

**„BABEȘ-BOLYAI” UNIVERSITY
CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
„ISIDOR TODORAN”**

***MYSTERY OF REPENTENCE AND THE
RECONSTRUCTION OF SELF***

Abstract

PhD Coordinator:

Arhim. Univ. Prof. Dr. Habil. Teofil Cristian TIA

PHD Student:

Gheorghe Gherontie CIUPE

2020

CONTENT

Introduction

Chapter 1: Historical-Critical Approach to the Mystery of Repentance

1.1. Preliminaries

1.1.1. Conceptual Framework. Constitutive Elements of the Mystery of Repentance

1.1.2. The Concept of *Person* and its Relation to the Reconstruction of Self

1.2. Necessity of Repentance – Profane and Scriptural Testimonies

1.2.1. Repentance in the History of Religions

1.2.2. Repentance as Symbol in the Old Testament

1.2.3. Mystery of Repentance in the New Testament

1.2.4. Repentance in the Early Judeo-Christian World

1.3. Mystery of Repentance in the Teaching of the Holy Fathers

1.3.1. Mystery of Repentance in the Works of Apostolic and Apologetic Fathers

1.3.2. The Practice of Repentance and the Holy Fathers of the Golden Age of Christianity

(sec. IV-V)

1.3.3. Transition from Public Repentance to Private Confession

1.3.4. Mystery of Repentance from Chalcedon (451) to St John Damascene (†750)

1.3.5. Mystery of Repentance in the Post-Patristic Era

1.3.6. Liturgical Aspects of the Mystery of Repentance

1.3.7. Canons Regarding the Mystery of Repentance

1.4. Practice of Confession in the Romanian Orthodox Church

1.4.1. Romanian Elders and the Practice of Confession

1.4.2. Mystery of Repentance in the Communist Regime

1.4.2.1. Mystery of Repentance in communist prisons

1.4.2.2. Mystery of Repentance monasteries and parishes

Chapter 2: Mystery of Repentance and Personal-Existential Growth

2.1. Necessity of Repentance and Self-Sacrifice

2.1.1. Man as „Microcosmos” – Human Self and God’s Image

2.1.2. Original Beauty of Human Self as Full Participation to God

2.1.3. Fallen Self – From „God’s Image” to „Skin Clothes”

2.1.4. Ontological Dimension of Repentance

2.1.4.1. Restauration of Man's Personal-Existential Relation to God

2.1.4.2. Importance of Repentance in the Reconstruction of Self

2.1.4.3. Personal-Existential Growth

2.2. Mystical-Pastoral Dimension of the Sacrament of Repentance

2.2.1. Vocation and Responsibility of Spiritual Father

2.2.2. Conscience of Sin as a Precondition of Self Reconstruction

2.2.3. Confession — Redemption of Human Self

2.2.4. First Confession: From the Conscience of Sin to Obedience to Spiritual Father

2.2.5. Stages of Self Reconstruction

2.2.5.1. Cleansing of Passions

2.2.5.2. Devine Contemplation and Man's Theosis

2.2.6. Repentance as Continuous State of the Restored Self

Chapter 3: Mystery of Repentance and the Role of the Family in the Reconstruction of Self

3.1. Family —Space for Reconstruction and Fulfillment of Self

3.1.1. God - Source of Love and Power of Transfiguration in the Christian Family

3.1.2. Ontology of Family Intersubjectivity

3.1.3. Maternity in the Patriarchal Period

3.1.4. Description of the Role of the Family in the New Testament

3.1.5. Basic Characteristics of the Christian Family in the Golden Era of the Church

3.2. Repentance in the Psychogenetic Development of Self

3.2.1. Religious Education and Confession in Childhood

3.2.2. Guidance and Confession of Youth

3.2.3. Role of Confession and Asceticism in the Christian Family

3.2.4. The Family Crisis Caused by the Absence of Confession

Chapter 4: The Role of the Mystery of Repentance in Mental Illness Prevention and Treatment

4.1. Definition of the Concept of "Self". Reconstruction of Self through the Mystery of Repentance

4.2. Mystery of Repentance in Relation to Psychotherapeutic Theories and Methods

4.2.1. Psychology, Psychiatry, Psychotherapy

4.2.2. Confession versus Psychoanalysis

- 4.3. Role of Confession in the Prophylaxis of Mental Disorders
- 4.4. For an Orthodox Psychotherapy or a Theology of Psychotherapy
 - 4.4.1. Defining the Concept of Orthodox Psychotherapy
 - 4.4.2. The Need to Promote the Concept of Orthodox Psychotherapy
 - 4.4.3. Interferences between Theology and Psychotherapy

Chapter 5: Repentance in the Current "Theological Discourse"

- 5.1. Spiritual State of Contemporary Man
 - 5.1.1. "Individual" and "Person"
 - 5.1.2. Characteristics of Modernity
 - 5.1.3. Secularization within the Church and Repentance
- 5.2. Confession — a Strategic Bridge for Updating Pastoral-Missionary Methods
 - 5.2.1. Spiritual Reconstruction of the Parish
 - 5.2.1.1. Mission in the Parish
 - 5.2.1.2. The Formalism and Superficiality of Confession
 - 5.2.1.3. Establishment of a Core Group in the Parish
 - 5.2.1.4. Pastoral Care for Children and Youth
 - 5.2.1.5. Specifics of the Mission among Young People
 - 5.2.2. Mission of the Spiritual Father before and after Officiating the Mystery of Repentance
 - 5.2.2.1. Divine Liturgy — Foundation of Christian Mission
 - 5.2.2.2. Mission through Philanthropy
 - 5.2.2.3. Mission by Spreading Spiritual Books
 - 5.2.2.4. Establishment of Christian Schools - Way of Preserving and Promoting Authentic Moral Values
 - 5.2.2.5. Pilgrimages and Cultural Activities
 - 5.2.2.6. Updating the Pastoral Means of Communication

Conclusions

Bibliography

Keywords: Mystery of Repentance, reconstruction of self, metanoia, sin, healing, pastoral-missionary methods, spiritual father, secularization, orthodox psychotherapy, confession.

ABSTRACT

The present doctoral dissertation, elaborated under the supervision of Arhim. Prof. Ph.D. Habil. Teofil Cristian Tia, has as research topic „*Mystery of Repentance and the Reconstruction of Self*” and belongs to the field of Pastoral Theology.

The terms that make up the title of our research, *Mystery of Repentance* and *Reconstruction of Self*, are in a state of reciprocal interdependence: the Mystery of Repentance is a *sine qua non* condition for the reconstruction of self, and the self which was restored in this way becomes more and more deepened in repentance, because the fuller the reconstruction, the deeper the repentance becomes. The term *Mystery of Repentance* refers to the Holy Sacrament of the Church, which represents the work of cleansing and sanctification that rebuilds us spiritually and returns us to Christ, in order to dwell in the truth and receive eternal life. The Mystery of Repentance consists of the following elements: remorse, confession of sins before the spiritual father, penance, and absolution of sins. Repentance is not a mere enumeration of sins, but it represents, above all, a continuous state of acknowledging one’s estrangement from God through past or present sins and a permanent attempt to renew one’s life, both inner and exterior, based on an active relationship with God through confession.

The second term used in the title of our dissertation, *Reconstruction of Self*, refers to the restoration of God’s image in man, which was darkened by sin and had lost its main identity mark. *The Reconstruction of Self* describes both man’s personal growth towards his archetype—Christ, through the purification of passions, and the elevation of human nature to theosis, as the fulfilment of God’s thought for man since the foundation of the world.

Our dissertation aspires to contribute to the research of the Mystery of Repentance from a pastoral-missionary perspective and has a **dual purpose**: on the one hand, the description and the analysis of the process of reconstruction of self through the Mystery of Repentance in today’s society, having as research focus the man in spiritual crisis, the children, the teenagers, and the family in general. On the other hand, we aimed to harness the living experience of over 25 years of uninterrupted obedience in the activity of confessing the faithful and to offer to the spiritual fathers of our time a guide of practical recommendations for addressing the Mystery of

Repentance in the current social context, being convinced that our progress and personal growth as spiritual fathers are possible only by sharing among us the experience and the fruitful methods used in guiding the faithful.

The **motivation** of choosing the topic *Mystery of Repentance and The Reconstruction of Self* for our research is first and foremost a **personal** one: the confession and catechesis of the faithful (especially those coming for the first time to confession) has been my main obedience from the moment I became a priest. After more than 25 years of uninterrupted activity, I dare say that the absence of confession or the rare confession (two or three times a year), most often performed hastily, formally, and without a clear conscience of sins, is one of the main causes of dilution of faith, dissolution of spiritual life, and, finally, total indifference towards the Christian values.

As far as the **general aspect** of our motivation is concerned, we want to mention here the fundamental role of the Mystery of Repentance in the pastoral-missionary activity of the priest, as a unique means of pastoral mission and catechesis, through which the spiritual father can finely model and transform the soul of the faithful.

The **novelty** of our research consists in analyzing the reconstruction of the self through the Sacrament of Repentance in today's secularized society and in harnessing the author's experience as a spiritual father. Thus, among the newly described aspects, we mention the role of the Mystery of Repentance in the lives of children, adolescents and family in general, the penance received by the faithful who confessed for the first time, the role of liturgical life in our society, the importance of confession in mental illness prevention and treatment, the description of distorted confession practices, the relevance of spiritual books and their distribution to the faithful within the parish, and other practical recommendations regarding the practice of confession.

The **importance** of addressing this topic resides precisely in the essential role played by the Mystery of Repentance in the lives of the faithful, both as a premise of their spiritual health, and as the most efficient means of *reconstructing* the fallen human *self*, haunted today, more than ever, by confusion and lost in the maze of countless paradigm shifts.

The research undertaken in this dissertation is carried out on **two levels**: the **theoretical level**, which describes the current state of research for the chosen topic, being represented by the analysis and synthesis of the bibliography regarding the Mystery of Repentance; as far as the

practical level is concerned, it encompasses the author's experience mentioned above, with the souls of the faithful.

As far as the **methodology** is concerned, we have performed a literature review by examining numerous reference works in the field. First, we have addressed the patristic and post-patristic works, such as those of Saints John Chrysostom, John Climacus, Maxim the Confessor, John Damascene, Simeon the New Theologian, Nicodemus the Hagiorite, etc. Then, relating to the literature of the last century, we have made reference in particular to some fundamental writings: *Confession and Communion* (Archbishop Andrei Andreicuț), *Confession and Spirituality* (Rev. Fr. Petre Vintilescu), *The mystery of Confession in The Current Liturgical Rites* (Rev. Fr. Prof. Viorel Sava), and *The Mystery of Confession in the Orthodox Church* (Rev. Fr. Emil Cioara). In addition to these works, we have researched numerous other studies of the most representative authors in the field: Rev. Fr. Prof. Constantin Galeriu, Rev. Fr. Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae, Rev. Fr. Prof. Radu Dumitru, etc. Apart from these, we have also explored the writings of some of the most prestigious spiritual fathers of the twentieth century, from Romania, Greece, and Russia.

The present dissertation is structured according to the following **plan**: introduction, a logical sequence of five chapters, followed by conclusions.

The first chapter of our paper, entitled *Historical-Critical Approach to The Mystery of Repentance*, analyzes the topic from the biblical, historical, canonical, and liturgical point of view, with emphasis on the constitutive elements of this Sacrament and its importance, on the teachings of the Holy Fathers, and on the practice of confession carried out by the Romanian spiritual fathers. The chapter also describes the practice of the Mystery of Repentance under the extraordinary circumstances of the communist period.

From the biblical point of view, we have examined the Mystery of Repentance both in the *Old Testament*, as anticipation, and in the *New Testament*, as fulfilment. In the Old Testament, the confession was made before the prophets and the priests, who were entrusted with spiritual responsibilities, as an anticipation of the power that Christ would bestow upon the priests in the New Law. *The New Testament* clearly presents the establishment of the Mystery of Repentance. Here, repentance appears both as regret for the committed sins and rejection of the fallen human nature, and as mystery, endowed with the grace of forgiveness, performed after Pentecost by Apostles, bishops, and priests.

From a historical perspective, we have made a brief excursion into the *History of Religions*, highlighting the fact that in both primitive and ancient faiths and in the great religions of present world there are feelings of repentance and practices for the cleansing of sins and reconciliation with God, which show the universality of the concept of repentance. At the same time, we have insisted on the unique characteristics of Christian repentance.

By describing the Mystery of Repentance in the works of the Holy Fathers (apostolic, apologetic, holy fathers of patristic and post-patristic era), we have tried to present the central place occupied by this Sacrament in the life of the faithful of the Early Church, the way it was performed, and the essential role it played in the renewal of the fallen self and in the restoration of God's image in man. By reviewing the patristic heritage on repentance, we have aimed to actualize the thinking of the Holy Fathers and make it accessible to our society, as we need today, more than ever, benchmarks and role-models of holiness to counteract the false ideals of our secular and consumerist society.

From the liturgical point of view, we have taken into consideration the following points: the activity of the priest in and outside the Church, the preparation of the priest for the Mystery of Repentance, the service of Confession, concluding with the aspect of rare or frequent communion. Regarding the Mystery of Repentance in the Canon Law, we have emphasized the role of penance in man's personal growth towards achieving divine likeness.

The subchapter entitled *Romanian Spiritual Fathers and the Practice of Confession* is one of particular importance for the current state of research, describing the teachings on repentance of some of the greatest Romanian Elders of the twentieth century, who have spiritually helped the entire country with their wisdom and prayers: Father Cleopa, Father Arsenie Papacioc, Father Arsenie Boca, Father Teofil Părăian, Father Sofian Boghiu, Father Visarion Coman from Clocociov Monastery, Father Iustin Pârvu, etc.

The close relationship between the Mystery of Repentance and the reconstruction of human self has been emphasized by the communist period (1948-1989), which brought forth hundreds and thousands of martyrs, who sanctified their lives through suffering and sacrifice in the communist prisons. The Sacrament of Repentance was also performed in the system of mass incarceration of the atheist communist regime, transforming lives, reviving fallen souls, cleansing sins, and easing guilty consciences, even if its constitutive elements could not be fully observed.

The **second chapter**, entitled *Mystery of Repentance and Personal-Existential Growth*, consists of a logical sequence of two subchapters: *Necessity of Repentance and Self-Sacrifice* and *Mystical Pastoral Dimension of The Mystery of Repentance*. For a better understanding of the need for the reconstruction of the human self and of the role of the Sacrament of Repentance in this process, we have insisted in the first subchapter on the description of the special place that man occupies in creation, through his unique trait of God's image, endowed with all necessary qualities to attain holiness and divine likeness. By breaking the divine commandment and not acknowledging his sin, man loses the direct connection with God, estranges himself from his Creator and from the rest of creation, and thus, God's image in man is darkened and man's self is divided. Man, on his own, can no longer restore this image and reach theosis. Divine likeness, to which man was called by the act of creation, becomes again possible in its fullness through the Incarnation and the Sacrifice of our Saviour. The purification and restoration of the human self, disfigured by sin, is done by assuming the cross and walking on the path of repentance. This is called "science of sciences", "supreme art", "change of mind", and "second Baptism"¹, as it helps us to understand the fullness of human fall, to reject our sins, and to restore the connection to God, which renews our own identity through divine filiation.

In the second subchapter, *Mystical-Pastoral Dimension of the Mystery of Repentance*, we have attempted to describe the essential role of this Sacrament in regaining grace and restoring human nature, while emphasizing some important aspects: the vocation and responsibility of the spiritual father, sin awareness as a prerequisite for the restoration of the self, the practice of confession as a means of redemption of our fallen nature, the reconstruction stages of human self, and repentance as a continuous state.

We have also tried to briefly describe the portrait of the authentic spiritual father, called to collaborate with God in the salvation of the faithful. He must be a role-model of Christian life, guiding with humility and discernment, having a righteous and pure faith, sacrificial love, strong prayer, sound theological training, and solid general knowledge; he should use a lively spiritual vocabulary, in order to appeal to today's society and be understood by the contemporary man. However, the spiritual father needs, above all, the presence of God's grace in the Mystery of Repentance, because confession represents a genuine meeting of the faithful with Christ and does

¹ Terms used by the Holy Fathers and explained in Father Rafail Noica's book *The Culture of the Spirit*, used as a reference in the Bibliography.

not operate on the psychological level, its essence residing precisely in its soteriological character.

At the same time, we have presented the stages of the process of rebuilding the self through the Mystery of Repentance, starting with the consciousness of sin, which brings forth remorse and agony in the faithful's heart for losing the communion with God. Remorse and anguish generate a change of will in the decision to stop transgressing God's commandments. The next step is the confession of sins before the spiritual father, the only one invested with power and grace from God to forgive and absolve the sins. The self-reconstruction of the penitent is accomplished by striving to fulfil God's commandments. Important is also the penance given by the spiritual father, which must consist in the active involvement of the faithful in a campaign against his sins, in order to set an example for his fellow men.

Nevertheless, the practice has shown that the overwhelming majority of faithful need a general confession and a thorough examination of conscience. Therefore, we believe that the first confession must be one of "accommodation" and should include: detailed examination of the faithful's sins through guiding questions, carefully chosen so as not to traumatize the conscience of the person not familiar with confession; a penance, prudently selected by the spiritual father in accordance with the penitent's spiritual strength and knowledge and based on reading religious books; the recommendation to participate in the liturgical life of the Church.

Another important conclusion of the present research is that repentance and confession, in order to become truly fruitful, must go beyond the formal enumeration of sins and become a constant in the life of the faithful, a continuous state, an existential act. Their primary purpose is not the moral reformation of faithful, but the restoration of their communion with God, in order to become partakers of divine life. Repentance and confession represent thus a means of reinvigorating the spiritual life of the society, because the faithful who repent sincerely contribute to changing the world around them by involving, alongside the spiritual father, in the pastoral-missionary work of bringing the "lost sheep" back into the Church.

The **third chapter** — *Mystery of Repentance and The Role of Family in The Reconstruction of Self* — is dedicated to the analysis of the major role played by the Christian family in the process of reconstruction of the self in both man and woman united in marriage, as well as in their children.

This chapter is structured in two subchapters: *Family — Space for Reconstruction and Fulfilment of Self* and *Repentance in the Psychogenetic Development of Self*.

The first subchapter emphasizes the importance of healthy intrafamilial relationships, necessary for *the fulfilment of the self* in the Christian family, taking into consideration the fact that our society promotes a policy of destroying the family and its values. The focus is on describing the family as the image of the Holy Trinity, with the following issues being addressed: God's blessing received in the Sacrament of Marriage, spouses' love for God and for each other, self-sacrifice, rejection of egotism, and children's education.

The second subchapter is based on the author's pastoral experience in the chair of confession and addresses essential aspects for the reconstruction of the self, such as: religious education and confession in childhood, the presence of the spiritual father in the life of young people, the importance of virginity, premarital relationships, frequent confession and permanent obedience to the spiritual father, the role of preserving natural hierarchy within the family, the spiritual struggle and ascesis of family life, and the importance of participating in the liturgical life of the Church.

As far as the confession of children is concerned, we consider that it must start early, so that the little ones become familiar with this practice, showing obedience to the spiritual father and taking responsibility for their deeds. It is very important for the spiritual father to be sincere, to behave simply and naturally, to use a language appropriate to the age of the child, treating him with much appreciation and love, in order to be able to communicate God's word and grace to him. At the same time, we believe that the religious education of children should be based on the living example of their parents and should be done in a natural way, avoiding false zeal and exaggerated coercive measures.

The guidance and confession of young people also require special attention, as they are the most vulnerable and exposed to temptations category of faithful. We focused on the major problems the young people are facing today and which may have irreparable consequences on their future: dangerous entourages, promiscuity, pornography, premarital relationships and virginity loss before the Sacrament of Marriage, alcohol abuse and drugs, addiction to social networks, and complete moral relativism. We believe that the restoration of the self of these young people consists in their sincere acknowledging of sins, which brings forth the cleansing

fire of repentance, and in the firm commitment to stop transgressing and start praying for themselves and for the others.

There are multiple causes with regards to the current crisis of the Christian family: undermining the institution of marriage by trying to replace the traditional family with unnatural or erroneous forms of cohabitation, estrangement from the liturgical life of the Church, fornication and "trial marriages", adultery, abortion, parenting education, lack of communication and mutual tolerance, divorce, and abandonment of children. However, I dare say that the root cause of this "chain of weaknesses" lies both in a formal, inauthentic, and fatalistic faith, and in the absence of the spiritual father from the family life of the faithful.

Overcoming today's family crisis can only be achieved by restoring the Christian family as the basis of the contemporary society and as a framework for future generations' education, where moral values can be naturally transmitted, in order to shape man's spiritual character and restore his relationship with God and with his neighbour. Family's holiness and unity can be achieved through the fulfilment of God's commandments, common prayer, fasting, abstinence, and charity. Love, as the beginning and end of all Christian virtues, must be the centre and the deep heart of the family, the only one capable to abolish isolation between people and to bring them in communion with one another, according to the model of the Holy Trinity.

The starting point for the research undertaken in **Chapter IV**, entitled *The Role of the Mystery of Repentance in Mental Illness Prevention and Treatment*, is represented by the exponential increase of the number of mental disorders in our society (personality disorders, depression, anxiety, existential crisis, neurotic, psychodynamic, and somatic disorders). Therefore, we have decided to analyse the concept of mental illness, addressing it from the perspective of Christian anthropology and of the Holy Fathers, as well as from the perspective of the contemporary psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychotherapy, emphasising the interferences and the main differences among these disciplines.

Special attention has been given in the first subchapter to the concept of *self*, which plays an important part both in defining the human identity from a psychological point of view, as well as in the perspective of Christian anthropology and of the Holy Fathers. At the same time, we have described the concept of disease in orthodox theology as the result of breaking the communion with the Creator through sin, which leads to the darkening of the mind and the alteration of God's image in man. No longer able to contemplate God and estranged from

spiritual life, man has become physically and spiritually ill; he is incapable to attain true self-knowledge through corrupted reason and a conscience weakened by passions. Therefore, the self-knowledge begins in the orthodox vision with man's "coming to himself" and the awareness of his sinful state. This brings forth man's sincere remorse for his deplorable state and an unquenchable desire to confess his sin before God and abandon it forever.

The second subchapter, *Mystery of Repentance in Relation to Psychotherapeutic Theories and Methods*, describes, from a historical point of view, the evolution of the scientific methodology of investigating all mechanisms which make up the human psychic structure and inner phenomena. The concept of illness in psychology, psychoanalysis, and contemporary psychotherapy is described here as an expression of the inner disorder generated by psychic conflicts, repressed feelings or previous traumas, accumulated in the subconscious. However, the primary purpose of these disciplines is not man's healing, but the knowledge of the human psyche by revealing his repressions and regaining psychological balance, so that man can enjoy life to the fullest, without anxiety or complex. We consider that all the psychological practices and psychoanalytical methods lack the ontological horizon, as their object of study is represented by the human being, limited to his life on earth, in a state of condemnation and sin.

On the other hand, the healing of the human self is completely different in the vision of the Church and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. Considering the human being in the unity of his existence, both earthly and eternal, the orthodox ethos pursues the inner healing of the divided human self by consolidating its spiritual powers, that is, by cleansing the heart and the mind of passions, so that the two can become one through repentance and illumination of the Holy Spirit.

We strongly believe that the search for therapeutic solutions in extra-ecclesial areas is primarily caused by the superficial character of today's confession, the neglect of penance, the reduction of confession to a formal act, and the practice of a rare, depthless and sometimes public confession. As a result, we think it is essential to clearly distinguish between the psychotherapeutic act and the authentic confession. The main difference between the psychotherapy outside the Church and the Mystery of Repentance is that the former acts anthropocentrically, being limited to rational-human methods, while the latter is a divine-human work and operates with divine grace, through which the restoration of man is fully achieved.

The subchapter entitled *Role of Confession in the Prophylaxis of Mental Disorders* highlights the therapeutic and prophylactic nature of confession in relation to the mental illnesses specific to our secularized world. Taking into consideration the fact that spiritual powers that act contrary to their primordial purpose lead to passions, causing a state of spiritual illness, foreign to human nature, and that mental illnesses are nothing more than a consequence of this spiritual illness, we believe that spiritual healing of man through the Mystery of Repentance leads, in most cases, to his mental healing. The retrospective investigation of sins and the grace of forgiveness received in confession heal the deep wounds of the human fall, while confessing one's thoughts in front of the spiritual father reveals the causes of the passions that threaten man and help preventing spiritual illnesses, leading to true self-knowledge and restoration.

The fourth subchapter, *For an Orthodox psychotherapy or the Theology of Psychotherapy*, emphasizes the importance of developing and practicing an orthodox psychotherapy, understood as the science of spiritual healing according to the teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The cooperation and communication between the spiritual father and the psychotherapist or psychiatrist, in order to establish a holistic treatment for the patient, has increasingly become the main method of addressing the patient's needs in orthodox psychotherapy, especially in difficult cases, when the mental illness has both spiritual and organic causes. But, for Orthodox psychotherapy and confession to bring forth "fruits worthy of repentance" (Luke 3: 8), both the priest and the psychotherapist must facilitate the encounter of the faithful with Christ the Saviour, "the doctor of our souls and bodies", the only One who can heal man's self and overcome the evil in us and in the world, according to His holy word: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16: 33).

The last chapter of our dissertation, *Repentance in The Current "Theological Discourse"*, represents one of the most significant contributions of our research and describes the practical conclusions regarding the service of the Sacrament of Repentance and the reconstruction of the human self, reached based on the experience accumulated over two and a half decades of uninterrupted activity as a spiritual father. Not claiming to have achieved an exhaustive description of the pastoral-missionary means available to the confessor in his work, but taking into account the fact that "Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." (cf. Prov. 11:14), we believe that, regardless of the experience gained, permanent consultation with other confessors and mutual sharing of both the difficulties

encountered and the productive methods used, are absolutely necessary conditions for the success of the soul-guiding priest, which anchor him in the healthy tradition of the Church and prevent him from falling into extremes, heresies or irreparable mistakes.

This chapter is developed along two coordinates, suggestively entitled: *Spiritual State of Contemporary Man*, respectively *Confession — a Strategic Bridge for Updating Pastoral-Missionary Methods*. In the first subchapter, the focus of the research falls on the description of the characteristics of contemporary society and of secularization within the Church. The value system of today's world can be summed up in three main attractions: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (I Jn. 2:16). However, this is not something new but represents the way in which any process of temptation is carried out, from the initial temptation of our proto-parents in Heaven and to the present day, when man surrenders himself without fighting to immorality, uncontained desire, and Luciferian pride, seeking self-deification without any relation to God. The sign of the generalization of the disease is represented by the penetration and flowering within the Christian community of the phenomenon of secularization — understood as the denial of the deep connection between faith and the basic aspects of human life. The secularized society reduces the Church to a service provider, while religion becomes a subordinated part of this society. This situation promotes the proliferation of sin, superstitions, rebels and sects, while the contemporary man sees in the Church of Christ a simple religious faction, governed by man-made rules. We need a spiritual revival based on an authentic liturgical life and a catechesis of large proportions, which require much sacrifice and patience from the priest. The exhortation of the spiritual father, like the word of St. John the Apostle, must be firm and unwavering, showing people another way of life, in line with God's will, which leads to the acquisition of eternal life: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (I Jn. 2:15-17).

In the second subchapter, entitled *Confession — a Strategic Bridge for Updating the Missionary and Pastoral Methods*, we have underlined the fact that the priest's work in contemporary society must be more than ever a missionary one, through confessing the faithful and preaching the Gospel of Christ, His Cross and His Resurrection, for the salvation of all. We

consider that a fruitful pastoral work is based on the liturgical and catechetical tradition of the Church and is characterized by the permanent adaptation of the pastoral-missionary means and methods to the present conditions.

One of the main goals of the priest's mission is the spiritual reconstruction of the parish, understood as body of Christ, by engaging all faithful in the spiritual life of the community and by rebuilding the self of each member. This is achieved through the missionary sermon, as a means of addressing the problems and doubts of the faithful, accompanied by individual and common catechesis, in the form of an open and sincere dialogue. It is also important for the priest to use an adequate vocabulary, in order to be understood by contemporary people. At the same time, experience has shown us that practicing a quality confession plays an essential role in the recovery of those estranged from the Church and from liturgical life. In addition, of great help are also the priest's presence in the church outside of liturgical worship, the home visits to the faithful, and the effort intensification to spiritually reconstruct the Christian family, by organizing activities for children and youth and encouraging children's frequent communion with the Holy Sacraments. But the *sine qua non* condition of the spiritual revival of the parish has been and will always remain the active participation of the faithful in the liturgical life of the Church and the Eucharistic communion with Christ, as means of permanent reconstruction of the human self and of strengthening the unity and brotherly love among faithful.

With regards to the major dangers that threaten the existence of the parish as a spiritual center of the community, we have mentioned the following aspects in our work: the rare confession (during fasting periods or even on an annual basis), the superficial confession, performed hastily and often reduced to a mere formality necessary in order to partake of the Holy Communion, and the transformation of confession from a Sacrament of Repentance into a simple psychological counselling. However, we strongly believe that nothing damages the foundation of the Christian parish more than neglecting the liturgical life and practicing a communion with the Holy Sacraments in the absence of profound repentance and without proper preparation. In this way, the passions of the faithful are encouraged, while they become accustomed to a precarious spiritual life and to a symbolic Christ in the Eucharist; from here, there is only one step to the loss of faith identity and the abandonment of the Church by the disappointed faithful.

At the same time, experience has shown us that establishing a group of active and passionate missionary faithful, committed to an authentic Christian life, plays a vital role in

reviving and maintaining the spiritual life of the parish. The objectives of such a group are both the spiritual study and the participation in the liturgical life of the Church, as well as a fruitful missionary activity at work, in family, and among friends.

Another important aspect of the effort to revive the parish's spiritual life is the pastoral care for children and young people, which is based on an honest and open dialogue, the use of a current language, and a clear description of the meaning of each liturgical act and gesture. Of special importance in the pastoral care for adolescents is the cultivation of personal relationships among young people and their integration into an authentic community, where they can find their place and which can offer them true role-models.

In the subchapter *Mission of the Spiritual Father Before and After Officiating the Mystery of Repentance* we have insisted on the fact that the parish must also be a source of authentic culture and a theological school *par excellence*. We have therefore recommended the organization in each parish of a library with a broader spectrum of religious books, as well as the establishment of a center for the distribution and dissemination of spiritual materials. This is one of the most productive missionary methods, especially in the large parishes of the cities, facilitating the access of all faithful to spiritual literature, but especially of those who cannot afford to buy books.

On the other hand, we consider that the *Holy Scripture* and the *Prologues* should be on the reading list of every faithful, contributing thus substantially to the authentic spiritual atmosphere of the Christian family, where children grow up harmoniously. We recommend reading from the *Prologues* daily, as an "antidote" to the surrogates which appear permanently in mass-media and as a practice of knowing and following the example of the saints, with whom we enter into communion and who pray for us. We also believe that this kind of reading, as well as the study of other spiritual books, can be today one of the most efficient types of penance the confessor can prescribe in exchange for reducing the period of restriction from communion. Other missionary-pastoral means available to the Church are: philanthropy mission, pilgrimages, cultural activities, and the establishment of Christian schools, as an adequate environment for promoting authentic moral values.

As a final conclusion of our research, we would like to highlight the effort of the Church and its servants to constantly update and adapt the means of communication and mission according to the needs and requirements of the contemporary world. It is the duty of the priests

to facilitate the access of the faithful to the priceless treasure of teachings of the Holy Fathers, applying their values and experiences to the current social context, so that the contemporary man can assimilate them and thus find his unique place in the Church, the mystical body of Christ.

Not claiming to have exhaustively addressed the proposed theme and being aware that the subject remains open to other possible approaches, we hope that the present work will contribute to the development of research in this field and provide contemporary spiritual fathers with an important set of pastoral-missionary means to assist them in their spiritual activity, while also preparing the ground for future studies on the theory and practice of the Mystery of Repentance in contemporary society.