

# **THE PASTORAL CARE OF ADDICTS**

This course was conceived with the blessing of His Beatitude Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, from a desire to provide students within the Pastoral department of Theology Faculties with the instruments and information required in dealing with this special category of people, as much neglected as misunderstood. This course represents the result of the concentrated efforts of people dedicated to serving addicts, and not the expression of an academic, solemn way of thinking, however a dry one, lacking practical experience. As the domain of addiction is a vast and fascinating one, we are convinced that the present material will displease those seeking an exigency of the word, as well as those expecting an exhaustive scientific research. Still, we hope that we will stir the curiosity of the Theology students, who are animated by the desire of knowledge of the young Nathaniel, and determine them to explore this domain themselves until they acquire the strength to approach the disfigured face of the addict and restore its initial beauty, always bearing in mind the beautiful face of Christ.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE SPIRITUALITY OF ADDICTION**

By Fr. Julian Negru

During this lecture, we chose to speak about addiction in general, but we preferred discussing especially about alcoholism, as we see it as the most eloquent example of addiction. This, not only due to the fact that the phenomenon of alcoholism is by far the best-known in our country at the moment, but also to the fact that what is applied to the disease of alcoholism remains valid for the addiction to other substances or behaviors. Furthermore, the spiritual process of recovering from various dependencies is very similar, in almost all cases, whether one speaks about alcohol, cannabis or heroine. Of course, there are differences between addictions and their solutions; however, we shall highlight the similarities between them, trying to understand them better, from a theological coherent perspective.

Another reason for approaching the subject of alcoholism is that, this way, we will be able to find countless scriptural and patristic testimonies about alcohol-alcoholism-drunkenness, unlike illegal drugs, which were not so widespread in the old times. Certainly, a question arises in the mind of the young theologian: where does the necessity of acquiring and understanding these concepts that belong rather to the domain of medical, psychological, medical and social sciences stem from? As long as addiction is a disease, and this has been established since 1956 by the World Organization of Health, why does this domain have to be subject of theological studies as well, not only to those psychological, medical and social?

The answer lies in the following statements we shall enumerate and sustain with arguments:

**1. The consume of psychoactive substances affects all the dimensions of the human being: physical, psychological, social and spiritual.** The interests for authentic spiritual things, as well as the relationship with God, are severely affected by dependencies. **Addiction represents a visible manifestation of the degradation of the human spirit, an inevitable consequence and a form of the rejection of God,** in which the vulnerability to demonic attacks is extreme. That is why, according to the commitment made to Jesus Christ to serve as a fisherman of people and a doctor of souls, the priest must know how to bring the lost sheep, sick and threatened by eternal death, back to the stall. Then, in the attempt to assist people in the process of salvation, the priest will have to first heal them spiritually so as to finally offer them the supreme healing: salvation.

**2. The priest is a doctor of souls.** *“Orthodoxy is mainly a therapeutic method and education and the work of priests is mainly therapeutically. The priest can do charity work and many other works that belong to the Church, however all these need to be integrated in the therapeutically conduct.”* A priest with a real pastoral calling will not abide to bury those he could not help. He will not be satisfied only with encouraging those in pain, but he will do all that is possible to intervene in their lives, in order to change something, with the available pastoral methods.

**3. The consumption of alcohol is only a symptom of the disease of alcoholism and not the disease itself.** It only represents the tip of the iceberg, the part that cannot be seen by the unauthorized or/and careless eye, constituting the cause of serious spiritual illnesses.

Therefore, we have to see from a theological point of view, which are the inner mechanisms of the human being that awaken the irresistible need to consume a certain substance and lead, at a certain point, to a psychical and psychological addiction. We are convinced that somewhere, in the “lectern” of our souls, an intuition regarding this aspect already resides.

Firstly, we must say that the tendency towards a state of well-being, an undefined, yet persistent and influent striving, which determines most of our decisions, options and even tastes, exists in the soul of every human being. This paradisiacal state pre-exists our conscience and cannot be updated or fully accomplished in this world. The existential agitation is unavoidable in the fighting dimension of life, and man, through his free will, interprets and handles it as he wishes. The primordial tragedy can repeat itself with every man, every time he makes decisions in his life. He chooses either to sacrifice the future in order to experience a state of well-being in the present, or to sacrifice the present without having the certitude of a better life in the earthly future, but with the hope of a reward in the afterlife. The repeated choice of immediately satisfying a pleasure transforms, in time, the use into abuse, which then becomes routine and automatism, intoxication and obsession, and ends in psychical and psychological addiction.

The state after which the human soul craves is the result of that mystical aspiration towards absoluteness God bestowed upon us. This state, however, can be easily counterfeited and confused with the euphorically state given by the consummation of earthy substances: drugs. That is why in some primitive religions, the psychoactive substances have played the part of sacred stimulation in reaching states of religiosity, considered entrances in the sphere of the divine. Today the neurobiology of the brain explains with a scientifically precision the mechanism of producing

dopamine, which induces a state of euphoria and liberation, a liberation that leads from a single experience to the addiction to liberation. This state, provided by the molecule of pleasure, is actually nothing more than a pale imitation of that ecstatic state, experienced on the highest peaks of spirituality that one reaches only through asceticism with spiritual discernment and persistent prayer. Of course, most prefer the shortcut that finally leads to a dead end.

These modified spiritual states representing fundamentally contradictory positions on the ladder of salvation have been named, paradoxally, with the same name: drunkenness.

## I) DRUNKENNESS - IN THE OPINION OF THE HOLY FATHERS OF THE CHURCH

The state of drunkenness is an altered state of mind which can be achieved through various methods. Alcohol is just one of many causes that can produce the wanted feeling of beatitude. In other words, the state of drunkenness can be obtained without consuming alcohol. The Bible speaks very clearly about this possibility: “it is a pity for those that get drunk but not with wine” (Is. 29, 9).

The Holy Fathers also admit the possibility of experiencing same states of mind that are alike with the state of a man who becomes drunk without consuming alcohol.

As a key expert of the human soul insights Saint Basil the Great expresses this in a very clear way: “Anger is a drunkenness of the soul; it makes a human lose his judgment just like the wine itself. Sadness is also drunkenness because it confuses the mind. Fear, when it comes to life without a reason is another state of drunkenness. [...] And, to put it short, each of this states of mind that confuses the judgment, can be called based on right judgment, drunkenness”.<sup>1</sup>

Further on, developing this idea, Saint Basil The Great shows what astonishing resemblances exists between the drunkenness caused by alcohol and many self-intoxicated state of mind, for example the states of anger : “think about the angered man, how drunk of passion he is! He can’t control himself anymore; he doesn’t recognize other; just like in a night fight, he grabs all he can. He pounces upon everybody, he isn’t conscious anymore of what he is saying, he can’t be stopped, he swears, he hits, he threatens, he yells, he snaps. Run far from this drunkenness but avoid the alcohol intoxication as well.”<sup>2</sup>

So, we can see that alcohol is viewed by Saint Basil the Great as material substance that has the same effect upon human soul like different causes of spiritual natures. Though the alcohol is a material substance it has an immediate effect on the psychological and spiritual levels, competing therefore with other immaterial causes: anger, sadness, fear.

Therefore alcohol is just one of various causes that lead to obtaining a modified state of mind, called drunkenness.

We find the same idea at Saint John Chrysostom: “it is time now to advise you to avoid not only the common drunkenness but also the one without wine, because that one is much more terrifying. And do not be surprised of what I say to you. Because there is also drunkenness without wine. And

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<sup>1</sup> St. Basil the Great, *Homilies and Speeches*, trad. by Fr. D. Fecioru, E.I.B.M.B.O.R., Buc., 1986, p. 356

<sup>2</sup> *ibidem*

to confirm that such drunkenness exists, listen to the prophet that says: “it is a pity for those that get drunk but not with wine” [Is 29, 9]. What kind of drunkenness is this without wine?

There are many and of various forms. Because anger also produces drunkenness, and also pride, and madness, and each of the destructive passions that came into us because they produce in us a certain drunkenness and self-fulfilling that blinds our mind.

Drunkenness is nothing else but the waste of our natural powers and the loss of straight judgment and wisdom. [...] And pride and madness is another form of drunkenness much more terrifying than common drunkenness. Because who is enslaved by these passions loses his straight judgment upon reality and doesn't have a saner mind than that of insane people”.<sup>3</sup>

It looks like the expression “drunkenness without alcohol” was used by The Holy Fathers and not only as figure of speech with which to adorn their speech and writings. It was seen as different reality than the alcoholic intoxication, but one resembling through their manifestations.

Therefore, we find references of drunkenness without alcohol at many Holy Fathers and not only at the greatest speakers. For example Saint Antioch, in his words of wisdom about anger says:

“It is very good for man to force himself to control the passion of anger, to destroy his soul rashness, with long lasting patience and softness, with prayer and devoutness. Because the demon pushes to anger the one that wants to save his soul. Because the efforts that the man gathers through fast and prayer, through wakefulness or ceremonies, vanish after words in one second, the devil of anger taking the reward for many years of efforts. And this is the man that is **drunk without drinking wine!**”<sup>4</sup>

So the state of drunkenness regardless of the nature of its causes comes to us as a tempting reasonable alternative, though subjective, at objective reality, many times boring and dissatisfying, in which we live.

Indeed, this world can not entirely satisfy us because that's not the purpose it was created for. Drunkenness appears then as an easy, subtle and programmable refuge in a euphoric state or as a temporary release of one's ego, oppressive and, many times accusative.

From this point of view, drunkenness can be understood also as a state that willingly and consciously suspends the human conscience, or a total or partial censorship of the conscience, and substituting its qualms with on undeserved euphoria!

But a person that can commute can navigate between two or more realities is a person that is a sick as an alcoholic, even if he doesn't drink alcohol. Consciously change of objective reality with other subjective reality, made at demand, is a disease of the spirit generally speaking, and not only an alcoholic disease.

For example, the liar creates his own reality, different from that of others, enjoying with selfishness, the fact that he knows things that others don't know. It's like the dog that retreats in his kennel to leak his bone.

A genuine mythomaniac lies for pleasure, not with a purpose.

To sum up, we can say that, a person that gets drunk (with or without alcohol) is a person that craves to another reality than the one he lives in.

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<sup>3</sup> John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, Lord's Army PH, Sibiu, 2003, p. 83

<sup>4</sup> St. Antioch, *Prologoale*, Metropolitan of Oltenia Publishing House, Craiova, 1991, p. 200

It is actually the restlessness and the undefined will towards God's Kingdom.

In the opinion of The Holy Fathers, the drunkenness is any method of coming out from ourselves.

Coming out from ourselves is against the human nature when it's caused by selfishness.

But there is also a coming out into ourselves, when the purified soul meets God. In this case, coming out into ourselves is one that agrees with our nature, because our nature, was created so that it can share with God beyond its natural powers through grace. To get an ecstasy state of coming into ourselves is necessary a rediscovery of the lost ego.

"The man that got out from Heaven, got out of himself. He is searching for his ontological ego outside, in the variety of the creation". Otherwise God Himself teaches through the example of the prodigal son: "and coming into his senses he said..." (Luke 15, 17)

So, before meeting the Father the estranged son had to meet with himself. Only afterwards the feast could take place.

## II) ALCOHOLIC DRUNKENNESS – A VOLUNTARILY SURRENDER

Holy Scripture categorically condemns the habit of drinking excessive alcohol, because amplify the human nature defects: "Drunkenness multiplies the anger of the fool (...) shrinking the virtues and acquires injury" (Is. Sir. 31, 35) and that brings suffering and death: "Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living. Instead, be filled with the Spirit". (Eph. 5, 18)

But excessive drinking not only leads to a sickness of soul and body, but may take some more severe forms. Therefore, the attitude of some of the Holy Fathers is very categorical. If in general is put into practice the "hates sin and loves the sinner" principle, approaching the drunkenness issue we can see an obvious change of tone. Clement of Alexandria firmly states that drinking is poison: "should you abstain from drunkenness as hemlock, that both lead to death."<sup>5</sup>

Saint John Chrysostom states that „a drunken man is worse than a dead one”<sup>6</sup>. In his opinion, “drunkenness is a **willing surrender to the devil**. Drunkenness clouds the mind much more than demonic possession and it robs a drunken man of any kind of judgment. Often, when we see a possessed man, we pity him, we suffer for him and we show him much compassion; however, we behave in a totally different way with an drunk man; we revolt ourselves, we get angry, we call him names of all sorts. And why do we behave in this way? Because a man tortured by the evil demon unwillingly does what he is doing; he deserve forgiveness even if he kicks with his legs, even if he tears his clothes, even if he speaks shameful words; the alcohol addict, however, does not deserve forgiveness for what he is doing; he is utterly accused by family, by friends, by neighbors, by everybody, because he willingly got himself into this bad situation, he willingly surrendered himself to drunkenness.<sup>7</sup> In the view of Saint John Chrysostom, the passion of drinking is indeed

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<sup>5</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *The Paedagogus (The Instructor)*, Book II, Cap. 56. 3, în PSB, vol. 4, p. 263

<sup>6</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies to Genesis*, trad. by Pr. D. Fecioru, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Buc. 1987, p. 368

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 372

synonymous with demonic possession: „the one who spends his time in drunkenness and caress and feasts, serves the devil himself.”<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, the one who gets drunk risks losing his own salvation: “You cannot see the kingdom of heaven if you are an alcohol addict. Don’t be mistaken’, says Saint Paul, ‘neither the alcohol addicts, nor those who curse shall see God’s kingdom. But why do I speak of God’s kingdom? If you are an alcohol addict, you cannot see the things of this world. Drunkenness changes the day into a night and the light into darkness. Alcohol addicts have their eyes opened, but they cannot even see what lies in front of their feet. The atrocity does not resume only to this, beside it, alcohol addicts endure a much more frightening punishment: they are sad without a cause, angry, ill, continuously bantered and scolded. What forgiveness can these men, that bring upon themselves so many misfortunes, achieve? None! Where there is drunkenness, there is the devil himself.”<sup>9</sup>

The one who drinks without a measure is avoided not only by others, but even the Holy Spirit himself estranges from him: ‘Smoke drives away the bees, drunkenness drives away the heavenly graces.’<sup>10</sup> Alcohol (Spiritus) drives away the Spirit (um)! ‘My Spirit shall not remain in these people, as they are only flesh.’ (Fac. 6, 3)

In this way, we become more vulnerable to demonic attacks that slowly take control of our free will. Although it cannot be certified that **all** alcoholics are under a demonic possession, the passion of drinking represents the visible sign of our defeat in the invisible fight with the powers of darkness. That is why the most adequate person to approach the problem of alcoholism, due to his spiritual nature, is the priest. However, this requires much prayer and spiritual maturity on one hand, and understanding and professional training on the other, as ‘our fight is not one against the body and the blood, but one against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against the evil powers that roam the skies.’ (Efes. 6, 12) Although he fought with nerve against drunkenness, calling it ‘the national vice of countries with a cold climate’, Saint Theodosius recognizes his limits at a certain point, stating: ‘The priest easily drives away a demon from a possessed man, but to drive it away from an alcoholic addict is something that surpasses the exorcism of priests all over the world!’<sup>11</sup> It is an extremely provoking statement for a priest!

These thoughts help us understand that repeated states of drunkenness can drive a man, slowly but irreversibly, into ‘a much more terrifying situation than demonic possession’, towards a physical and psychological addiction to alcohol. Due to the fact that the alcoholic addict is a ‘willing demon’, there also exists the prejudice that he can willingly relinquish this passion. However, his free will, maybe the greatest gift from God, is enslaved by the devil and unable to fight. Will becomes of no use to an alcoholic addict. He finds himself in the dramatic situation in which he ‘would like to have the will to quit’ drinking. That is why, beside prayer, much effort, cooperation and spiritual support from others are required. Perhaps nowhere else are the words of the Holy Fathers more appropriate: “When it comes to sinning, the man sins on his own; but when it comes to recovering, he can recover only in communion.” As for the rest, according to studies, only 5 % (meaning 1 out

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<sup>8</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Omilii la parabola despre săracul Lazăr și bogatul nemilostiv*, Editura Sophia, Bucuresti, 2002, p. 7

<sup>9</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies to Mathew*, Homily no. LXX, trad. by Pr. D. Fecioru, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Buc., 1986, vol. 23, p.

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<sup>10</sup> Sf. Basil the Great, *Homilies and Speeches*, trad. by Fr. D. Fecioru, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Buc., 1986, p. 357

<sup>11</sup> T. Spidlik, *The Great Russian Mystics*, Ed. Ep. Dunării de jos, Galați, 1997, p. 35

of 20) succeed in remaining abstinent without help from a group support. In the case of alcoholism, group therapy is essential, and the involvement of the community in the recovering of the addict is an obligation and not an option.

### III) ADDICTION (ALCOHOLISM): SIN OR DISEASE?

The question above is just apparently a dilemma. Alcoholism cannot be considered a sin, for the simple reason that a sin is an act, a gesture deliberately and consciously committed, and alcoholism refers to a state of psychosomatic dependency acquired unwillingly as a result of excessive alcohol consume.

Why unwillingly? Someone eats chocolate to feel good, but develops diabetes. It is not known why only some develop diabetes, although some eat much more sweets than they do. In a similar way it has been proven that nobody drinks to develop a dependency, just as well as nobody refuses liberty in favor of detention, even though dependency is, in fact, 'a psychological detention'. One drinks to feel good, integrated, accepted, 'to become courageous' and so on, but not to become an addict. Dependency develops itself unwillingly with the passing of time, in such a subtle way that people realize that they have the disease of alcoholism only when they cannot do anything through their own will in order to stop drinking. Analyzing the difference between voluntary and involuntary facts, Saint John Damascine says: *'The involuntary act is carried out through force or through ignorance. Through force, when the determining principle or cause is of an exterior nature, when we are forced by somebody else, without being completely convinced, without contributing from our own initiative, without fully cooperating to the deed and without doing ourselves what we are forced to carry out. Defining this, we say: the involuntary act is that whose principle is external, an act that one is forced to commit and does not contribute to it through his own initiative. The principle constitutes the effective cause. An involuntary act committed unknowingly appears when we are not the cause of ignorance, but the situation itself is of such nature. For example if someone kills while being drunk, he has killed unknowingly, but not involuntary, as he has generated the cause of ignorance, the drunkenness. But if somebody, while bow shooting, were to kill his father that was passing by, is considered to have killed unknowingly and unwillingly.'*<sup>16</sup> Concluding, we could say that involuntary is not only the development of the addiction, generated by ignorance, but the drunkenness that succeed the installation of dependency, due to the external determining principle. Or as Floyd Frantz says, *'alcoholism starts as a sin and ends as a disease'* and that *'the principal symptom of alcoholic dependency is the relapse (drinking)!'* In spite of all this, civil law states that acts carried out under the influence of alcohol consume constitute aggravating circumstances, and not extenuating ones.

That is why we consider drunkenness to be a sin, while alcoholism is a vice or a disease of the soul. This way, somebody can be an alcoholic without having drunken in a long period of time. Saint Nikitas Stithatos states: *'Not any vice is a material sin, as the material sin is one thing and the vice another.'* And he explains his thesis: *'The vice is what moves in the soul, whereas the sinful deed what is visible in the body. For example, the love of pleasures, the love of silver, and the love of*

*glory are atrocious vices of the soul. And fornication, the greed for wealth and injustice are sinful deeds of the body. Lust, anger and pride are passions of the soul or its powers in the movement against nature. And adultery, slaughter, theft, drunkenness and anything else that is done through the body, are sinful, atrocious deeds of the body.'*

Therefore, the most appropriate term to define alcoholism is 'vice' or 'disease' and not at all that of 'sin'. In spite of appearances, the medical term 'disease' does not involve the abolition of an individual's responsibility, it only gives it a different implication. The word is found in the specialized vocabulary, being used to diagnose and describe alcoholism in medical terms, highlighting at the same time the necessity of intervention from the part of specialists (the doctor, the priest, the psychologist, the counselor of addiction) and of non-specialists as well (family, friends, colleagues, the community). The concept of 'disease' refers to the physical and psychological dependency or to the alcohol addiction. The analysis of the etymology of the word 'addiction' reveals the Latin primary root '-addictus', meaning 'slave', 'slavery'. In ancient Rome, the term 'addictus' was used to describe a person who would become the slave of another, following a series of loans that he could not repay at one point. Then he was enslaved as payment for the sum of money he owed. This term accurately illustrates the situation of an addict who, by regularly consuming alcohol, ends in being ruled by the uncontrollable desire to repeat on and on the euphorical experience of alcohol.

From a spiritual point of view, the disease of alcoholism is the symptom of a deeper problem. Taking into consideration the perspective of Christian anthropology, according to which the divine element reflected in the human nature is God's face, we could say that the man finds his happiness and satisfaction when a connection between the type (the face) and the prototype exists (the Trinity). The human being is more than a *micro cosmos*, as Saint John Damascine named it; he is rather a *microteos*, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa teaches us. The threefold face of God engraved in the human nature can be understood in connection to the three abilities or powers: reason, sensibility and free will. When harmony and balance exist between these three powers of the soul, then the transparency between man and God is complete. This way the man becomes an agreeable dwelling for the One that '*rests among the Saints*', as the Bible says: '*...we shall come to him and we shall dwell in his being*'. (In. 14, 23) However, due to the dual nature of the man, the interior imbalance of these<sup>12</sup> three powers equals with a disfiguration of the face of the Trinity within us. An exaggerated development of<sup>1314</sup> one of these powers leads consequently to the alteration or deformation of the other two. This way, the excessive use of reason makes one become less sensible to the problems of others or develop a weak coordination of free will. People taken over by a passion usually have, beside a weak will, a disorganized and unstable sensibility and/or a contradictory logic.

For example, it has been observed that alcoholics are extremely rational people. In justifying their need for drinking, they seek the most impossible arguments. The exercise of arid thinking, dissociated from sensibility or understanding and without any connection to the immediate reality,

makes them infatuated, proud and egocentric. It is difficult to combat an alcoholic through arguments, as they are the best lawyers of their cause. This aptitude has developed itself from the constant attempt to silence their conscience and to find arguments to justify their drinking. The last feature an alcoholic lacks is intelligence. However, as Alexis Carrel said: *'intelligence cannot be of any use to those who has only that! The pure intellectual is a failed, miserable being, because he cannot approach what he understands.[...] Without the exercise of will, intelligence remains wasted and sterile.[...] Affective activities are, however, absolutely necessary for the progress of intelligence. They must be reduced to that passion that Pasteur referred to as the <<inward god>>, the enthusiasm. Only the mind of those who hate or love can elevate.'* Therefore, arid intelligence, without having involved feeling and will in its exercise, becomes monstrous, in the same way that an exaggerated quality becomes a defect.

This defense weapon, just one of the rich panoply of alcoholics, transforms itself, over time, into their worst enemy and ordeal. The self-aborrence that inevitably overwhelms them becomes unbearable and alcoholics try to blame others in an attempt to revive their self-esteem. The interior emptiness and solitude are indescribable ordeals. Many recovered alcoholics confessed that they returned from the gates of Hell and that they went through Hell on earth. Others, overwhelmed by despair, admitted that to the end they were drinking in order to die. For most of them, loneliness is the worst torture, unlike monks who, due to the interior wealth and overflow, leave into the wilderness and cope there, as they can substitute the world with theirs.

In this vicious circle it is very difficult to establish which is the 'primum movens', which determines which. It is not known whether the exacerbated rationalization of thinking leads to the growth of the appetite for alcohol, that activates or encourages sensibility, or that, on the contrary, alcohol consume creates these dysfunctions and disorders of the human soul. Either way, alcohol consume is just a symptom of alcoholism. It is well-known that many artists create with more inspiration when they consume alcohol, due to the plus of sensibility conferred by it. That is why the works of humanist artists, inspired by Bacchus instead of the Holy Spirit, awaken identical feelings in those admiring them and who, in turn, seek a justification of their behavior in the works of 'great artists'. In the Christian vocabulary, the terms 'disease-patient', as well as 'cure-doctor' are very common. Our Savior Christ has shown Himself as a doctor of the souls and the bodies, healing those in psychical and/or spiritual pain. He Himself did not hesitate in calling Himself this way: 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick' (Mt. 9, 12) (Mc. 2, 17) (Lc. 7, 31) or *"you shall truly say this parable to me: Doctor, heal yourself.'* *This attribution of doctor fulfilled by Christ, and afterwards by the Apostles in His name, is so striking that pagan observers present Christianity as a religion <<for the sick>>, characteristic that surprises them in this time in which religions have the tendency of despising the sick and levitating towards the healthy.'*

In the New Testament miraculous healings implied the dual restoration of the physical and spiritual health. Moreover, salvation itself is perceived as the most important healing. Therefore, *'in the old Christian literature a therapeutically terminology is often used to refer to the salvation brought by Christ. Actually the Greek terms σωτηρία (soteria) and σοξο (sozo) used in the New Testament for <<salvation>> and <<to save>> have this therapeutically connotation, meaning also <<healing>> and <<to heal>>.'* From this perspective we can say that the liberation of the vice of alcoholism is

synonymous with the healing of both the soul and the body. Therefore, the priest, before saving souls, must heal them.

For us orthodox Christians, the religious term of 'passion' is broader and more meaningful, as it reveals the true nature of the disease of alcoholism: *'A <<passion>> refers to more than a sickening of the soul, it is the falling into the slavery of an enemy power, that dominates us against our will, fights against us continuously and seeks our eternal death. Behind every passion hides the evil power of the Devil.'* Therefore addiction is a form of rejecting God and of entering the the sphere of evil attraction of the Devil. And a passion is indeed difficult to treat, as the Saint Basil the Great proves: *'When the vice grows old in our soul and when, with the passing of time, the sinful thought strengthens, then it becomes hard, even impossible to cure the vice, and that because often the habit becomes a nature. [...] I know some, who from their youth slipped to the passions of the body, and due to the routine of sin, remained in sins until they were old. Just like pigs that slosh in the mud and constantly add layers of filth to their skin, these people load themselves daily with shame because of the pleasure.'*

In order to avoid useless etymological debates, both terms of 'disease' and 'passion' should be used in a complementary way, as they both equally express, though from different perspectives, the same abnormal character of alcoholism. In the past, alcoholics have been stigmatized and seen as sinful people, lacking in will and character. This perception has brought no change in their lifestyle, on the contrary. However, perceiving alcoholism as a passion or a bio-psycho-socio-spiritual disease, we attain the possibility of fully understanding its profound causes, its specific stages and symptoms, applying also an integral treatment, according to the Creationist vision of man.

#### IV) DRUNKENNESS - A THIRST OF...GOD?

If the lowest stage of the human spirit's degradation is named "drunkenness", paradoxically the highest state of the spiritual development is named with the same word. Therefore, the "drunkenness" term is found in the scriptural language and in the Holy Father's as well, not only with its derogatory use, but for naming high states of soul too. St. John of the Ladder, recognized for his metaphorical language and, in the same time, profoundly theological, compares the exterior manifestations of the godly feeling of love with drunkenness state: "Love, in the quality perspective, is alike God, as the humanly possibilities. And, in the inner work perspective, is soul **drunkenness.**" <sup>15</sup>

Saint Nichita Stithatos strengthens those mentioned before through an affirmation that can only amaze us: "When someone reaches to know himself, fastly comes in the soul a godly humbleness, higher than the word, bringing in the heart crush and tears of deep humiliation, that the one which stays under its work thinks about him being dust, ashes, worm, not a man; but even unworthy of animal life. That, because of the gift of God, which overwhelms him. And someone who succeeds in passing much time in this gift fills himself by another **unspoken drunkenness**: the humiliation of

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<sup>15</sup> John of the Ladder, *The Ladder*, Editura Humanitas, Buc. 1997, p. 425

heart and reaches in the deep of the humble thinking. This, going out into himself, despise all foods, drinks and clothes from outside, not looking for those over his needs, like one who is changed with the power of The Highest".<sup>16</sup>

Here we observe that the gift of humbleness offers a feeling of spiritual plenitude which equally fills, feeds and highs the soul in such way that St. Nichita Stithatos didn't find another proper way to illustrate this feeling in a word, than expressing laconically: "going out into himself" (a ecstasy state). The completeness which overflows **in** and **out** of the soul gifted with humbleness is the unspoken proof of Holy Spirits presence in the believers' life. Therefore, the promises of God are coming true, who said: "The one who believes in Me, like is said in the Holy Scriptures, rivers of alive water will flow from his body" (In. 7, 38) or the word who says that God when gives, "He gives like an gentleman"<sup>17</sup>, "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over". (Luke 6, 38) This "unspoken drunkenness" leads invariable, but not irreversible, to the extreme decreasing of the natural needs, like those of thirst and hunger. The soul that has a conscious relationship with God experiences satisfactions of divine nature, superior to those of human origin, which are limited, and comes to 'disregard all foods, drinks and clothes of the body', as being inferior to the former. Therefore, we understand that only the soul filled with godly grace can reduce and even eliminate the bulimia and lust of drinking without measure. So, when it comes to proposing oneself the diminution of the 'satisfactions' offered by alcohol or by any other substance, used in an addictive way, without even trying to substitute them with high spiritual satisfactions, gained with patience from the secret union with God, the chances of success are minimal. Wine can give you cheerfulness, but only the Holy Spirit can bring you joy.

Saint Nichita Stithatos tells us that, for those who have progressed on a spiritual level, the reading of the Holy Scriptures is like "wine from a godly chalice, cheering their hearts and bringing them out of themselves through the power of meanings and raising their minds from the letter that kills them so as to examine the depths of its spirit, thus becoming the one who creates and uncovers the meanings, that those can say, honestly: "Your Glass gets me drunk with its strength." (Ps. 22, 5).<sup>18</sup> Speaking about this passage, Father Prof. Dumitru Staniloaie affirmed: "The knowledge about Great Sacraments, above word, of the personal and fond Logos, better said infinitely fond, is like a drink which drunks with enthusiasm and joy, creates a truly forgetfulness of oneself, but, in the same time, an amazement, which makes the man not to confuse with God, because in the amazement he lives something that isn't your belonging. In all spiritual ascend, God climbs in us'.<sup>19</sup> These are words that don't need any comment...

Drunkenness of The Holy Spirit gives not just forgetfulness of oneself. The holy drunkenness means a sublime state of spiritual enthusiasm which makes the believer not to feel tiredness or the pain caused by world. The courage and the serenity with what martyrs and all the saints faced the world and the devil was owing to these states of spirit of joy and exaltation, gained compellingly and through love. This extraordinary state was sometimes confused with madness. Those who were

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<sup>16</sup> St. Nichita Stithatul , *Cele 300 de capete despre făptuire*, Editura Humanitas, Buc. 1997, p. 240

<sup>17</sup> Nicolae Steinhardt, *The happiness journal*, Editura Dacia, 1992, p. 104

<sup>18</sup> St. Nichita Stithatul , *The 300 words about praxis*, Editura Humanitas, Buc. 1997, p. 262

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 262, note no. 64

crazy for Christ, in fact, they were drunk of love for Him. Under the title “the drunkenness for God makes the man unfeeling for sadness”, St. Isaac of Syria dedicates a whole chapter developing this idea and we quote: “When the normal desire of living beside God will awaken in the soul, and this glass of wish shall water the life of the one in need and will get him drunk, he will not feel the world or tiredness anymore, but shall become indifferent to sadness or various tiring works.’<sup>20</sup>

Saint Gregory of Nyssa also spoke about the so called ‘**awake drunkenness**’ as being “the enthusiasm of seeing God and of the rest filled with joy in His endless love.”<sup>21</sup> We see that the sacred drunkenness is not just a state that is worth of wanting, but a sublime purpose of a Christian’s life as well, synonymous with spiritual improvement, just like Saint Seraphim of Sarov preached: “All our efforts (...) strive to achieve the Holy Spirit”<sup>22</sup> or when he urged us: “My joy, please obtain the peaceful spirit !”<sup>23</sup> Divine drunkenness is the result of the experiencing of the dogma and sacraments of the Church.

Excepting the use of the same word for expressing two different soul states, there is something more. Even some external manifestations of the Holy Fathers leaded by Holy Spirit are unexplainable similar with those from the persons under alcohol influence. For instance, in the day when Holy Spirit descended in fire tongues above the Holy Disciples and another apprentices of Saviour Jesus Christ, many unadvised persons, involuntary witnesses at the event, thought that they were drunk: “Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine” (F. A. 2, 12, 13) Of course, St. Apostle Peter explained them, through the later named “the first Christian catechesis”, that “these people aren’t drunk, like you think, because is the third hour in day” (F. A. 2, 15) they are just “carried” by the Holy Spirit, “poured” over their entire body.

This apparent resemblance between unusual manifestations of the both person categories, certainly situated in two opposite positions on the salvation scale, is owned to the fact that, in both situations it appears a lack of control on oneself, that getting out into oneself said before, a change in the voice, the expression of the face, the gestures, a specifically inner aliveness. Both categories benefit of a sensation of plenitude that is overflowing. Of course, in the first case, is about a consummation and a transfiguration of self in the light and the heat of the Holy Spirit, and, in the second case, about a disfiguration of face and soul of man addicted, heated by alcohol and stimulated temporarily by the excess of dopamine in the brain.

Drunkenness, as a result of using various substances, is prohibited by God, because is a cheap substitute and an unsuccessful imitation of that state of “sacred drunkenness”, the consequence of a life of communion, through love, with God. Just like that, in a mystical meaning, the urge from The Singing of Singings can be interpreted; otherwise, his words would scandalize us: “Come and drink and get drunk...” (Sing. 5, 1) or the mysterious: “Get drunk, but not by wine; shake, but not because of drink!” (Is. 29, 9) David the Psalmist makes a statement too for the communion with God as an ecstatic state, an “divine drunkenness”: “You prepared my meal before, alongside with

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<sup>20</sup> St. Isaac of Syria, *About temptations, sorrows, pains and patience*, Ed. Evangelismos, Buc., 2007, p. 53

<sup>21</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The 300 words about praxis*, Editura Humanitas, Buc. 1997, p. 240, note no. 28

<sup>22</sup> Saint Seraphim of Sarov and St. Nil Sorschi, *Spiritual Words*, Ed. Pelerinul Român, Oradea, 1991, p. 78

<sup>23</sup> *ibidem*, p. 80

those who bother me; You greased my head with oil, and **Your Glass gets me drunk** as if it were too strong. (Ps. 26, 6)

All this old-testamentary urges to feast and celebration cannot be understood unless interpreted in a symbolic way, as they are an anticipation and premonition of the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, of which our Savior Jesus Christ himself spoke in a more explicit way. As for the urge <<get drunk>>, he may refer to that <<sacred drunkenness>> of divine love, “but to that eschatological frenzy of those who will be satiated with the endless joys of eternal happiness.”<sup>24</sup>

Saint Paul the Apostle urges us: “Don't get drunk on wine, which leads to wild living. **Instead, be filled with the Spirit**” (Ephesians 5, 18) He suggests that drunkenness, the cause of burdening passions, should be combated by drunkenness with The Holy Spirit, the former replacing the latter. Saint John Chrysostom, ‘the mouth of Paul’, proposes the same thing, but in a different form, in the Word spoken ‘Against alcoholics, and those who go to bars’: “Yesterday being the day of the demonic feast, you transformed it into a spiritual feast by receiving my words with much goodwill and spending here most of the day, getting drunk with a drunkenness filled with wisdom and dancing with Saint Paul.”<sup>25</sup>

God gives every human being the possibility of experiencing great states of spiritual enthusiasm, but these are a special gift of God and not the result of conscious consume of certain substances. Unfortunately, as it can be easily procured, and because of its predictable euphoric effects, alcohol is the most used substance in the purpose of altering the state of mind. Divine drunkenness, which requires sustained effort and cooperation with God, is therefore replaced with the much more facile alcoholic drunkenness, situation that explains the lack of any kind of interest shown by alcoholics for an authentic spiritual life. The profligate is as far from pure love as the alcoholic from sacred drunkenness!

From an ontological point of view, the man finds himself in a relationship of addiction to its Creator. He is spiritually rich just as long as he fills with The Holy Spirit. Drifting apart from God, the man estranges from himself as well, from his normal nature, perverting all his spiritual faculties, inclined frenetically towards the creation. This way, he becomes addicted to the object that has replaced his Creator. Independence from the Creator leads to dependence of His creation. There can be no neutrality! It is either Christ, or Bacchus!

Driving God away from our being, we are left with an immense spiritual emptiness, with an intrinsic longing, that cannot be filled with anything in the world, but only with God: “*Oh Lord, you have made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you!*”<sup>26</sup>, Saint Augustine exclaimed. The man was created with the thirst of infinity, of God! Or as Fr. Staniloaie said: “The man is an infinite in virtual reality; the man is made for infinity...”<sup>27</sup> That is why he will always strive to fill that emptiness, “reserved” to God, through cheap substitutes, various pleasures that give him the temporary feeling of false plenitude and perfection. Therefore, it could be said that even the one

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<sup>24</sup> *The Holy Bible*, trad. de I.P.S Bartolomeu Anania, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Buc., 2001, note b, at vrs. 1 from Sing. 5, p. 878

<sup>25</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Omilii la parabola despre săracul Lazăr și bogatul nemilostiv*, Ed. Sophia, Bucuresti, 2002, p. 5-6

<sup>26</sup> Fer. Augustin, *Confessiones*, trad. de Pr. D. Fecioru, E.I.B.M.B.O.R, Buc. 1994, p. 85

<sup>27</sup> Sorin Dumitrescu, *7 mornings with father Staniloaie*, Ed. Anastasia, Buc., 1993, p 217

who goes to the bar to drink, unconsciously and desperately searches for God. He is just not looking in the right place...

## CHAPTER II

### **THE DISEASE CONCEPT OF ALCOHOLISM**

by Floyd Frantz

*Definition: Alcoholism is an illness of both the body and of the soul. It is characterized by physical, psychological and spiritual distress when the person stops alcohol use for even a few days. The most obvious symptom is his inability to consistently control when he will drink alcohol, and when he does drink he will have difficulty controlling how much he consumes. The alcoholic will continue to use of alcohol in spite of having serious life problems related to its use.*

The problem of **alcohol abuse and alcoholism** is both an old problem and a new problem in our society. I say that it is an “old” problem because people having problems with alcohol have been with us for generations. It is mentioned in the earliest books of the bible, beginning in Genesis, and continues through the epistle of St. Peter.<sup>28</sup> I say that it is a “new” problem because each new generation is effected by alcoholism as if no one had ever heard of it before, or knew what it was. What is truly amazing is that when people are assaulted by this very difficult and dangerous spiritual sickness they are surprised, and often times refuse to admit the obvious when alcoholism affects a friend, is in their family, or even in themselves. It is as if their pride tells them that “it can never happen to me”! But yet alcoholism continues to affect millions of people in each new generation, and it been with us for centuries doing the same thing. The statistics state that as many as 1,000,000 (million) people here in Romania abuse alcohol, or are alcohol dependant.<sup>29</sup>

The symptoms of the **spiritual illness** of alcoholism are everywhere in our daily lives. For example, many of the funerals and most of the divorces, domestic violence events, child abandonment cases, and much of the poverty and other social problems that people face today are related to alcohol abuse and alcoholism. In regards to a person’s physical health, it takes about 15 years off of the normal life span of the heavy drinker. In the process of taking away his physical health, the alcohol slowly drains the mental abilities of the alcoholic, and at the end of his life he is impaired in thought, in judgment and especially in his ability to relate meaningfully with others. It is important to note that poverty, grief or psychological problems do not cause alcoholism. Many people have serious problems in these areas who are not alcoholics. What we see is that alcohol abuse often times contributes to these conditions, making them worse.

In order to understand what alcoholism is, we need to explore alcoholism from the perspective that it is a kind of illness, or disease that affects the whole person. By the “whole person” we mean addiction affects both the body and the soul, or “spirit” of the person. In the physical dimension,

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<sup>28</sup> Genesis 9:21-1 Peter 4:3

<sup>29</sup> According to the Romanian National Anti-drug Agency the number may be even higher.

excessive use of alcohol<sup>30</sup> can cause changes to the person's biochemistry which in turn contribute to biological addiction.<sup>31</sup> This is the "physical dependency" that we speak of when a person has tremors, shakes, sweats, or even seizures when he abruptly stops drinking. Accompanying these external physical symptoms, the person's body actually "craves" a drink of alcohol. This craving is because of an imbalance in the endocrine system brought on by long term alcohol abuse. Physical dependency is a combination of the pain of physical withdrawal combined with the very real physical feelings of "craving" for alcohol. These two physical problems which accompany the withdrawal along with other psychological withdrawal symptoms make it very difficult for the alcoholic person to stop drinking. But this is only part of the story. Alcoholism is also identifiable as a primary, progressive, chronic and fatal malady which has identifiable signs and symptoms which are seen in progressive stages. At the risk of over simplification we will take a brief look at these characteristics of addiction.

Because there are so many differences among alcoholics some modern authorities on the subject are beginning to consider that alcoholism is not "a disease", but rather "diseases", meaning more than one kind of alcoholism exists. We use the "Jellinek model" because it describes the complex qualities of alcoholism quite clearly. Jellinek stated that alcoholism was "primary, progressive, chronic, and fatal." He was saying that alcoholism is not a secondary condition, and that other problems that the alcoholic might be having would not improve significantly until after the person stops drinking. Also, once a person goes from alcohol abuse into alcoholism that the problems will only worsen over time, and there is no cure for alcoholism. It is "chronic" in that it lasts for a life time, like diabetes. Finally, he is saying that alcoholism is a fatal disease, and indeed it does reduce the life span of the alcoholic by several years. Related to these four dimensions, there are identifiable stages which a person goes through in developing alcoholism. These are best described as being a "pre-alcoholic" stage, followed by early and mid-stage alcoholism, and ending in late or "end-stage" alcoholism which is near the point where the person either stops drinking or he dies.<sup>32</sup>

When we say that alcoholism affects a person's soul, in the Orthodox tradition we must also speak of the mental, emotional and rational aspects of the person, as well as his "will", or "volition". While this small booklet does not allow us to discuss these in any detail, we can say that the typical alcoholic experiences much confusion and generally feels guilty about his drinking. These feelings of shame and guilt are at times extreme, and they prevent the person from facing the reality which his drinking has produced. An example of this is would be a lost relationship with a spouse, or with his children. He avoids dealing with the real world. He does not want to see that his alcohol abuse has caused a problem in his marriage. Sometimes he will say that "she does not understand me", or finds some other way to blame the victim wife instead of dealing with his problems. However, there exists a kind of "delusion" which prevents him from seeing the reality of his situation. This "delusion" is very real, and the person is simply blind to himself. It is very much a symptom of a spiritual illness, and it requires help from a spiritual guide for him to understand and to begin to work through his problems. He must face reality and assume responsibility for making his home a loving and safe place for everyone, to re-establish his relationship with God, and to find peace with himself. He cannot do this alone. His mental and spiritual confusion prevent him from being honest with himself, and without personal honesty he can do nothing. Without a spiritual guide to assist him out of the addictive spiral

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<sup>30</sup> See the appendix published by the World Health Organization (WHO) "Normal Drinking Guidelines"

<sup>31</sup> See the appendix on "Cellular Addiction". Alcohol is a drug, and alcoholics are addicted to the drug alcohol. Drugs such as heroin are more addictive than alcohol while other drugs, such as aspirin, are less addictive.

<sup>32</sup> Please go to web site of the National Anti-drug Program of the Romania Orthodox Church for more information on this topic. [www.ortodoxantidrog.ro](http://www.ortodoxantidrog.ro)

he will continue to make the mistakes in thought and in judgment which keep him addicted. It is the "patima" which then controls his life.

Recovery from any illness involves the soul or "spirit" in that a person consists of both body and soul. They can be separated, but not in this life. What affects one affects the other. When we speak of one, we must consider the other. This is especially true when we speak of alcoholism, or addictions of any kind, because the addiction of the body correlates with the "patima", or a passion of the soul. Although the physical aspects of addiction are important, we must consider the spiritual addiction or the "patima" as being more relevant because it is through dealing with the passions that addiction is dealt with and the soul and the body are healed. So when we speak of "recovery from addictions" we speak about healing from patima.<sup>33</sup> This is saying that "recovery" from addiction exists when the body, the mind, the emotions, the spirit, and the will together recover and function in harmony with God's will for man.

This is not about being "anti-alcohol." Using wine is ancient and at times useful occupation. Although there are many cautions about its use listed in the bible, generally it is approved of for social and medicinal purposes. Alcohol use only becomes a problem when it becomes a type of "idolatry." This idolatry occurs when a person abuses alcohol and it becomes harmful to his soul and spirit. People "worship" alcohol when they allow the alcohol to replace God as the source of their happiness, joy and sense of purpose. Rather than living for God and family, the alcoholic begins to live mostly for his own self, and for when he can take the next drink. Alcohol becomes his god, because he needs to drink in order to be happy. He cannot be happy without it. His life does not lose its purpose and meaning, but the alcoholic can no longer sense fulfillment, joy and serenity because of his estrangement from God. As God takes second place to the alcohol, so goes the wife and family. As the disease progresses so does the estrangement. That which is really important falls lower and lower on his list of priorities. But we need to remember that alcoholism is only a symptom of the "soul sickness" that exists in all of us. We all sin, and in all of us there is some form or another of idolatry. From time to time all of us put God on the second place in some area of our life. But with the alcoholic it is taken to the extreme.

St. Maximus tells us that "progress towards healing cannot begin before we recognize that a problem exists". This is saying that we cannot make good decisions about healing unless we recognize the true nature of the problem. Let us go forth and see just what alcoholism is, and a few facts about the process of addiction.

Today's society is developing in new and exciting ways. During the past few years we have entered into a phase of growth and development that is unparalleled in world history. Our society has become more modernized and it has more wealth distributed between all classes of people than ever before in world history. Today people have more freedom of movement and a greater number of choices than ever before. The introduction of the computer age is changing the way the people communicate, and the way they are doing business. The availability of goods today would shock people of only 50 years ago, and the comfort in most people's houses would make even the kings of past generations envious because of the conveniences of modern plumbing, electricity and heating. Along with these other advances, medicine and psychology are understanding and developing new ways to solve some of society's most long standing and difficult social problems, not the least of which are alcoholism and drug addiction.

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<sup>33</sup> See the "Spiritual V-chart" in the appendix

The scientists have discovered the biochemical action of physical addiction, and now there are drugs that allow a very safe detoxification from alcohol and most other drugs. People no longer have to die in withdrawal, and some of the newer drugs help relieve the intensive cravings that people have for alcohol once they quit drinking. Following the detoxification stages of treatment, counselors, psychologists and sociologists can help the alcoholic to his understand addiction from a perspective that it can be treated as a kind of psychological and social condition, and that recovery is possible if the person is willing to follow a few simple guidelines. The most significant advance in the treatment of alcoholism came about 75 years ago with the start of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). It was started by group of alcoholics who began to live by spiritual principals as a way to maintain their abstinence from alcohol, while also recognizing the importance of the disease concept of alcoholism.<sup>34</sup> Today in virtually all treatment programs for alcoholism, both in the United States and in Europe, there is a kind of “moral psychology” that is taught and endorsed by the psychologists and counselors which is based on AA’s 12 Steps of recovery. AA got the idea for it spiritual recovery program from religion, but religion did not understand the “disease concept” part of alcoholism. AA has been successful because it has both teaches about the disease concept of alcoholism and it has an emphasis on spirituality as a means of recovery. Their “recovery program” of the 12 Steps has helped millions of alcoholics to find happy and useful sobriety using spiritual principals.

AA has a kind of “moral psychology”, but it is not the traditional psychology practiced by most modern clinical psychologists. In modern secular psychology, which is humanistic, the focus is on the person being able to change his own self, through inner discovery and expression. It is “self dependant”, reliance being on the individuals own potential for change. In the type of “moral psychology” we speak about, the focus is on the person becoming “God dependant”, and finding spiritual help through building a relationship with God. In Orthodox terms, this would be “Praxis”, or “practical spirituality.” We will discuss just how this helps alcoholics to over come their problems in a later chapter.

Of course this means that not all of what they were discovering about recovery from alcoholism was new to the Orthodox Church, and our spiritual fathers. The basic message found in the 12 Steps of AA is common Christian spiritual teaching, and in one form or another it has been taught in the Orthodox Church since the time of the Desert Fathers. What was new in all this was the “disease concept of alcoholism”, with the new understanding that total and lifetime abstinence was necessary if recovery from alcoholism was to possible. Today science understands why this abstinence is necessary, and there are books published about the subject of endocrine systems, biochemical changes, and cellular damage. We will not go into this in any detail because they are outside the scope of this small book but having some information about this topic will helpful so we have included in the bibliography some suggested web sites for you to explore. For our purposes, it is enough to identify that alcoholism exists, what its characteristics are, and generally how people can recover if they have the desire, or “will” to live by spiritual principals.

Notice that I have again used the word “will.” It is perhaps the most important word in the “recovery jargon”, and perhaps the least understood. Regarding alcoholism, “will power” is of little

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<sup>34</sup> Here I am speaking of the “Alcoholics Anonymous” program, which was started in 1935 by two alcoholics. Today there are more than 63,000 AA groups around the world, and has more than 3.5 million members. In Romania there are currently around 20 AA groups in various cities, with about 300 active members. We have devoted much of one chapter to AA, and a partial list of their contacts is made in the appendix.

*use. In other areas of his life the alcoholic may have very good will power. He can be a successful doctor, banker, teacher or truck driver or even priest. However, because of the physical changes that chronic drinking produces in the body, and the “patima” of the addiction, trying to deal with alcoholism by use of will power alone is of no use. Actually it is not so much a lack of will power, but a misuse of will power that causes the problem. He needs help to find his way out of the patima, and he cannot do it alone.*

This actually brings us to a very important issue, that of personal responsibility. It is easy to blame the alcoholic for his problems, and it is true that for the most part they are of his own making. But this leads us directly into being judgmental of him, and of blaming the victim. We must always remember that the alcoholic is also the victim. We are all victims of sin, through sins of our own doing, and because of the sins of others. If the alcoholic has essentially lost control of his drinking, and we believe that he has, then how can he help his own self? This is a very important question, and one that needs to be discussed if we are to have healthy attitudes towards those who are afflicted with these kinds of problems. About the only way to answer these questions is to consider alcoholism and addiction as being a kind of “patima” or “passion.”<sup>35</sup> But strangely enough it is at this point that we find our answers, as through the law of the “Spirit” found in Christ, we find that we can be free from passion, sin and death (Romans 8:2). It is this “law of the Spirit” that is at the foundation of the recovery principals used in recovery programs, and it is the “Spirit” which gives them their recovery and their freedom from the addiction.

Many people drink occasionally, with no problems, so drinking itself is not the issue. Modern Western society has made drinking alcohol a part of its traditions surrounding socialization. It is almost impossible to attend a party or social event without alcohol being present. Alcohol use, if not actually demanded of us, is certainly an encouraged behavior. However, it is not the social drinking that is the problem. It is the “abusive drinking” that causes the problems, and it is excessive drinking, alcohol abuse, that actually leads to patima, and spiritual disease. We can say here that excessive drinking is a sin because it is harmful to both the body and the soul. Please note that “alcohol abuse” and “alcoholism” are not the same things. “Alcohol abuse” refers to a set of behaviors which imply that the person is drinking more than is good for him. These people can usually stop or moderate their drinking when the situation requires them to do so. The “alcoholic” or “alcohol dependant” person is the one who is actually addicted to alcohol much like a heroin addict is addicted to heroin. This is the person who quits drinking and then after a period of time starts up again. Then he then drinks to excess again and again. Not everyone who abuses alcohol is alcoholic, but all alcoholics will show some of the symptoms of “alcohol abuse”.

The following is a short summary of how addiction develops, followed by a list of symptoms that describe alcohol abuse and alcoholism. For a more detailed list, please consult the V-chart<sup>36</sup> provided in the appendix section. You may see that these reflect the progressive stages of alcoholism already mentions, but there may be other symptoms as well. Also, if a person does not have all of these symptoms it does not mean that individual is not alcohol dependant. Anyone who has just one of these symptoms is showing signs for being at risk of developing alcohol dependence. Let us first of all

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<sup>35</sup> Please note that I am using “alcoholism”, “addiction” and “patima” interchangeably. Alcohol is a drug and alcoholics are addicted to the drug alcohol. In turn, addiction is a form of patima, and recovery from addiction is possible through the spiritual methods used to treat other passions.

<sup>36</sup> See the V-chart in the appendix.

take a look at the “process of addictions” and ways in which people put themselves at risk for developing the disease of addiction.

## I) The Process of Addiction

1. **Experimental use** – motivated primarily by curiosity and the search for adventure (sometimes, also by rebellion); the use effects are less important than the mood that comes along with this taboo; this use takes place usually in a social context, it's not frequent, can be impulsive and lead to drunkenness.
2. **Social use** – the primary motivation is social acceptance and social facilities (integration); the main effects are relaxation and giving up the inhibitions; this use takes place in the friends / colleagues group, at parties; big amounts of alcohol can be used, they can get drunk; hangovers and blackouts may appear; this is the stage when teenagers begin to learn about the instrumental effects of drinking on emotions and behaviors.
3. **Instrumental use** – in this stage, the teenager searches for the previous mentioned effects of drinking on emotions and behavior; there are two types of use: the hedonistic one (searching for pleasure and giving up the inhibitions, sexual or aggressive behavior) and compensatory use (using the substance to inhibit a behavior or suppress some emotions, like anger, resentments, guilt, shame, pain, boredom or anxiety). At times, accidents, hangovers or blackouts may appear, but the negative consequences are still minimal and hard to notice. Missing school and lower school performances may result, but the adults will not make yet the connection with drinking.
4. **Habitual use** – alcohol use becomes the main way of entertainment and/or coping with problems. Changes in the lifestyle may appear (entering a group that drinks heavily, intoxications are more often, isolation, rebellion, irritability). Also, this is the stage when we can talk about *a tolerance increase* (the need of progressively using more alcohol to obtain the same effect) and about ongoing use of alcohol despite the physical, social, legal, academic and emotional consequences.
5. **Compulsive use** – losing control of when, where, how much, for how long they person drinks, preoccupation with the use, unable to stop the use; irritable and depressive when not using. This loss of control over the effects of alcohol, which includes getting drunk and other inappropriate behavior while drinking. This usually develops over a period of time, and is a gradual process of the effects of drinking on behavior. This is actually the beginning stage of what we call alcoholism. Following are some of the major symptoms of alcoholism.

## II) The Major Symptoms of Addiction to Alcohol

1. Repeated and compulsive use of alcohol, and sometimes drinking in the morning in so as to avoid a hangover or having to deal with remorse or shame from the previous nights drinking behaviors.
2. An increased tolerance to alcohol, increased frequency of use, and increased amounts of alcohol used while drinking. This is someone who used to drink a certain amount to feel the effects, but who is now drinking more for the same effect. If you are with someone who likes to show his high

tolerance for alcohol by drinking a lot of drinks, you are probably with an alcoholic. If you will note, farther down the line you will see a symptom of “decreased tolerance”.

3. Physical withdrawal symptoms when alcohol use is discontinued. This includes sweaty, puffy skin and face after drinking, red bloodshot eyes, and shaky hands. This is usually accompanied by visible sign of nervousness.

4. Increasing psychological and physiological dependence on alcohol. This includes anxiety, irritability, restlessness and generally being discontented with life. These symptoms may appear weeks or even months after the person has stopped drinking alcohol. It is important to remember that “drinking” is only one symptom of alcoholism. These are actually symptoms of craving for alcohol and are signs of obsessive thinking about alcohol when not using. This includes feeling uncomfortable in social situations unless alcohol is served, and thinking about or planning the next drink and manipulating social situations so that alcohol is served.

5. Decreased tolerance to alcohol is a clear sign of alcoholism. This decreased tolerance is accompanied by a gradual loss of control over the amounts used when drinking. After the heavy drinking damages the liver, then the heavy drinker starts to become more intoxicated sooner in the evening. Then his behavior becomes more and more bizarre as he continues to drink at past levels that he is used to drinking at. His guilt levels then increase, along with remorse, shame, defensiveness and denial about the drinking being a problem. It is a progressive event, but sometimes it can happen over just a few months. We will note here that one of the big differences between alcohol abuse and drug abuse is that using drugs people can become addicted in a few days or even in a few hours. With alcoholism it takes longer, up to 15 years before symptoms of addiction begin to emerge.

6. Related to the disease concept, the last symptom that we shall mention is one that helps to distinguish the alcohol abuser from the alcoholic. The person who simply abuses alcohol does not usually experience guilt after heavy drinking. On the other hand, the alcoholic drinker will usually experience guilt and remorse after a drinking episode. This is true especially if he has tried previously to quit drinking, or to moderate the amounts he drinks. He may feel that he has betrayed himself or others by going back to old behaviors after making a promise or oath to not drink so much. Sometimes this guilt or remorse will lead him back into an even heavier drinking episode.

The alcoholic feels guilty, but should he? Is he really such a sinner after all? Let’s take a look at how “sin” is sometime perceived. On the one side of sin, you have the idea of personal responsibility. “He did it, and he is guilty of doing what ever it was that he did.” Or, “It was a deliberate act on his part, and he should be punished in some way, or at least held accountable.” In this case the person is sometimes labeled as being a “bad person” or at the very least he is labeled as being a “bad actor”. On the other side of the “sin” question you have the more tolerant view of the sin. It speaks of responsibility for acts committed, but not in the sense as if someone did a deliberate bad action. You might say, “he missed the mark”, or “he did not meet the ideal behavior” of what was expected of him. One the one side, you have someone who does a willful and deliberate act that would be against God’s will in any circumstance. On the other, you have someone that is regarded as being “sinful”, but is struggling against the behaviors of which he is accused, usually without much success. Actually, assigning guilt, shame and remorse have never done much good in helping the alcoholic to stop drinking, and usually have the opposite effect.

Is the alcoholic responsible for his actions? Of course he is, and no one disputes his responsibility for the things he does and does not do. Is he a bad person or a “sinner” for having a disease called alcoholism? That is a different question. Still another and perhaps more important question would be “what is the alcoholic’s responsibility when he knows that help is available to him, but he refuses the help”? We could also ask a question of society. If we know a person is “sick”, what is the responsibility of society for giving that person the help that they need? These kinds of questions about sin are not always easy questions to answer. One thing that we can say for certain about sin is that it is the cause of our separation from God and separation from God has been the cause of disease and death ever since the fall of Adam.

The “Apostle to the Gentiles”, St. Paul, spoke of his own sinfulness in Romans, Chapter 7, Verse 19-20; he says, “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me”. Here St. Paul is speaking of the kind of powerlessness that comes with the human condition generally. This powerlessness is not the result of any personal sin that he may have committed. He is speaking of sin in a general way, the kind of sin that comes with our “fallen human nature”. Paul was no worse of a sinner than the rest of us. Far from it, he was very righteous and is today regarded as a saint. However, his temptations were very great, and he was tempted by his own human weakness. It could be said that in this passage Paul is speaking of the kind of weakness, or “powerlessness” that the alcoholic must deal with every day while he is trying to control his drinking. It is also where the “guilt” feelings enter into the very soul of the alcoholic. His “doing that which I would not do, and not doing the things that I would” would give rise to guilt and remorse in anyone. For the alcoholic, the repeated failure to live up to his own value system causes the alcoholic more pain and misery than the non-alcoholic can ever imagine. Again we must say that guilt feelings about drinking are indicators that a person has entered into a critical stage of their alcoholism. Non-alcoholics, even if they are heavy drinkers, do not have guilt feeling about their own drinking behavior.

For the alcoholic, his spiritual life becomes more complicated because of the nature of alcoholism. His separation from God becomes very acute, and very real. He does not choose to separate himself from God in a deliberate or willful way. This separation occurs when his choice to drink alcohol leads him into a pattern of living that is naturally alien to God. However, the factors that determine alcoholism are usually unknown to the alcoholic so he goes against his God given nature not by choice but rather more by chance. He does not choose addiction. Rather he becomes a victim of a patima, which in turn becomes beyond his control. He does not recognize the danger he presents to himself by excessive drinking. This is due usually to his lack of knowledge about alcoholism and addiction. And please remember the pressures of this society are obviously encouraging him to drink alcohol, the very thing that causes the problem.

One other very important note about viewing alcoholism as a sin is that because of the stigma and shame of being labeled a “sinner”, many alcoholics find it difficult to use the Church for reconciliation with God. In fairness to the clerics until a few years ago alcoholism had been thought to be only a moral weakness. Today the disease concept of addictions is better understood and accepted, and we have a proven program based in spirituality that actually helps the alcoholic and addict. Actually, although AA advocates the disease concept of alcoholism it proposes a spiritual approach to the treatment of alcoholism. This spiritual approach is outlined in AA’s “12 Steps”, which are intended to help the individual find peace and reconciliation with themselves, other people, and with God. It is worth noting here that the first step of AA is to admit to personal “powerlessness”, exactly the kind of

powerlessness the St. Paul spoke of in Romans. We will talk about this need for personal honesty in the chapter no. 4<sup>th</sup> on “Praxis” later on in the course.

Where does this lead us to in our discussion? Is alcoholism a sin, or is it a disease? Well, I would say that neither argument is completely correct. Moralistic and judgmental views only make the alcohol problem more difficult to treat because it alienates him from society. Also, the “sin model” does not consider the biological and psychological factors of the disease concept. On the other hand, a strict disease concept model of addiction does not allow for the depth of spiritual despair that the alcoholic faces, and does not allow for the development of the spiritual resources necessary for recovery. These views can compliment each other, and are both useful if they are both thought through to their conclusions. The only problem is that sometimes people hold one view to the exclusion of the other. They tend to defend their position and then neglect to use what the other position has to offer. This is usually not helpful, and sometimes even harmful to the alcoholic.

I will end by sharing a story from the Gospel of Mark, Chapter 2, and Verse 9. In this story Jesus is healing a man suffering from paralyzes. Jesus said to some scribes, “Which is easier to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’, or ‘Rise, take up you pallet and walk’?” Now, in this story Jesus healed a man of a disease, and also forgave his sins. We always need to consider that healing both the disease of the body and of the soul is important.

#### **Questions for discussion:**

1. Is the alcoholic a “a sick person” or a “bad person”?
2. How did he become an “alcoholic”? That is, did he “choose” to be an alcoholic, or is he, along with society, a victim of a disease called “alcoholism”?
3. If he is indeed “alcohol dependant”, then is he able to control his drinking, or is it really beyond his control to stop or moderate?
4. What are his responsibilities for accepting help?
5. If a parent, relative or even friends are drinking, does that not tell him that drinking alcohol is socially acceptable? That it is even a required social activity?

## **Chapter III**

# **ALCOHOLISM AS A FAMILY DISEASE**

**by Nicoleta Amariei**

**Abstract.** This chapter will review the disease of alcoholism from the family side, the way the drinking of one person affects the other family members and the ways they are trying to adapt to a dysfunctional way of living; furthermore, we will approach a few aspects regarding the relevance and the available recovery principles; also, suggestions will be given for the pastoral counseling for the family members of an alcoholic.

**Key words and expressions:** family member, co-dependency, V chart, family roles, adults children of alcoholics, Al-Anon, detachment with love, tough love, the 4 C's or the C.T.C. of family recovery.

## I. General presentation of the topic

In any given social circumstances, in any social class, the question “*do you know anybody that has a drinking problem*” will always have a positive answer. The variable remains the number of these ‘anybodies’ (two, three, five...) or the kinship (father, grandmother, sister etc.). Though, since it is a topic that involves each and every one of us – either personally or professionally – it seems natural to talk about what alcoholism and addiction are as a family disease.

As mentioned above, by family we refer to all the people that we are connected to biologically, socially or spiritually (i.e., godparents) and whose behavior and disease have an effect on us. By example, if a father is drinking too much – and not necessarily as a daily routine or in high amounts – there will be arguments between him and his wife, there will be financial difficulties or work related problems; occasionally, there might be domestic violence toward his wife and / or kids or legal problems. If the mother is the one drinking, most of the time there will be situations of child neglect or unfulfilled responsibilities. If an uncle is drinking too much, it's very possible that he will not be invited to family reunions or, if he is, that these events will end in quarrels and conflicts. When grandma' is too attached to the liquor, she might be having health problems, while the rest of the family will uselessly try to ‘fix’ her. After a while, the alcoholism will dominate the whole family life, will destroy the emotional ties and will blow up any feeling of trust and safety.

We also have to clear out the aspect of what alcoholism is and what does it mean to have a “drinking problem”. For the family, it's just as hard as for the alcoholic himself to admit the alcoholism of a dear one – the shame is too big, the stigma too strong. So, most of the time, we say that “*daddy has some drinking problems, but I cannot say he's an alcoholic; he works, he's a smart guy, he did well in life... it's just that when he drinks, he doesn't really know what he's doing... but he gets better after that...*” For the sake of simplicity, but also for practical reasons, we say that someone has a drinking problem when he has... problems due to his alcohol use and, despite these problems, he continues to drink. It doesn't matter how much or how often he drinks, or if he can abstain from drinking for 3, 5 or 9 month – all that counts is that when he pours alcohol into his body, this will have an effect on him and on those around him.

We bear in mind the image of an alcoholic as being someone who doesn't have a job, a family or is rejected by it, is drinking cheap vodka and is often sleeping in a ditch or on a road side. It's just like saying that a person with diabetes will always be overweighted, grumpy and isolated. The problem is that this image is wrong and that we stick too close to it – maybe because (hope dies last!) we hope that our dear one is “not so bad”, that he is not really an alcoholic and that we will not have to bear the shame, the weight and the despair of a bad label that could be glued to our name and family. We call this denial, a defense mechanism, a way to protect ourselves from everything that we know or suspect to bring along the admission of a drinking problem. Denial is important and used both by the family, and by the alcoholic himself. Unfortunately, hiding behind the finger will make the problem disappear for a very short period of time only from our visual field, not from reality. Though, alcoholism continues to progress, and the drinking problem will develop into an all destructive addiction. None of the alcoholics that end up sleeping repeatedly on the street has got there at a month or a year after his first use of alcohol. Nobody gets to be that sick of alcoholism overnight.

A simple clue to identify someone who has a drinking problem is to ask him if anybody has ever told him that he should drink less or that he shouldn't drink at all. If so, this means that those around him have felt on their own skin or have witnessed the way the bottle can 'kidnap' a dad or a mom, while the person himself was being 'robed' by his soul and humanity. This is the first clue that the person in front of us has an *inadequate* behavior toward alcohol. Many times we hear the alcoholics complaining that they're really not drinking so much, but their wives are too sensitive about this issue, wishing that they wouldn't drink at all. On such cases, who's really having a problem? From our perspective, he is, since alcohol shouldn't worth more than the family or more than the relationship between a man and his wife. Unfortunately, the disease of addiction perverts the whole soul of his victims, destroying the good thoughts with the bad deeds, transforming a life soaked in alcohol into something normal, while an alcohol-free life becomes simply unnatural.

Also, in order to identify the first symptoms of alcoholism, we encourage you to study the "V Chart of alcoholism" which will present the progression of this disease. Also, in the appendix section, you will find the "V Chart for the family disease" which presents the symptoms of this disease spread over the family members. By following the items presented there, you will probably build up the puzzle of how alcoholism can "break and destroy" a family... any family.

## II. THE ALCOHOLISM – FAMILY RELATIONSHIP OR CO-DEPENDENCY

Co-dependency – another term used to describe the family disease – means to be caught up in the circle of another person's addiction, and not „to be dependent on another person“, which is a different thing. Here are some specific ways that alcoholism affects the ones close to the alcoholic:

1. Family considers itself **guilty** for the alcoholic's drinking because of the „mistakes“ done by the mother, father, wife or the children.
2. Family members have feelings of **confusion and self-deception**, the desire to believe the alcoholic when he says that everything is ok; they doubt their own perceptions on reality and they lose their self-esteem.
3. Family becomes **responsible** for the problems of the alcoholic, hides, lies, finds false excuses to protect the alcoholic, does things for the alcoholic that he should do for himself, places the needs of the alcoholic before the family's or children's needs, anticipates the drinking periods and try to manipulate and control the alcoholic by threatening him with divorce, or by throwing away his bottle etc.
4. Family becomes empty from the **emotional and spiritual** point of view; the obsession and exaggerated fear for a new episode of drinking appears; it loses the sense of security and self determination; it feels incapable to act according to its own system of values and beliefs; uses extreme methods to solve the family situation (including witchcraft, and even murder or suicide).

Co-dependency is very much like addiction itself; even though we have the tendency to place the alcoholic and the family on two different sides of the story:

1. It was shown that it has a certain component of intergenerational heritage, even if this is not like the genetic one. Studies show that 50% of the women that come from alcoholic families

have the tendency to marry with alcoholics, and also the fact that about a third of the children with alcoholic parents will develop the disease themselves, if they choose to drink alcohol.

2. As alcoholism, codependency is a primary, progressive, chronic and fatal disease. **Primary** because as long as the real problem – that of alcoholism of a dear person - will not be recognized, the symptoms will not disappear, but instead they will **progress**. For example, domestic violence in the family will not stop until drinking stops first (please remember that domestic violence can also take place in the absence of alcoholism). Also, the alcoholic's wife low self esteem and depressive moods will not get better only with medical treatment unless the role of alcoholism will not be explored and special coping skills will be built. The symptoms of the disease are **chronic**, will follow the codependent persons throughout all their lives and will even be transmitted to the children by perpetuating a certain way to behave and to react to events. The **fatal** part is not subtle at all, many of the people caught up in the trap of alcoholism ending as direct victims of it, or by choosing a form or other of suicide (by literally taking their own life or by using alcohol, drugs, illegal or at high risk behaviors, promiscuity etc.)
3. Both the alcoholic and the family members will feel put down by shame and guilt feelings, will feel that their own life doesn't make sense, they will be exhausted in 'classical' attempts to fix the situation (promises, vows, attempts to control the drinking or the behavior). The wife will try to cook better, to be more modest or more elegant; children will try to learn better, not to make too much noise, to help the parents in the house chores. None of them will know how to interact normally with others, will have extreme reactions and emotions, and will have an ongoing fear and insecurity about the future, despite of them using all sorts of fantasies to escape from the painful present. For example, the children of an alcoholic can imagine that soon all the problems will disappear, that the family will soon have enough money and that they will spend their holidays together, even if the day-to-day reality will only bring along new conflicts and loses, and a deeper gap between them.

The alcoholic and the codependents share even the same diagnostics when they ask for psychiatric or psychological help: depressions, anxiety, neurosis, personality disorders. None of the family members knows how to deal with feelings; they don't know how to solve conflicts in an assertive<sup>37</sup> way. From a social point of view, all of them have stopped any significant connections with outside world, are isolated and gravitate around alcohol and its consequences - either to protect the drinking, either to protect themselves from the shame created by it. Most of family members stop at a certain moment to invite home any friends or colleagues, never knowing "what will happen at home today". Sometimes, this is not enough emphasized in the recovery process of the alcoholic, when the one who is drinking follows a recovery program and manages to break the heavy bell of his (her) disease. If the family doesn't follow a similar program, she will remain prisoner of the same disease and of the old ways to behave, even if active alcoholism has now disappeared from the family environment.

This is how alcoholism attacks all the people involved and how similar sufferance of the alcoholic is to the one of the people close to him. Even if each of them will explain their situation in a different manner (e.g., the alcoholic is angry because "the family makes him drink", and the family is angry

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<sup>37</sup>Assertiveness is the middle point between aggression and passiveness; it refers to a certain way of expressing feelings, ideas, wishes and rights in a simple, direct way that is not intended to attack or manipulate others. In this style conflicts and crises can be solved in a constructive way.

because “the alcoholic drinks”), all of them are victims trying to survive in an unusual and unwanted situation<sup>38</sup>.

It seems that God is always helping us to get through the black periods of our life, even if when we are surrounded by darkness we don't really feel His help. In the case of alcoholism, family members find ways to deal with the disease and to adapt to the environment that they have to live in, in the attempt to keep and to regain the balance and the security that every one of us needs it so much<sup>39</sup>.

### III. „SURVIVAL” AROUND ALCOHOLISM

In order to better understand the ways in which the family members of an alcoholic are trying to “survive”, let's imagine together a family formed by two parents and four children. Again, the role of the alcoholic will be played by the father, even if the mother can also be the one who's drinking too much<sup>40</sup>. We will not get into too many details of this role, since it has been presented in other chapters, but we will underline the fact – unknown by many – that the alcoholic too is struggling with feelings like shame, low self-esteem, guilt, fear and anger, just like his family does too. During the counseling process, we discover that the alcoholic punishes and blames himself more than anyone else could blame him. Surprising, right?

The wife of the alcoholic plays the role of “chief enabler” of the drinking<sup>41</sup>. Most of the people are scandalized by this affirmation: “*How come? She, who is trying to save the family, can be accused that she's helping her husband drink?*” She is doing it indirectly and unintentional. And she is doing this by all her attempts to help the alcoholic *not to drink*, by taking over his financial responsibilities, his house chores, his involvement in the children's education (the wife is paying the bills, makes sure the kids have food on the table, she is providing the treatment and medical leave when the husband is not going to work because of a hangover, the wife is begging the boss to keep him on the job etc). This is how, day by day, he feels less and less the consequences of his drinking, since most of them are covered or minimized by the wife. In the same role we can find the parents, brothers and friends or colleagues of the alcoholic. Finally, the situation is similar to the one when we have a cavity ... if it doesn't hurt enough, we are not in a hurry to go to dentist. So, if “*my drinking doesn't hurt too much, why would I stop?*”

A similar role is sometimes taken over by the elderly child, “**the hero**”. He is the child that helps his parents greatly, takes their responsibilities, takes care of younger brothers, and learns since he's a child how to cook or to accomplish other household jobs. He's also does very well in school. In other words,

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<sup>38</sup> The chapter referring to spirituality of addiction already made the difference between the perspective sin or disease of alcoholism; even if he chooses to drink, the alcoholic doesn't consciously choose to become an alcoholic.

<sup>39</sup> In Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the man's need for security is the second one after his need to fulfill the biological necessities a.s.o.

<sup>40</sup> Studies show that in families where the wife is the alcoholic, husbands' tendency is to leave the family and not to assume the unfulfilled responsibilities of the mother.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix 1 *Enablers*

he is the child that every parent would want. It's just that "the hero" is paying a high price for getting all the positive attention. He matures very fast – he becomes "a small parent" by accomplishing so much of his parents' role. This means he doesn't know how to relax, he's always over tensed and preoccupied by work, trying to control the environment and the people around him. So, as a consequence, when he will take a drink, he will soon appreciate the relaxing power of alcohol.

**"The Scapegoat"** is the child who gets the negative attention of the family. Rebel, always angry, he feels frustrated, uncertain, scared of the day by day life. He acts out with aggressive behaviors, gets into high risk social circles, has legal problems; he runs away from home, and has serious school problems. Meanwhile, he will also discover what alcohol or other drugs can do for him, and will start his new and very own relationship to them. Drinking will also block him from maturing and from finding alternative ways to cope with life problems. This is one way to explain the fact that many grownup alcoholics have the emotional maturity of teenagers, since they got emotionally stuck when alcohol becomes their refuge and solution. About the scapegoat, people will say that - obviously - "he is a *chip of the old block*", because he takes a lot from the role and the behavior of the alcoholic.

**"The Lost child"** is the one trying to cope with family conflicts by isolating from the family, by constantly withdrawing from everything that means community, school activities or job colleagues. He doesn't have friends, chooses jobs that do not require too much interaction with other people and ends up drinking only to overcome shyness and loneliness.

There is also the situation in which the child (usually, the youngest as age) tries really hard to release the tension in the family by focusing their attentions on him. "The **mascot**" is the funny little child who makes crazy things and says jokes, who tries to get his parents involved in other activities than fights or arguments. He ends up having concentration problems, hyperactivity, will be instable in his relationships with others, since he doesn't have the patience to build and maintain these relationships. For the mascot, alcohol will be a reliable friend who'll calm him down and release off his fears.

So, you can see that, despite the different "surviving" ways and patterns that the children of an alcoholic will adopt, alcohol finds his way into their lives, though he was the one causing them so much sufferance. If we add the effect that alcohol has on the mood of each person drinking it to the genetic predisposition towards alcoholism that these children have, we discover a very high risk situation for anybody who chooses to drink alcohol.

We cannot blame anybody – even if people are doing it many times. **These roles are normal ways to survive in an abnormal life situation.** It is very important to notice that the roles adopted by family members can change in time, according to their age and the family structure. For example, a scapegoat can become a hero, once the 'pride of the family' leaves the house by going to college or getting married. Also, these patterns of behavior are continued in the adult life of these children, so they become the so called "*adult children of alcoholics*"<sup>42</sup> for which there are special support groups. This is a relevant detail for us, since many of these children will choose professions in the help and care area, like theology, medicine, social work or psychology, driven by their need to understand what has happened to them and to heal the pain of suffering others.

#### **IV. FAMILY RECOVERY**

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<sup>42</sup> See in appendix 2 *Adult Children of Alcoholics*.

Contrary to what many people believe, family recovery is something that can really happen, even if it's not easy at all. We often say that alcoholism is like a magnet which makes sure that the whole "house" will remain trapped under his attraction force. The implicit unwritten rules of an alcoholic's family are: **"don't talk, don't feel, don't trust"**, so that escaping the codependency and asking for outside help is so much more difficult. In Romania, assisting an alcoholic's family is even more difficult since there are just a few counseling services to address it. Even when these services are available, the family finds it as difficult as the alcoholic to accept change and the idea of getting into recovery. In case you ask yourself why, here are some of the reasons:

- inability to accept that someone close suffers from alcoholism; it is as if admitting this would represent a personal failure of the wife and it would assume that she's incapable to "stop her husband's drinking";
- shame and fear of being labeled as an "alcoholic family" by the people around them;
- pride and the fear of being felt sorry for: *"poor thing, it must be very hard for her..."*
- self-deception, denial, minimizing: *"it could be worse...actually, everybody drinks...he will stop drinking as soon as he changes his job" ;*
- loss of hope and learned helplessness: *"what's the use of speaking about it, nothing can be done, anyway,...this is my cross and I have to carry till the end of my life...nobody can do anything...God has abandoned me..."*
- mysticism: *"God will give us a sign and will perform a miracle in our lives"*

Indeed, God makes a lot of miracles in our lives. However, there are situations when we have to do our own part, be active and complete our prayers with deeds.

So, what does recovery mean for the family and what can the family do? Probably one of the most effective support-programs for the alcoholic's family is the so-called Al-Anon Family Services Group<sup>43</sup>. Al-Anon represents a community (group, if you like), consisting of persons afflicted in one way or another (personally or professionally) by alcoholism.

They are people who meet in order to understand their sufferance, and to learn how can they live in a different way – whether the alcoholic drinks or not – and how to help others as well. In Al-Anon, the main focus of discussion is not the alcoholic, but our own person (as a relative, spouse, friend, etc.): *"I am a human being who has rights and needs... I have to take care of myself in order to acquire the energy and strength to fight for others, too."*

This is not a sect, not a gossip group, it's only a place where you can change your way of approaching life and alcoholism.

Whether there is an Al-Anon group or not where we live and work, we can always guide ourselves after the principles of this program in order to help the family-members of an alcoholic.

First, we have to help the family understand "the C.T.C. of recovery" (better known as the 3 C's of recovery):

1. **"You did not cause the alcoholism"** – it's useless to blame themselves for what the alcoholic does or doesn't."
2. **"You cannot treat the alcoholic"** – he is the one that has to ask for help, and A.A.<sup>44</sup> is the best place for him...the responsibility for recovery belongs to him, and the help can come from outside the family in very effective ways.
3. **"You cannot control the alcoholic"** – by taking the role of God and by manipulating the alcoholic, family won't make alcoholism disappear; she's tried this for many years, and the results of these efforts should convince her to try something else.

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<sup>43</sup> Al-Anon Romania, [www.alanon.ro](http://www.alanon.ro)

<sup>44</sup> Alcoholics Anonymous Romania, [www.alcooliciianonimi.ro](http://www.alcooliciianonimi.ro)

Once the “basic rules are settled”, we can go further to discover the specific ways in which alcoholism has infiltrated itself in every corner of the family members’ minds and souls, to see their fears, the anger they feel towards the alcoholic and his disease, their lack of trust in him and in the day of tomorrow, the shame and low self-esteem they experience every time they look into the mirror or into the eyes of their acquaintances. The first phase of recovery is a painful one, and most of the time it is accompanied by lots of tears; therefore, a shoulder which they can cry on or a pack of handkerchiefs are always welcome. It hurts, but only this way the family members will accept that they are powerless over alcohol, and that their lives need a new direction. (Step 1 of the Al-Anon Program<sup>45</sup>).

Then, the family members have to learn that in their new life they need the God’s guidance and help, that they can ask these from Him, and to abandon themselves to Him and to His will for them. This means that they have to give up their “shopping list” kind of prayer and to their own “scenario” for the world they live in. Again, the group is of very much help in putting these principles into reality. The group will be later on the place where the family members can learn how to make their personal values and character defects inventory, how to make amends to others. Step by step, they will build a way of life based on honesty, care for others and themselves, according to God’s will for them.

Obviously, there are moments of crisis in which the alcoholic gets sick or when the family goes through crushing situations (accidents, unemployment, divorce etc.). This is when the group will also offer his support so that the family won’t loose its head, won’t ignore the problems they have to face, but instead try not to let them take control over them, change and improve what can be changed and improved. Even if the group won’t change the reality by magic, it will help them feel that they are not alone and that there is still hope left.

All this can happen no matter if the alcoholic is drinking or not. But how should family members behave with the alcoholic? The appendix 4 **Letter to my family** provides us with some specific suggestions: trying not to lie to him, not to argue, not to get nervous with him, not to hide his bottle, not to get isolated from friends and family because of the shame caused by his drinking, to avoid any arguments when he is drunk, not to attempt to manipulate him or the family at every step of the way so that he doesn’t drink, not to accept doing things that *he should be doing*, and not to neglect their own medical, self-care, social and spiritual needs. This is what is called **tough love** and **detachment with love** in Al-Anon: we continue to love him and pray for him, but we also take care of ourselves and let him feel the consequences of his drinking. To give an example: a lady was telling that she has stopped carrying her dead drunk husband to bed, change his clothes, clean his vomit or pick up the broken dishes; she’d let him sleep on the floor, but she’d cover him with a blanket so that he won’t freeze down there.

In the same time, we can give to the alcoholic information about the places where he can go to in order to get help, and we can do this directly (not when he is under the influence, but rather in the moments following a series of drinking days, or when he is still sick and suffering because of hid drinking!) or indirectly, by leaving out flyers with the contacts of an AA group or of another specialized treatment service. We can also ask the help and support of the family doctor or of the priest, so that the alcoholic will receive the same message of recovery from more sources.

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<sup>45</sup> In *The Twelve Steps of Al-Anon* you can read more about the basic principles of the program (see appendix 3).

More delicate is the situation in which inside the family there is physical violence against the wife or the kids. In these cases, a specific intervention is needed – the abuse must be stopped, even if this means getting the extended family and the police involved, or using a special shelter for abused woman<sup>46</sup>. The physical safety of the family comes first.

Even when an alcoholic accepts to enter a treatment program, the family problems don't reach to an end yet. A high number of divorces are registered after the alcoholic stops drinking, and this happens because the long term effects of alcoholism are sometimes underestimated.

## **V. PASTORAL COUNSELING FOR THE FAMILY OF AN ALCOHOLIC**

As we have already mentioned, the priest's role in assisting a family with alcoholism problems is extremely important. Next to the doctor, he is the one that the family is turning to in order to find a solution and relief from the ongoing and always growing pain. So, what can a priest do so that he can help his parishioners?

1. First of all, he should have the necessary information; he should overcome the shame and the fear of bringing the problem of excessive drinking out in the open. By doing so, he will be able to identify a lot sooner the people who are facing this disease and to guide them or even to go with them at their first meeting in a specialized treatment centre. Alcoholism should be approached as diabetes, so please do not underestimate the role of the Alcoholic Anonymous or Al-Anon groups, just like you don't underestimate the doctor's role in treating diabetes.
2. Such support groups can be invited to have meetings in the local churches or in a different space near the church, so that those in need can have easy access to adequate services or support. If such groups do not exist in the community, the priest can help start one, according to the guides and traditions of 12 Steps groups (see the AA and Al-Anon websites).
3. Once a person has been sent to such a program, it is important that the priest keeps close contact with her and monitor both the progress and the obstacles she is facing.
4. By working the spiritual principles of the 12 Steps program, the recovering family members need and are encouraged in the same time to use a spiritual counselor or father as a companion in their life changing process.
5. Our Church encourages us to live a healthy moral life, so it seems just normal that in each and every parish there would be occasions for open discussions on alcoholism recovery (i.e., during sermons), just like there would be available information such as flyers and posters.
6. We do not forget about the personal prayer program, just like we do not forget about the prayer inside the Church. In parishes where the alcoholism problem tends to be a serious one, the priest can do a weekly akatist (i.e., the one of the Everlasting Cup), of great help to those affected by alcoholism.
7. Pastoral counseling takes time, patience and high tolerance to frustration. Many of your efforts will not have the expected results, or at least not immediately. By falling into the moral extreme where we only condemn sin or use the "carry your cross" slogan we will not ease too much the acute sufferance of those asking desperately for the priest's help. God is asking us to pray, to be dignified in our sufferance, but He also wants us bold and fearless.

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<sup>46</sup> More information on this topic you can find at [www.artemis.com.ro](http://www.artemis.com.ro)

**Questions for debate and discussions:**

1. How do we recognize a family in which the alcohol abuse is a problem?
2. Which are the things we can do to help a person who's suffering because of someone else's drinking?
3. Which are some of your personal difficulties that would stop you from doing this?
4. What kind of prejudice do you have when you have an alcoholic in front of you or when you are supposed to help him? What if he fails your expectations and disappoints you?

For the family, is the Step 3 principle "surrender our will and life into the care of God" equivalent with the "carry your cross" slogan?

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRAXIS OUTLINE**

by Floyd Frantz

As direct result of man's lost relationship with God, diseases, wars, murders, sexual perversions, thefts, divorces, and other problems continue to trouble mankind. In a broad and general way, these conditions are universal and affect all human beings in some form or another. Put in a more personal way, these problems are the consequence of man's darkened reasoning and our loss of love for each other. Mankind no longer knows what is true regarding God and generally is ignoring God's will. This is not news; it has been going on ever since the time of Adam. But as a result of this darkening of the mind and loss of love our souls have become corrupted, man's free will has become weakened, and sin is leading many of us into addiction, as some would call one of the more common forms of patima. However, sin and patima are never a part of our true nature, which God created and then gave a free will. It is our "fallen nature" which becomes addicted and taken over by patima, through sin.

This fall from grace and corruption of our nature is a result of poor choices, many of which are made young age and while under the influence of others. Alcoholism is a good example of this. No one actually chooses to be an alcoholic any more than a person chooses any other disease. Rather it is something that happens over time, and usually without the person even knowing that he is becoming addicted to the drug alcohol. Without their knowledge or consent, passion slowly becomes a normal part of the way in which the person lives their life. In the case of alcoholism, the patima begins as consent to only small sins, usually occasional heavy drinking. But slowly this sin leads its victims into a place that they do not expect to go into, that of "patima", "soul sickness" or if you like, into the world of "addiction". Please note that I referred to "heavy drinking" as being the problem.<sup>47</sup> Some alcohol is useful, and can be enjoyed by nearly everyone.

Whatever you choose to call alcoholism it affects every aspect of what it means to be human. It corrupts the body and causes many different diseases, including cancers, heart and liver disease, and even brain damage. Mentally it affects man's reasoning abilities, his imagination, his perceptions and his ability to function at full capacity in our very complex and changing world. It affects man's soul in that it changes the perceptions and desires of the "heart of the soul" or "Nous". According to

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<sup>47</sup> Please see the appendix on Normal Drinking Guidelines given by the World Health Organization.

Metropolitan Vlachos<sup>48</sup> in his book “Orthodox Psychotherapy” it is the “Nous” which is most affected by sin and passion. The Nous is at the very core of what it means to be human and it does not refer simply to our will and the decisions we make. It also refers to our affections, our desires, our perceptions of reality, and how we view life and other people.<sup>49</sup> Alcoholism and addiction also affect man’s “spirit” in the sense that many people affected by addiction lose their sense of purpose and meaning in life. As the addiction progresses, the alcoholic can also lose the vitality of his spirit, and with very grave consequences. The natural desires in life can become changed into those of a desire for alcohol, another drug, among other things.

One very central issue related to “patima”, or “addiction”<sup>50</sup> is related to man’s “volition”, or as some would say “will power.” Actually, .....most alcoholics and addicts have very good will power and are often successful in most areas of their lives. But in regards to alcohol or drugs their will power is no longer available to them. It is lost some place in the depth of their soul and only God can help them to find it again. This loss of will power is seen when they drink at inappropriate times, and when they drink too much too often. It is like they have good will power, but cannot use it in respect to alcohol. The basic text of Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>51</sup> refers to the “unaided will”, and states that without help from God there comes a time and a place when the alcoholics own “will” is defenseless against his taking the first drink, and it is the first drink which causes the problem. Science has discovered the biological reasons for these cravings. They have found that it involves both cellular change in the central nervous system, and in changes to the brain and chemistry of the endocrine system.<sup>52</sup> The “Science of the Fathers” have taught us for centuries that sin also has the capacity to rule the man.<sup>53</sup> St. Paul was quite overtaken by sin, and he was a holy man. What can we expect from sin, unless we have God’s help to preserve us? The problem for the alcoholic is that he has abandoned God. He puts alcohol first, before God, before wife and family, and even before his own physical and spiritual well being. Thankfully most of us do not experience soul sickness at the depths which the alcoholic or addict experiences it. With alcoholism and addiction the “passion” becomes very powerful and can distress the soul even to the point of self destruction. Addiction is after all the most common form of self destruction known to man. And the patima of addiction, and the sin leading up to addiction, is so insidious that normally the addict is spiritually deceived into believing that he is living a fairly normal life. The addiction becomes a part of his nature without his even knowing it, and he not only accepts the patima but he defends having it.<sup>54</sup>

Of course baptism purifies us and frees us from sin, but we all suffer from one kind of soul sickness or another. If you are unaware of your sin then you need to talk to your spiritual father about pride, it is a soul sickness of the worst kind. When it happens that a man sins unknowingly it is worse than if the man sins, knowing that he is a sinner. The man who knows that he is a sinner at least has the humility to recognize it. The gospel reading from the Sunday of the “Pharisee and the Publican” is a

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Please note that I am using English language texts, so am not including actual page numbers which would differ from the Romanian language texts. All texts mentioned are available in the Romanian language.

<sup>48</sup> “Orthodox Psychotherapy, The Science of the Fathers” is available in Romanian.

<sup>49</sup> See the Appendixes on “Wheel of Life”, “Rational Drinking” and “V-Chart on Alcoholism”

<sup>50</sup> Please note that I use “Patima” and “Addiction” interchangeably as they are for all intents and purposes the same thing. Alcoholism is simply one of the more common forms of addiction.

<sup>51</sup> AA’s basic text is commonly called the “Big Book” and the reference is in the “Doctors Opinion” at the beginning of the book.

<sup>52</sup> See the appendix on the “Biology of Addictions” or go to the PNA web site for more information.

<sup>53</sup> See Romans 7:20

<sup>54</sup> See the appendix V-Chart of spiritual illness

good example of this.<sup>55</sup> The one man left the temple healed and forgiven, but the other left in a worse state than when he went in to the temple pray. We should note here also that it was the blind pride of the Jews that led to the eventual crucifixion of Christ. Our holy fathers did not put the Sunday of the Pharisee and the Publican at the beginning of Great Lent for no reason. But how does it happen even after Holy Baptism that we become spiritually sick, sometimes even to the very depth of our souls? According to St. Maximos<sup>56</sup> and other ancient fathers of our holy Orthodox church we simply suffer from false beliefs about reality, about ourselves, and about God. We lose touch with our true values, and we lose touch with the “universals”, the principals which God writes on the heart of every human being. These universal values are strengthened and renewed at Holy Baptism, but we lose them because we live in a fallen world. We become influenced by the sin around us, and then we participate in the sin. Because of pride, our participation in sin gives us a false sense that the sin was “not so bad” and our soul begins to lose its life’s direction towards good, towards God. For the alcoholic, this loss of “direction” results in a downfall that is unintentional, but of his or her own making.

Having false beliefs and having false knowledge can lead people into believing that some things are true when they not true at all. One example of this is the belief by some people that homosexuality is a normal expression of sexuality. Others believe in pluralistic gods, or they believe that God is simply some universal concept that is impersonal and not actually involved in the affairs of us humans. At the level of the alcoholic, the false belief is that he is drinking “normally”, and often times he or she will blame someone else for the problems that they have created because of his or her own drinking. Sometimes they believe that other people or even institutions are the cause of their problems and therefore the cause of their drinking. Then they avoid taking on personal responsibility for their own behaviors. The basic text of the program of Alcoholics Anonymous<sup>57</sup> refers to this as the “delusion” of the alcoholic. This is saying that the alcoholic cannot see his own condition, his own “powerlessness” over alcohol and so he continues to drink to his doom. The psychologist refers to the processes of “rationalization, minimization, and denial” as processes in which the alcoholic can deceive his own self.<sup>58</sup>

St. Maximos also refers to *“ignorance of the universals”* as being a cause for man to fall into passions. This means not knowing what is truly good, and not knowing the attributes of God. Faith, hope and love are three of these universals. When the soul loses her participation in these graces it causes a great distress to the soul. **When this happens there develops in the person’s soul a sense of estrangement and detachment from that which is God. The person loses his sense of purpose and meaning in life, and questions why he even exists. The philosophers call this an “existential vacuum” but in reality it is simply a separation from God,** and it is not by God’s choice that the separation exists. It is man’s choice, as man separates himself from God through sin.<sup>59</sup>

However, God did create us in such a way that we naturally seek to return to his grace, and to his love. When the soul begins to feel this emptiness, then that soul begins to seek God. However, sometimes the “eye of the soul”, or “Nous” is confused and does not know God. The “reasoning” abilities of the man may be impaired because of ignorance or through some passion that the person is

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<sup>55</sup> See Luke 18:10

<sup>56</sup> See St. Maximos: Third Century on Love; 34 Philokalia

<sup>57</sup> Based in a spiritual 12 Step program, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is the best know about and most successful recovery program for alcoholics in the world today. It has around 3,000,000 members, mostly in the U.S and Canada. There are about 15 AA groups in Romania.

<sup>58</sup> See the appendix on “Defense Mechanisms of the Alcoholic”.

<sup>59</sup> See 1 Corinthians 6:10

caught up in, such as in addiction. Many addicts and alcoholics have said that they tried to fill this longing for the spiritual through the use of drugs and alcohol. When this happens, the sin itself truly becomes “god” to that person. Of course if you suggested this to them they would be offended, but their behavior tells a different story. This is one reason why personal honesty is so important in recovery from alcoholism. Its less about the drinking than what it is that the drinking does to the person, i.e., the passion.

In fact, alcoholism is often times referred to as a form of idolatry because the alcoholic makes alcohol more important than anything else in his or her life. This includes their personal health, relationships with spouses, their children, or even with God himself. . But remember that because of the “false beliefs” and delusion outlined earlier the alcoholic simply cannot see the true reality of his situation. This does not happen over night, but over time it is easy to see that alcoholism does steadily progresses downward into an abyss of despair and pain.<sup>60</sup> It is sort of like boiling a frog. If you put a frog into hot water it will jump out again and escape being cooked alive. However, if you put a frog into warm water and then turn up the heat slowly, the frog will stay in the water until he is completely cooked. No one chooses to be an alcoholic, they simply do not see that the situation is changing and so they continue on the road of self destruction.

St. Maximos also taught us that “impassioned thoughts” lead many into soul sickness, even if they know the true God. We all like or enjoy one thing or another perhaps more than we should and then we suffer because we allow these earthly “things” to take our focus from the things of God. This love of “things” actually occurs when we allow our feeling do our thinking for us. Emotionally we over value something, such as car or a new watch, or even a relationship with another person. If we do not feel we have enough of whatever it is that we are in love with, or if we feel that it is somehow threatened, we over react and become defensive, angry, or even hostile in defense of the “thing.” This occurs when the “emotion rules the mind” rather than the inverse, “mind over emotion”. In the case of patima it is very serious, because of the “false beliefs” and “ignorance of universals” noted earlier. The confusion of the intellect impairs our reasoning faculties, and then our emotions rage in defense of our mistaken beliefs. When this happens it is a disaster for the soul.

In regards to the alcohol dependant person this becomes quite obvious when someone confronts him about his alcohol use. Fearful that he may be asked to not drink, or to drink less, he becomes defensive and sometimes angry at even the suggestion he may have a drinking problem and that he needs to quit or to cut down. He values the alcohol more than he values his relationship with God or his relationship with others. He even values it more than his own health and well being. It is a form of self destruction, even of suicide.

St. Paul has said, everyone makes mistakes and commits sin.<sup>61</sup> But there are some people that simply give themselves over to sin or to some other passion, as in the case of alcoholism. They are like the lemmings running into the sea, one after the other. This can happen when there are very low social or personal values about drinking. These are people who do not understand about the disease concept of addiction and who believe (falsely) that drinking is a game that they can always win at. After a few years of heavy drinking the passion of alcoholism takes over, and by then the drinking has taken a very important part of his or her life, sometimes the most important part. This can happen very easily when a society has cultural values which allow or even encourage excessive drinking, and when there are no

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<sup>60</sup> See the appendix on the “V-Chart of Alcoholism”

<sup>61</sup> See Romans 3:32

clear guidelines on rational drinking behavior, or normal drinking.<sup>62</sup> Of course God has not left us without hope.

There are three stages of spiritual growth, “praxis”, or the cleansing of the heart, “theoria” or awareness and understanding of God, and “illumination”, or knowledge of God. These are clearly defined stages, and for the most part they lap into each other. For example, one may have a brief awareness of God, or a glimpse of the heavens, and still be in the process of cleansing ones heart. An example of this is with St. Paul.<sup>63</sup> On the day he began his journey with the Lord he saw a great light, which caused his repentance to begin. Not only did he begin to repent on that day, but he also came to know more about God’s will for him, and something about God himself. But let’s take a closer look at these recovery programs, and at what is involved for there to be spiritual recovery from diseases like alcoholism.

Also, in order to break up the ignorance surrounding “false beliefs” there must be education about alcoholism as a disease.<sup>64</sup> It is not so easy to help someone to recognize their problem with alcohol, so educating yourself about the disease concept of addiction, particularly about alcoholism, is the best way to begin.

Also, because sin, addiction and patima are not natural to man, when man becomes addicted it creates a conflict between how God created us and what we become. Please note that this conflict is not with God, but rather with our own self. The conflict found in all alcoholics is a perfect example of the conflict which occurs when man is in conflict with his own value system. Usually referred to as “guilt” by the priests, or “conflict of the character” by the psychologists it eats at the soul of the alcoholic like nothing else.

Even the most addicted of persons can be free of their patima if they are willing to live a spiritual life.<sup>65</sup> The way of spirituality has been written about for centuries, although generally people ignore these writings, other than monastic’s and people who make serious efforts at changing their lives in a Godly direction.<sup>66</sup> Sometimes the spiritual life is written about in terms of “Ladders”, or “Steps”, or “Paths”. Essentially they are spiritual “principals” through which a person can overcome the sin (passions) in their lives, and then to learn about and to know God. Not through learned theology as is taught in schools, but rather through living and practicing spiritual “principals”. These principals are the way of “Praxis”, or the cleaning of one’s heart, and they lead to “Theoria”, which is awareness and understanding of God. Theoria is followed by “Illumination”, which is knowledge of God. Orthodox spirituality is true theology because it teaches us about God and leads us to knowledge of him. This knowledge of God is what the soul seeks, and is what every heart loves. It is only in unity with God, in and through Jesus Christ, that we are healed from our infirmities, and from all spiritual sickness.

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<sup>62</sup> See the Appendix on “Rational Drinking Guidelines”

<sup>63</sup> Acts 26:13

<sup>64</sup> See Appendix “Facts about Alcoholism”

<sup>65</sup> See the appendix on the “12Steps of AA” which is the most commonly used spiritual recovery program in the world today, having more than 3,000,000 members in over 60 countries.

<sup>66</sup> The Ladder of Divine Ascent, the Rule of St. Benedict, and the 12 Steps of AA are three examples of these spiritual paths. St. Isaac the Syrian also wrote something similar. The Philokalia presents several texts about this, not the least of which is that of St. Maximos.

All of the great spiritual fathers tell us that progress towards spiritual healing cannot begin until after a person recognizes that a problem exists. This should be obvious, but to the alcoholic it is not at all obvious. The problems are those of pride and delusion. In the case of the alcoholic, he will continue to drink alcohol and have the problems associated with the drinking until he after he faces the fact that he simply cannot drink alcohol without having problems.<sup>67</sup> He must recognize and admit that a “patima” has control of his life and that he needs help.<sup>68</sup> This admission of powerlessness over alcohol is the very foundation of recovery and without this first step there can be little hope of any person affected by alcoholism making any genuine progress spiritually. This admission requires both honesty and humility, and acquiring these virtues can sometimes be a difficult task. Sometimes personal honesty precedes humility, and sometimes it follows, but these two sister virtues are always closely related with one another and they are the corner stones of spiritual recovery. Without them it is impossible to break through the barriers of denial, delusion, and the “false beliefs” about alcoholism.<sup>69</sup>

The addicted person must go beyond simply believing in God. He must begin to seek knowledge of Gods will. There must be a desire to do God’s will in all things, and a surrendering of the ego and pride which cause so many of the alcoholics’ problems. Because man cannot defeat the passion alone, and God will not over take the persons free will there must be a synergistic relationship between the “Grace” of God and the “will” of man. Man’s will (his desire to do things his way) must be given over to God through prayer and meditation. It is then that man can make different choices, with God’s help. A simple prayer, like saying the “Our Father” with attention to “thy will be done” is a good way to help us to begin giving our will to God and to make the surrender of our will to God’s will. This is a normal part of being Christian. E

Eventually this surrendering to God brings about a change in the relationship with God. It will also change his relationship with other people. When the alcoholic begins to treat his family with more love, by giving them his attention instead of to alcohol, then sometimes a wonderful healing in the family takes place. At the very least the effects of the active drinking are taken out of the home so healing can begin to occur naturally, with the help of God and the priest.<sup>70</sup>

Confession is a very important part of Praxis. It is the process in which the sins or errors which exist in a person’s life are identified. Then with the help of a spiritual advisor, usually a priest, it is possible for that person to make a firm decision not to repeat the old mistakes and to change his lifestyle. This means admitting to God, to himself and to another human being the “defects of character” which are most troubling to him.<sup>71</sup> A life grounded in such positive spirituality will make spiritual growth more likely, and without such recognition of harmful attitudes and behaviors, without confession, permanent change is unlikely.

The **confession** should also be based in the reality that alcoholism is a disease and that the alcohol dependant person can no longer drink alcohol. Even one drink can lead them back into the darkness of despair and alcoholism. The awareness of this reality is very important because the confession must go beyond the admission of a few sins. It is also about confessing the “lifestyle” that causes the sins. For example, admitting to alcoholic drinking is admitting to the obvious. He may also

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<sup>67</sup> See.....in Big Book

<sup>68</sup> See Appendix on “Stages of Change”.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix on “Myths about Alcoholism”

<sup>70</sup> See “The Chapter to the Wives” in the AA Big Book, and the attached bibliography for further resources.

<sup>71</sup> St. James has told us to confess our sins to one another.

need to include the necessity of changing a few friendships so that he can avoid the old temptations to drink. Putting ones self in a place of temptation can be a sin in itself.

Once the initial confession is made, then the battle for the soul has actually begins. The devil will return to that person to tempt him in various ways, and he will need help and encouragement to deal with these temptations.<sup>72</sup> The pride, ego and fear of the alcoholic will return to try and lead him back into the passion.<sup>73</sup> The roots of these three spiritual defects of character must be discussed with the spiritual father so that they can be dealt with. This is actually where the spiritual counselor is of most benefit, and it is very important that the spiritual father have an understanding not only of sin and patima, but also of the particular passion related to the disease of alcoholism.

Many spiritual fathers do not feel like they are able to counsel<sup>74</sup> people who come to them with problems related to alcohol abuse. This is because often times the alcoholic relapses back into active drinking after the priest has spend much time and effort trying to help him to drink less. If both the priest and the parishioner do not understand that alcoholism is a disease, the expectation may be for the alcoholic to simply drink less alcohol. The alcoholic will certainly try to drink less but because of the disease of alcoholism it is impossible for the alcoholic to consistently control his drinking. Sooner or later he will always fail in his resolve to not drink so much and then when he fails both he and the priest are discouraged. There should be a clear understanding at the beginning that there can be not return to “normal drinking”. The only safe route is 100% abstinence.

Sometimes the alcoholic takes an oath to not drink ever again, or to not use alcohol for extended periods of time. Many times he will not be able to keep this oath, and when he fails with the oath the problem can be worse than ever. The increased shame and guilt of a relapse back to drinking only causes the alcoholic to feel more hopeless and helpless. When he relapses, and relapse is actually a part of the disease process,<sup>75</sup> he loses faith in himself and in God. He may actually blame God for the relapse. Actually he was doomed to failure if he did not understand the characteristics of his disease. He must know that he has a biological, psychological and spiritual sickness that must be treated daily through a conscious, and deliberate, program of prayer, meditation and surrendering the will to God. It is important to remember that alcoholics are more spiritually sick than your average parishioner, and that they need to understand their addiction to the drug alcohol. Without this information and few alcoholics can succeed in overcoming their illness.

One of the most significant facts in all this is that most people simply do not develop a daily program of reflection, meditation, and prayer. If you ask them how are they are doing spiritually they will say that they are “just fine”. This is a grave error that many of us commit, and one that the spiritual fathers caution us against. People sin, and then do not recognize that they are falling into sin until after it is too late, until after the sin is committed. They were tempted to sin and did not even see the temptation, only the sins. Or worse yet, they saw the temptation and thought that they were stronger than the temptation, and then fell into sin anyway. This can be very harmful to the person trying to not drink alcohol.

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<sup>72</sup> See Luke 11:24-26

<sup>73</sup> Chapter Five of the AA Big Book is very helpful with this inventory. Also see the AA 12 & 12, steps 4 and 5.

<sup>74</sup> In the Church these spiritual counselors are commonly called “Duhovnic’s” and the process is “Duhovnicesc”

<sup>75</sup> See appendix on “Cycle of Addiction and Relapse”

Once a person makes a decision to not drink alcohol usually he will not relapse because of craving alcohol. Usually the person relapses in order to escape a spiritual battle from within his self, or because of some pain within his soul. He is tempted in ways that he does not understand and so he relapses to deal with his confusion or pain. Worse yet, sometimes he simply forgets that he has a disease called alcoholism and that he cannot successfully drink alcohol. These relapses occur simply because the alcoholic is not being spiritually guided, or because he is not following a daily program of prayer, reflection and mediation. He becomes easy prey for the Adversary.

Finding the kind of faith in God that will release someone from addiction is not easy. It requires developing a lifestyle which reflects an ever increasing awareness and understanding of God's will in the person's daily activities. This kind of spiritual growth, which we call "recovery", is usually best accomplished under the guidance of a spiritual father, or someone who is walking the same "road of recovery" with the alcoholic. In Alcoholics Anonymous they have the advantage of "sponsorship", in which a person who has been abstinent for some time helps a newer person to understand the spiritual principals of recovery.<sup>76</sup>

### **Summary:**

I. Spiritual treatment procedures to help alcoholics include education about the disease concept of alcoholism, confession, spiritual counseling, and Alcoholics Anonymous group meetings if they are available. Also personal support from the priest to assist the person in developing a spiritual life based in humility and service to God.

II. Spiritual healing can only occur through the synergy of God's grace in cooperation with man's will. God's grace is most important, but he does not act without man's cooperation. This is accomplished through the sacraments, a spiritual father, prayer, and meditation. Sometimes God uses circumstances to bring about change.

III. The spiritual father (duhovnic) is critical in the recovery program for the sick soul. He can help to confront false beliefs, give education and correct information about alcoholism, combat the impassioned thoughts and fears of the "ego" and confront the alcoholic's pride. Also he can guide the "Nous" of the alcoholic back to God through correct reasoning and information based in truth. This is essentially on how to live a Christian life.

IV. The role of the priest is very important as a spiritual advisor, to give the sacraments, including confession, as an avenue of God's grace, and teaching about values from the perspective of holy tradition. The priest also offers the structure of the Church (services, including Divine Liturgy, Maslu services, Akathists) for social and spiritual support and by offering mature personal support in place of the society of the old drinking friends.

V. Praxis is about repentance and cleansing of the passions, and Theoria is about growth in moral understanding, while Illumination is about awareness and knowledge of God based in an understanding of God's will. The body and soul can have separate illnesses, due to decay, aging and physical disease, as compared to only "soul sickness" of the darkened mind, impassioned thoughts and

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter five of the AA Big Book for the 12 steps of AA

confused will. Healing the body and the soul is found through Praxis. In regards to alcoholism Praxis is the only known method of recovery.