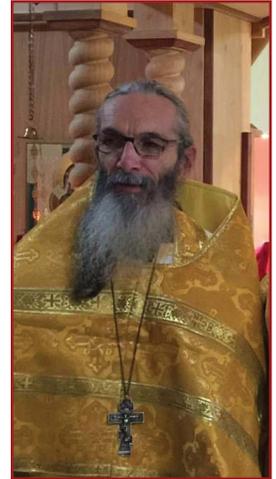


ADDICTIONS

Beyond Technical Sobriety ... Acquiring Emotional and Spiritual Sobriety

by Father Christophe Lepoutre,
Pastoral Counselor, MS



Father Christophe Lepoutre, M.S., is Executive Director of the nonprofit ministry “The Fellowship of the Inexhaustible Cup”. He is both an Orthodox psychotherapist and pastoral counselor. He holds an MS in Pastoral Counseling from Iona College, and an undergraduate degree in Psychology with a specialty in Early Child Development, from Vassar College. He also conducted graduate work in Bioenergetics at the University of Bridgeport.

A Founding Member of the Greenwich Hotline for crisis intervention and the Vassar College Drop-In Center for on-campus intervention. His tenure includes work with the Center for Christian Counseling & Healing in West Haven, Connecticut; the Pastoral Theological Institute in Madison, Connecticut; the Christian Institute For Psychotherapeutic Studies in Hicksville, Long Island; Supervisor with the C.G. Jung Institute for Training and Therapy Center in Manhattan; and the Temenos Institute in Westport, Connecticut. He is now working exclusively with the ministry he founded, based upon ancient Russian models, the Fellowship of the Inexhaustible Cup, offering individual, marriage, and family pastoral counseling.

In 1977, he participated in a workshop led by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos (author of *Orthodox Psychotherapy*), which presented a turning point in his career. Since that time, he has integrated the science of Orthodox psychotherapy, as taught by the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, in his counseling work. His commitment is not just to a career, but to a cause, which happens to be his career. He has developed the fullness of a ministry to the addicted, and to suffering people who are in families where addictions and their destructive effects have been present.



The grace -- of the One born of me, and of mine own -- will always be with this Icon.

AKATHIST TO THE INEXHAUSTIBLE CUP, KONTAKION 8

No one departs empty handed from the Inexhaustible Cup of divine gifts, O all-good One.

AKATHIST TO THE INEXHAUSTIBLE CUP, KONTAKION 12

Beyond technical sobriety ...

While the acquisition of physical sobriety is a great gift for the individual who suffers with an addiction, in and of itself this is not sufficient. Many individuals who are engaged in a 12-step recovery program, including Orthodox Christians, reach a crossroads in their life, and they are in need of healing at a deeper level. They are in need of a newfound freedom, mainly, the acquisition of emotional and spiritual sobriety.

The 12-step programs are to be commended, however, they do not go far enough. Someone may appear to be sober on the outside, but without this inner transformation, which is not adequately addressed in the 12-step program, the recovering addict will display characteristics of selfishness, resentment, and fear resultant from a lack of faith in a loving God. They remain miserable, angry, depressed, prone to self-pity, restless, and discontent. They persist in a state of denial while looking to blame those around them, rather than taking a deeper responsibility for themselves.

The 12-step program is concerned with what they call the “dry drunk syndrome”. This term refers to an individual who has not experienced the deeper levels of sobriety that are emotional and spiritual in nature. Contentment comes from maintaining a certain number of days of physical sobriety. These persons find themselves “dry” (not drinking), but they continue in the habits of addiction. This often includes living a double life and stashing a great number of skeletons in the closet.

Compounding this problem is the reality that more than half of all alcoholics suffer from multiple addictions. One of the best kept secrets among alcoholics and addicts is the presence of a sexual addiction, which they act out in secret with destructive behaviors such as masturbation, internet pornography and/or infidelity.

Significantly, because the fullness of sobriety is not acquired in the first place, those who suffer from the “dry drunk syndrome”, and have been involved in the 12-step fellowship for many years, present a distressing scenario. Some of these persons, after long periods of physical sobriety, end up having a relapse and committing suicide. This is because they have been acting out with a separate addiction which has not been treated. According to some estimates, and based upon my own professional experience, many addicts suffering from alcoholism, drugs, sexual addiction, overeating, and overworking, are themselves adult children of addictive or dysfunctional households.

Among the multiple addictions is included the relationship disease of “co-dependency”. The obvious symptoms of this illness are that the afflicted person is heavily invested in over managing, fixing, and controlling others. It is always marked by the need to seek the approval of others above all else. Those involved in helping professions especially doctors, nurses, therapists, and clergy are the most vulnerable and often disguise this destructive tendency in the name of helping others.

Orthodox Psychotherapy: The science of the Fathers and sobriety

The Orthodox Church contains within it the most pure, comprehensive, and holistic methods of treatment available to mankind for the healing of the soul and body. Deeper levels of spiritual and emotional sobriety are given to all them that seek the Lord within the Holy Orthodox Church, which is considered by the fathers as a “spiritual hospital”.

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, Abbot of the Birth of the Theotokos Monastery in Nafpaktos, Greece, writes in his work *The Science of Spiritual Medicine: Orthodox Psychotherapy in Action*:

The whole therapeutic method of the Orthodox Church is not aimed simply at making human beings morally and socially balanced, but at re-establishing their relationship with God and one another. This comes about through the healing of the soul's wounds and the cure of the passions through the Sacraments and the Church's ascetic practice.

This statement captures the essence of the Orthodox perspective on the topic of healing, which differs vastly from the Western approach to therapy. Orthodox psychotherapy is the science of healing found in the One, Holy, and Apostolic Orthodox Church. Its primary focus is our need to re-establish and to be reconciled first with God, and then with our neighbor and ourselves. This places the first commandment of our Lord in its proper perspective “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (MATTHEW 22:37).

As a result of the healing of the primary relationship with the Lord God, one is then able to love one's neighbor as oneself. The principles of Orthodox psychotherapy also stress the need to heal the soul and heart, and as a result of this healing, the mind will be healed, as it mirrors and reflects the condition of the inner heart.

The Fathers describe the soul as the nous (the eye of the heart), which has the primary function of giving the human being the noetic capacity to “see” God, or to have communion with His uncreated light. The capacity of this eye of our heart to see is contingent upon the state of purification that one's soul has undergone. This cleansing is needed to free it from the darkness resultant from the Fall of man, as well as from the worldly influence that surrounds us.

In addition to the nous, there are two other parts to the human soul. These are defined by the Fathers as the intelligent function and the irascible function. Because of the complexity of this theology, this requires a separate article at some future date. However, very briefly, the intelligent function is not to be confused with knowledge of God that is achieved intellectually, rather it is the knowledge from the heart of the mysteries of God. The irascible function permits us to willingly abide by the commandments of the Lord, to discern right from wrong, and to understand God's will for us.

Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness and according to my guiltlessness within me. Let the wickedness of sinners be ended, and do Thou guide the righteous man, O God, who searchest out the hearts and reins. Righteous is my help from God, who saves them that are upright of heart.

PSALM 7

All of the soul's functions became dysfunctional as a result of man's separation from God, at the Fall. This simultaneously caused man to live outside of harmony with the Lord's creation and with his own neighbors.

But the methods of treatment found in the Orthodox Church are designed to remove the sins and obstacles from our hearts, which keep us from experiencing the fullness of intimacy with our loving God.

For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with [their] eyes, and hear with [their] ears, and understand with [their] heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

ACTS 28:27

The first of three functions of the soul is called by Saint Gregory Palamas the "appetitive function". The word "appetite" means to have a longing for (inherent craving), hunger and thirst for God. We might ask why God created this function within the soul in the first place? Before the Fall, this need was satisfied by Communion with our God and Maker. From this perspective, it is clear that all addictions have their roots in the dysfunction of the soul's appetitive function. Mankind prone to sin chooses to fill the void and meet this need with created things, rather than receiving from and being satisfied with the living water and the immaterial manna (food), which can only be provided by Almighty God.

We must all come to terms with this insatiable desire and our futile attempts to fill the void in our souls with any number of created things. Our persistent wrong choices only create more separation from God and others, deepen our unsatisfied hunger and thirst, and lead to self-destructive behaviors (addictions).

Where to begin

One of the shortcomings of the 12-step fellowship is that, while it is important to focus on the removal of character defects which hinder our relationship with God and others, there is not enough emphasis on replacing these defects with virtues. Thus, there is a void, an emptiness that is not being filled, which has a burdensome impact upon the human soul.

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

JOHN 6:35

On the other hand, one of the fellowship's greatest contributions is the program's emphasis on the need to include actions of sobriety. The program strongly teaches that no one gets sober relying on their own thinking process. Sobriety is attained by sober actions. Examples of sober actions are going to meetings, calling one's sponsor, working

the steps, reading the literature, and participating in the fellowship. Individuals in recovery, as well as members of the Orthodox Church, can learn a great deal about how to improve their spiritual life with this emphasis on doing something about it instead of just talking about it.

For the individual, recovering addict or not, wishing to become more serious about accessing the fullness of "the methods of treatment" in the Orthodox Church, here are some suggestions to get started.

- Come to terms with our spiritual hunger and thirst by becoming aware of our sins. Many individuals are in a state of denial about their personal sins and only a crisis brings about getting their attention. Others are complacent about their futile attempts to fill the void in their soul with created things. For all of us, every act of disobedience (sin) toward our loving God and neighbor has its consequences. Much of our pain and sorrow is self-inflicted.
- Admit that our own self-will and self-sufficiency fuel our common enemy, which is pride and arrogance. It is time to admit that we act like orphaned children who have not experienced the fullness of the adoption which God, our Father, grants to each of us.
- We must acknowledge that the removal of our sins and the acquisition of purity of the heart will include receiving from the Lord that which we are lacking. Our loving God, the Father, desires to satisfy our hunger and to quench our spiritual thirst.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.

EZEKIEL 36:26

Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

PSALM 50:10

- Take practical actions of sobriety:
 - Walk humbly and become childlike;
 - Seek or renew the guidance of a spiritual father or parish priest, and be willing to begin, under his direction, a daily rule of prayer at home;
 - Set aside a minimum of one-half hour each day for personal prayer, and include within this time the proper use of the prayer of the heart, the Jesus Prayer.
- Take five minutes a day to pray for others.

The Fellowship of the Inexhaustible Cup

Please consider joining The Fellowship of the Inexhaustible Cup, a ministry of intercession. This ministry of prayer for others is dedicated to the Mother of God and her Holy Icon of the Inexhaustible Cup. Participation in the Fellowship requires only 5-6 minutes of Akathist prayers daily, including reading names from a prayer list, and joining the Mother of God in prayer, who herself is the queen of intercession. More information regarding this ministry and its outreach pastoral counseling services provided as part of this nonprofit work can be found at www.inexhaustiblecup.org.

We began this discussion with talking about some of the major core issues which all recovering addicts have in common, namely: overcoming selfishness/self-centeredness, resentments and fear. There is no greater method of treatment available to us in the overcoming of both selfishness and resentment than the practice of praying for others. The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ is greatly showered upon them that are willing to walk humbly and obediently in their imitation of Him, as well as following the example of Our Lady, who prays continuously for people in need.

My wife of 32 years, Matushka Syncletiki, and I, have learned first-hand about the magnificent benefits of setting aside time to pray for others, both living and departed, on a daily basis. I assure everyone reading this article that any sacrifice that we have made to consistently pray in this manner on a daily basis, has been outweighed by the benefits which we have experienced. Our loving Father is always pleased with those children who imitate Our Lord and His mother by praying for others. He pours out rich and abundant blessings upon us in response to our "actions of love" for others.

Pray for others as you would pray for yourself, for we are one, as the children of the Heavenly Father.

My Life in Christ, translated by
E.E. Goulaeff, Cassell & Co. Ltd., London, 1897

If you have questions or are seeking further information about any portion of this article, you may contact Father Christophe directly at orthodoxpsychotherapy@gmail.com, or by telephone at The Fellowship of the Inexhaustible Cup, 540-676-7484.