "Prison Law" (from February 1st), although the priest's involvement in corrective and moral education is confirmed by many other previous sources. After 1990, chapels are introduced in penitentiaries around the country where a chaplain serves. In 1995 the first UN Congress validated the right of detainees for religious assistance, and the Romanian Constitution, Article 29 (Freedom of Conscience) states: "Freedom of thought and opinion, as well as the freedom of religious beliefs can not be restricted in any way".¹² The priest's activity is therefore well established, and among his attributions we mention two of them: the setup of the place of worship and the organization of religious services and other religious activities. We note that less emphasis is placed on the counseling side, which seems to belong exclusively to the psychologist's jurisdiction.

Recent studies are confirming the effectiveness of spiritual counseling, and it surpassing many other corrective programs; thus, a consistent series of Western scientific articles have shown that religious religious programs favor adaptation and reduce recidivism. Moreover, established psychotherapists have shown that a combination of pastoral counseling and cognitive-behavioral therapy reduces depression much more effectively than each of these methods do, taken separately.

⁹ The multicultural and multiconfessional society allowed for the diversification of counseling offers, including in the penitentiary perimeter. We will resort to the specific bibliography, recovering everything that is valid from the Orthodox point of view, even if the Protestant (or even Neoprotestant) environment assumed it. (N.N.)

¹⁰ L. Jody Sundt, H. R. Dammer & F.T. Cullen „The Role of the Prison Chaplain in Rehabilitation”, *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, XXXV (2002), no. 3-4, p. 59-86.

¹¹ C. E. Krumbholz, "Message from the president," *Proceedings of the Seventy-Fourth Congress of the American Prison Association*, 1944, p. 170-172.

¹² „Constituția României”, published in *Monitorul Oficial*, nr. 233, din 21 nov. 1991.

In study conducted in 2002 among US penitentiary priests for the question: „*What do you think is the best way to rehabilitate offenders?*” the answers have the following hierarchy: first place, changing the values of detainees, through religion; second place, learning the skills which enable detainees to get a job after release; third: good education. Most do not consider conversion as important or necessary, so there is no emphasis on this during the counseling process. Counseling, however, acquires new nuances, specific to the current approaches in psychology, being sensitive to: reality therapy, customer-centered counseling, group counseling, cognitive-behavioral therapy.

The biblical and patristic perspective on responsibility towards the imprisoned

The Holy Fathers had their own incursions into the world of those deprived of their liberty. For example, we're told about St. Panteleimon that he sold his fortune and he gave some of the money to those in prison, and Saint Diomed, a physician, was offering free medical services to those imprisoned.¹³ They related to the prisoners through the Gospel, further reinforced by St. John Chrysostom, who was interceding for the prisoners "as for Christ".¹⁴

Not forgetting those who are imprisoned is a Christian obligation taken from the Savior and the Apostles: "Remember those in prison, as though you were in prison with them, and the mistreated, as though you yourselves were suffering bodily." (Hebrews 13:3). They offer a paragon of patience and a way of adapting,¹⁵ singing and praying, transforming the external environment of punishment into a tolerable one (Acts 16:25). According to the Holy Scripture, the mission of the priest is generally to bring them all "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). This noble and difficult task rests with the chaplain priest, the "light" that illuminates a place that symbolizes the fallen world, the darkness.

Whether we call it "spiritual counseling", "religious and moral counseling", "educational", "pastoral" or "Christian formative", the structural elements that must be known to the chaplain priest are the same: on the one hand the theory and practice of classical (or secular) counseling, and on the other hand, religious techniques and means (prayer, meditation, confession, etc.). The professional duty of penitentiary priests is to integrate them into unity, with religious and moral effects on the personality of the detainee.

¹³ I. D. Beșleagă, *Asistența religioasă în unitățile sistemului penitenciar românesc*, București, Universității „Carol Davila”, 2013, p. 48, Apud. P. Comșa, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare*, Bucureștim ASA, 2003.

¹⁴ I. D. Beșleagă, *Asistența religioasă în unitățile sistemului penitenciar românesc*, p. 49.

¹⁵ We would call it today a coping mechanism (our note).

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Therefore, the issues that can be discussed in counseling or formative interaction sessions with prisoners are countless, the themes being varied: everything they consider problematic for themselves can become a subject to be counseled, the priest coming with the religious, pastoral and spiritual perspective. The priest thus makes an offer of Christian values that can illuminate, guide, clarify and enrich the detainee.

The requirements of pastoral counselling in the penitentiary

The major challenge for today's prison managers is to maintain a balance between the institution's intention to punish undesirable behavior (from the point of view of society norms) and to assist detainees in the process of correction and reintegration into society. Detention raises at least two problems for the detainees: the first is the adaptation to the norms and values of the institution, and the second concerns the further development of his personality.¹⁶

a. Identification of possible psychological disorders (and deficiencies) present in detainees

This identification is important in order to adapt the counseling process to the specifics of the beneficiary; if the counselor priest ignores these disorders the effectiveness of his work will be greatly reduced, the beneficiary not having the capability to fully absorb the priest's constructive message, and by the end of the session the priest may experience a sense of failure or dissatisfaction. We will list some of the most common psychological disorders:

- *Anxiety and the pastoral therapeutic approach.* There are people entering the penitentiary with anxiety (or only with a predisposition) but also acquiring it inside the institution, based on a very strong stress such as adapting to the prison environment. Symptoms are: heavy, rapid breathing, redness, increased heart rates, abdominal pain, muscle spasms, migraines, sweating, etc.¹⁷

Relaxation using breathing is indicated at such times to restore homeostasis. Controlled, abdominal and deep breathing is performed for 5-10 minutes. In the same way the discussions help with the emotional ventilation process. Psalm 90 is recommended as a spiritual technique (read aloud and then analysed in depth). Also, *The Prayer of the Hearth* can be used in combination with relaxation using breathing.

- *Depression (or despair) and the pastoral therapeutic approach.* The frequency of the depressive disorder is increasing, even in the outside population, even more so in the penitentiary environment. It's easy to see

¹⁶ A. Pavel, *Introducere în probațiune*, București, Ed. Național, 2001, p. 29.

¹⁷ D. J. Cooke, P.J. Baldwin, J. Howison, *Psychology in prisons*, New York, Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2002, p. 60-61.

that these people feel they no longer have energy, they do not care, they have no appetite for food or life, they are hard to get out of bed, they cannot sleep or sleep too much, they feel hopeless, they often think of suicide (this needs to be taken seriously and discussed), they do not want to talk to others, etc.¹⁸

There are a few steps that need to be followed in this situation:

- We listen carefully and show interest to the difficulties expressed by the detainee and prove that we understand his psychological and emotional state;

- We offer him hope and reassure he can change his optics and the way he sees things. We must not promise anything without cover, meaning not promise positive future states of which we are unsure;

- If there are practical and urgent problems, these must be addressed with priority;

- It is important to support him to keep engaged in the activities he previously had;

- Under no circumstances should we relativize his symptoms, just to get rid of him. If we agree with what he says, especially with the fact that the situation he is experiencing is difficult, we need to communicate this.

Suicidal tendencies along with self harming behaviors are always a problem that must not be ignored. We have to answer a question: what is the reason for doing this? Does he want to die, wishes to attract attention, seeks other benefits from this behavior?¹⁹

The pastoral approach implies that the counseling priest must show understanding, offer hope and prospects, practical suggestions and to find solutions together with the detainee. Typically, such persons should not be left alone, but should be integrated into a group or kept in constant contact with the staff or other detainees. If he has a continuous occupation, managing these tendencies will be much easier.²⁰

b. *Illiteracy (factual or "functional")*. A particular category of detainees is represented by those with *learning difficulties* due to either obvious medical conditions or socio-economic factors. The level of education is a predisposing factor to delinquent behavior, and in our country, illiteracy is often found in certain social categories.

c. Pastoral principle: relating to the inmate with "intelligent goodwill"

The counseling priest has the duty to deal with all inmates, regardless of the level of education or the ethnic group they belong to. Here are some ways to manage these situations:

- It is advisable to study both the strengths and the weaknesses of each inmate;

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 61-62.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 62-63.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 92-98.

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- The activities they perform are much easier to learn and improve if they follow a certain routine. Any sudden change causes anxiety and possibly avoidance;

- To help the inmate learn a new behaviour or new skill, dividing into successive work steps for learning is advised;

- It is useful to emphasize and build on what is of interest to the inmate and on his personal strengths;

- We must try to reduce anxiety whenever it occurs (usually when confronted with difficult tasks);

- It often happens that those with learning difficulties are more difficult to integrate into society or in a group, but isolation is not a solution (except for serious mental illness).²¹

A distinction must also be made between the inmates expressed needs (which may be real or fictitious in order to manipulate or reach a certain goal) and his hidden needs (whether consciously avoided or consolidated in the unconscious).

When there are requests from detainees, they should be treated carefully because they represent an important element in creating a *functional therapeutic relationship*.

We are thus reinforcing the detainee's willingness to follow²²; the positive relationship with an inmate will increase the frequency of desirable behaviors. The real and consciously expressed needs can be fulfilled if possible, and the real but unconscious needs must be brought forward and fulfilled as far as possible.

The pastoral care for various types of inmates

Prison life is difficult and risky even for the institution staff. Efficient management of emotional, cognitive and behavioral problems of prisoners can prevent acts of violence, abuse or even death. It is much easier for staff with direct contact to detainees to identify those with high aggressive potential *if some typologies are known*.

The priests pastoral care must be initiated and based on the knowledge of the typology of each inmate. Depending on the needs of inmates and the purpose of the penitentiary, the involvement of the priest through his activity of spiritual and educational counseling must be structured and supported by appropriate abilities, techniques (methods) and activities.

Religion seeks to increase the mental health potential and the responsibility of the human person. A successful pastoral counseling offers psychological strength to the inmate, attachment to Christian values (which

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 98-101.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 89.

are universal), openness to fellows (ie, a predisposition for love and respectful behaviour towards others), meaning additional social consciousness. The greatest achievement, however, is attaining the sense of transcendence, by this the inmate to developing care for his eternal life, for his afterdeath fate, which religion proclaims. If there is an interest for his afterlife, he will become very attentive to the details of the current world.

As a fact acknowledged in the scientific area, religion has many functions: spiritual - the divine-human relationship; personal self-development - knowing and capitalizing on personal resources; problem-solving - personal, relational, decision-making, interpersonal problems etc.; self-control - balanced management of emotions and thoughts.²³

By knowing these typologies, the priest can perform group counseling, selecting the beneficiaries. He can use the video projector and some PowerPoint presentations, like a teacher in the classroom, adhering to a didactic program and teaching lessons to the students. But instead of having a certain class, in the penitentiary he will have certain groups established according to the inmate's typology. He can show documentary films or content from the penitentiary environment, segmenting the film to extract moral conclusions and highlight life principles.

This will offer inmates the chance to exercise their ability to express themselves and communicate, to think and to identify Christian values present in the film (or presentation). They can be challenged to express how they would act in similar conditions, thereby enhancing their own decision-making potential, their independent thinking and to assimilate the values proposed by society and religion.

The priest should consider four elements in his activity: 1. Clearly formulate a plan of action (for example: viewing a film about religious values); 2. To permanently monitor the recuperative intervention (how often inmates engage and participate in the pastoral and pedagogical moment or they separate, ironically disapprove or disturb others); 3. Evaluate the outcome (if it had a public impact or engages emotionally; has short, medium and long-term effects; the inmates continue to discuss the actions or found practical uses).

The genesis of deviant behavior. Cultural secularization and the atrophy of spirituality

The "death of God" triggered the "deification" of man, man's self-proclaiming as a supreme being in the universe and in the entire the conscious existence. The empty place was quickly occupied by the "interested" (who in fact hastened to vacate the place for himself). The

²³ M. Răducănu, *Credința creștin-ortodoxă, valoare profilactică și terapeutică în psihiatria românească contemporană*, Ed. Reîntregirea, Alba – Iulia, 2011, p. 20.

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proclamation in the public space and culture of the "death of God" meant, as a consequence, the right of man to behave as though He did not even exist. And "if God does not exist - said Dostoevsky - everything is allowed!". Everyone can pursue their own interest, even though it seriously damages others.

Pursuing the personal interest without any attention to the well-being of others was a process of social degradation and decline of communities; specifically, its reoriented priorities, made mutations in the personal and collective values system, spread conditions from the psychopathology area, allowed behavioral deviance and anti-social attitudes. The disastrous effects are the result of non-observance of the second commandment of Christianity: "Love your neighbour as yourself". Man began to love himself to the detriment of his neighbor, overturning the equilibrium.

The deviant behavior is the effect of eliminating the Divine from social life, expressing itself primarily in the society, and then in the penitentiary. Reassessing the importance of the relationship with God (the vertical relationship) has as a first effect the improvement of the natural relationships between people (horizontal relationship). Reassessing the problem of God can reorient one towards the authentic values, and this represents the beginning of healing. The thought: "God may be alive!" - is the beginning of healing.

The atrophy of spirituality at the individual level results in a clinical and psychopathological picture comprising: mental disorders, sexual deviations, irrational beliefs, multiple addictions; antisocial behaviors, etc. Determining the symptoms is the first step, the first phase of therapy, the so-called radiography stage. The next stage, the therapy itself, analysis and intervention, is an in-depth stage with chances of being effective, seeking to solve the causes and origin of the problems.²⁴

Criminal behavior

Although the causes of delinquent behavior can be classified in many ways, we opt for the version in which three aspects are recognized as having a decisive role: personality, entourage (environment) and society.

The role of personality can be easily observed in our community as well as in the penitentiary. Social conditioning works to a greater or lesser extent, according to the type of personality of the person to whom it is applied. Extroverts, for example, are harder to respond to conditioning than introverts, and the results observable in the former (applying corrective strategies) will be worse than those observable to the others.

The environment can invite for moral crime and dissolution, if it is poor in its values. The lack of stable reference points in a community

²⁴ F. Gheorghe, *Fenomenologie penitenciară*, București, Ed. Oscar Print, 2003, p. 86.

becomes a framework conducive to a culture unfavorable to moral values. The heterogeneity of the environment accentuates the contamination phenomenon, rapidly reaching a moral, behavioral, educational decline.²⁵

Spiritual counseling has a motivational role which increases self-efficacy, on one hand fortifying the inmate's confidence about the change possible through his own effort, and on the other hand, forging trust in God's participation in this change. The inmate understands that he is not alone in his corrective approach and the action to change for the better, of spiritual growth is in his interest in the first place.

Another purpose of spiritual counseling is to create a strong bond, primarily between the inmate and the priest, and secondly between the prisoner and God, a link that is highlighted by communication, safe, relaxing relationship in both directions, both horizontally and vertically. This connection will also mean the definitive end of the emotional loneliness feeling that challenges all people throughout their lives. Once the link is created, the inmate will never feel alone.

Through all the activities in the penitentiary, despite their low connections, an attempt is made to anchor the inmate to the reality outside of the prison environment. It is of particular importance to imaginarily expose himself to the outside world. To the extent that at this imaginative level there is a reformation of the preoccupations, aims, aspirations of the inmate in the direction of human and Christian values, placing on a positive trajectory after release is guaranteed.

Social assistants, psychologists, counselors are working towards this aim, but we must not neglect the aspects handled by the priest – the definitive anchoring in God. Christian values and models will seed in the prisoner's soul intercommunion with God. As soon as the prisoner reaches perception of God's presence as being comforting and protective, he will make every effort to keep this precious acquisition even after leaving the prison environment. He will see God as the pillar of fire that guides the believer.

The problems the detainee will have to solve after release will not crush him anymore, for he will no longer feel alone, but guided and accompanied on the path of the beginning of a new life. He will overcome all difficulties not only through his own effort but through a teandrical work, a joint work of man and God. It is a change of optics that generates security and inner comfort.

The spiritual life - path of healing and psychological and behavioural regeneration

²⁵ A. Leaua, *Penitenciarul, psihologie socială aplicată*, Iași, Ed. Lumen, 2006, p. 14-20.

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The patristic perspective puts the chaplain priest mission in another special light. He is in the Shepherd's position looking for lost sheep, leaving the 99 sheep that do not need salvation.

St. Basil the Great speaks of healing by the imitation of Christ: the weaknesses of the soul are treated by their crucifixion, by suffering. To crucify yourself with Christ implies accepting the proscscription on the one hand, and on the other the rebirth: "the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

A conscious relationship with God has colossal beneficial effects for the inmate. Identifying a transcendent point of reference has as a psychological effect of the power of managing the suffering, to cast away loneliness, and to motivate for success. Only by assumption or internalizing this will lead to moral and spiritual progress through real communion with Christ. An important role in this direction is the attendance of the services in the institution, which removes routine, transposing the detainee into another world. The chapel's full picture has special psychological and spiritual effects: it introduces the inmate into a heavenly world, the presence there becoming a true foretaste of the Eternal Kingdom, generating an atmosphere of non-earthly joy that conveys the joy of a new beginning. But this ontological mutation can not take place without parting with the past, without breaking off with sin, "the beginning of the appropriation of the good, being the separation from the evil ones" (St. Basil the Great)²⁶.

Counseling act structure

In a counseling relationship, communication is the key that paves the way for change. "The beginning of all things is the word" (Ecclesiastes 37:20). All of the abilities above converge in this direction; communication and relationship. Functional communication is objectified in a dialogue, which implies the existence of a transmitter, a receiver and a message. Dialogue is always bidirectional, the roles being interchangeable.

Verbal communication has a few points that we must highlight: positive appreciation, tone, use of reinforcements (eg: "I understand!", "Continue!", "How interesting"etc.), open questions or even silence.²⁷ Open questions are a way of creating a dialogue and to stimulating the inmate towards exteriorization (For example, "What do you think about how God works with people?").²⁸

„Restraint" in verbal expression is essential. "More" does not mean "better". The Holy Scripture confirms this truth through the advice: "Collect

²⁶ D. I. Beșleagă, *Asistența religioasă în unitățile sistemului penitenciar românesc*, p. 48, Apud. Petre Comșa, *Cunoașterea lui Dumnezeu la Sfântul Vasile cel Mare*, p. 49-50-

²⁷ D. J. Cooke, P. J. Baldwin, J. Howison, „*Psychology in prisons*”, p. 83.

²⁸ G. Miller, *Incorporating spirituality in Counseling and Psychotherapy Theory and Technique*, New Jersey, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Hoboken, 2003, p. 55.

your word; with few say many; be like one who knows ... even when silent."(Ecclesiastes 32:9). But communication doesn't mean just words, because we communicate with our whole being. Therefore, a great deal of what we say is done by behavioral, non-verbal way²⁹: body position, facial expressions and microexpressions, clothing details, care, hygiene, etc. Feedback or reaction to what the prisoner says supports this communication and further develops it.³⁰

An important element of communication is self-disclosure. In some specialized papers³¹ there is the idea that a non-personal discussion is not liberating or enriching. In the pastoral universe it is also widespread the opposite and wrong idea that the priest should always reprimand the penitent. It is wrong to generalize what can only work in a particular case. In general, criticism and rebuke lead to retreat and avoidance or even violence, and free and informal talks that touch on subjects of personal nature that are sincere, with no hidden intentions, relaxed draws near and liberate the inmate.

Revealing elements of the priest's personal life is useful as long as it is done sparingly and at the right time. It is advisable to know the person to whom we confess and to have a professional relationship already established before doing so. The level of self-revelation must not touch elements of intimacy (of the priest, of his family, of other close ones) through which he can be blackmailed or manipulated. Getting close to the inmate is accomplished through honest, open, non-invasive communication and from close positions. Any evidence of superiority from the priest can be perceived as offensive and aggressive ("And the man of God is proud and full of himself?"), greatly harming communication.

Establishing a functional relationship is the first purpose of counseling and begins with good communication. A collaboration is productive as long as it involves a certain degree of safety. The counselor has the duty to inspire respect and trust. The inmate must be approached at a comfortable level for him, the priest descending to this level and building on what he has good, valuable, positive, then trying to eliminate what is evil. Counseling should not be confused with preaching or confession.

It is a process whose "mandatory ingredients" are: listening, involvement, understanding, and change. Before we learn to communicate, we must learn to observe. Adapting our response to a given situation makes it "good" or "bad". The technique of observation has two parts: first, you gather the information and only after that draw the conclusions. The details that we need to take into consideration are those related to behavior, facial

²⁹ T. Reiman, *Limbajul trupului*, București, Ed. Curtea veche, 2010, p. 14.

³⁰ A. Băban, *Consilierea educațională. Ghid metodologic pentru orele de dirigenție și consiliere*, București, Ed. ASCR, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, p. 33.

³¹ D. I. Beșleagă, *Asistența religioasă în unitățile sistemului penitenciar românesc*, p. 65.

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expressions, clothing, wording nuances, etc. The inferences we make are those that give us an idea of how the inmate feels, thinks, what is his emotional state, or what is the behavior we can expect.³² A good observer is always one step ahead, managing the situation in a way favorable to the recovery of the person in front.

Listening is another skill required for the counseling priest. From the beginning we make the difference between listening and hearing. "Listening" is not just "hearing," but also nonverbal answering, emotional participation in what the inmate says. Listening thus implies empathy, it is empathic, demonstrates interest, concern, and is often accompanied by behavioral or verbal signals of motivational nature (which causes the inmate to continue with the impetus).

Also, empathic listening must be active and real (ie non-hypocritical, formal, conjunctural, because "it's required by the the prison regulations", but with passion and dedication). Falsification of empathetic listening is easily detectable by the inmate, regardless of his or her social status or education level. Empathic listening reveals the respect we give to the one in front of us, but it also betrays the degree of vocation as a priest we have: do we do it because it is in the job description or because we feel it is useful and constructive for a fellow man?

The information we use for the counseling must be translated into an interface language, adapted to the one in front of us. They must be correct and stimulate reflection, meditation, analysis of a particular subject. Paraphrasing helps us to show the inmate that his message was well understood, correctly received, and the use of his own words is not considered an attack on his person. Reflection helps the counselor to understand correctly what the inmate said, offering the opportunity to correct the elements perceived wrongly. Eventually, by summarizing we can structure all the information obtained in a specific time, clarifying the overall panorama for both the counseling priest and the inmate.³³

Beyond all this, a pastoral counselor must have a strengthened spiritual life and a continuous relationship with God. In addition to the characteristics of the laic counselor, he must also be: a friendly spirit, free and naturally acting, as he really is (not dramatized, such as an actor on the stage, nor pharisaical), to offer freedom of decision to the one whom he advises, and he must know his limits.³⁴ Thinking he can do more than he really can shows naivety and discredits him.

A psychotherapeutic perspective is logotherapy that has led to existential psychotherapy. Its founder, Viktor Frankl, compared to his

³² D. J. Cooke, P. J. Baldwin, J. Howison, „*Psychology in prisons*”, p. 81-82.

³³ A. Băban, *Consiliere educațională*, Cluj-Napoca, Imprimeria Ardealul, 2001, p. 34-35.

³⁴ M. J. Scott, *Arta consilierii cristocentrice*, Editura „Societatea P. de Misiune Creștină din România”, Oradea, 1993, pp. 51-54.

predecessors who emphasized the desire for power and pleasure, believes that the essence of earthly life and the primary need of the human being is to find out the purpose, to identify a meaning. The need to discover the meaning of life is the force that mobilizes for change. In existential perception inmates should be helped:

- To realize that the present is determined by the decisions of the past;
- To understand that although they cannot change the present, they can modify how they relate to these events;
- To learn from the past in order to rebuild the future;
- To accept their limits and to feel appreciated, even if they are not perfect;
- To know their motivations, desires, goals, objectives;³⁵

Every basic Christian catechism proclaims that the purpose of life is "salvation." But this is a notion to be explained, otherwise it will be understood in a reductive, simplistic, superficial manner. It will seem just a hypothesis of just a hoax in the interest of some institutions or people who want to take advantage of others, by manipulating them.

This notion must be explained as being a project for fulfillment and happiness of man, which consists of several stages, most of which are built here on Earth. Thus, life is composed of short, medium and long-term goals that will make up the total segment of life. Among the elements that can bring us happiness in life we must list: family, profession, education, relationships with others, relationship with God, thoughts, behaviors, emotions, etc. Each inmate must be helped by the counseling priest to draw up his own project of happiness.

Strategies may vary, methods can be changed, intervention is advisable to be tailored to each individual; the identifiable limits would be:

- Some change, others can never be changed;
- Forced change is not a real change, but only an apparent one; The use of force is contraindicated. If he is not allowed to change by its own will, he will not! Freedom, therefore, is part of the definition of man.
- Every time we want to change something, we must expect resistance or even fierce opposition;
- The relationship is the foundation for any progress.
- Each individual is unique, unrepeatable, a true universe, and we have to relate differently to each.³⁶

³⁵ S. Săndulache, *Consiliere și psihoterapie pastorală*, Oradea, Ed. Casa Cărții, 2009, p. 304-307.

³⁶ A. Băban, *Consiliere educațională*, p. 112-113.

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Conclusions: Beyond the liturgical ritual, we have the "teaching" obligation.

The chaplain priest's responsibilities go beyond the liturgical ritual and fit the needs of inmates: counseling, education (continuous training) and moral support (emotional support). The Savior's request: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19) reminds us that a condition of baptism, of new birth (John 3: 5), is teaching.

The essence of Christian teaching is derived from the word of God proclaiming great truth: that we are fallen beings, but - in spite of this - our fundamental nature, our original nature is good, and must be rediscovered, restored. Only by continuous education, through a perpetual re-formation in the spirit of authentic values, one can reach the "stature of the perfect man" (Ephesians 4:13). Our soul is a divine "gem", and has an immeasurable value. It is theologically called "the image of God" in us.

The reflection of Christ in us is accomplished by self-knowledge, by identifying our impulses, discovering our passions, shortcomings, thoughts and correcting them in the direction of a Christian and saving moral order. Therefore, the priests practice requires not only preachments, the proclamation of the word of God but also the use of strategies to facilitate this process of knowledge and self-knowledge, seeking for the best solutions which are always personalized, obtained by interacting with each detainee.

Educational counseling in the penitentiary is not alien or contrary to Christian teaching but complementary: it structures the overall educational process, simplifies it and systematizes it, offers new tools for evaluation, for intervention, for conceptualization of the problems faced by inmates. Similarly, information from psychology can help to assemble an overall perspective of what the integral, biological, psychological, and spiritual person is, that is, a *bio-psychological-socio-spiritual entity*.

The man is a perpetually changing creature, his needs are diversified (at the same pace as the technological momentum increases), and his adaptation to the new realities is mandatory for his spiritual and psychological and mental health. To search for the meaning of one's own life, of happiness, of self-fulfillment is not contradictory to the doctrine of the Church, but a form of evolving towards the essential, that is, to the truths proclaimed by the Church. And in this search for the essence and its discovery, the priest has the fundamental role of pastoral guidance. The intellectual, cultural, moral and civic value axis of each educable individual is a desirable construct that comes into shape, throughout one's development, starting with the first educational environment represented by family and continuing through the

specific forms/institutions (school, cultural, religious and social institutions).³⁷

Knowledge and understanding of human nature are not an option for today's priest, but a professional duty. People must be helped to abandon the wrong paths, get out of the hypnosis of evil, consciously opting for an itinerary that leads to happiness and the joy of being. Moral-Christian education and counseling is essential for this discovery journey. In this respect, the present article is intended to be only a page of an intervention guide for the counseling and religious-moral education of inmates from Romanian prisons.

³⁷ Adriana Denisa Manea, "Features of educational activities in the contemporary society", *Astra Salvensis*, VI (2018), no. 12, p. 245-253.

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