

“Ovidius” University of Constanța

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# **ABSTRACT OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS**

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**“OVIDIUS” UNIVERSITY OF CONSTANȚA  
FACULTY OF THEOLOGY  
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

**LOGOTHERAPY AND  
THE THERAPEUTIC DIMENSION  
OF FAITH  
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## -abstract-

### CONTENT:

RATIONALE.....	3
1. Definition of psychotherapy .....	6
2. Level of topic research within the Romanian Theology .....	8
3. Importance and actuality of the topic from the missionary and apologetic perspectives .....	10
INTRODUCTION .....	11
1. Psychology schools of Vienna .....	13
1.1. Psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud .....	15
1.2. Psychoanalytic theory of C. G. Jung .....	18
1.3. Individual psychoanalysis of Alfred Adler .....	21
I. VIKTOR FRANKL. LIFE AND WORK .....	27
1.1. Searching for the meaning of life with Viktor Frankl .....	53
1.2. The meaning of life and the four needs of human life .....	62
1.3. Introduction into logotherapy .....	69
1.4. Novelty of logotherapy and the renewal of human hope.....	85
1.4.1. Logotherapy and the finding back of the human perspective .....	99
1.4.2. Logotherapy principles and methods .....	119
1.4.3. Logotherapy and psychoanalysis .....	124
1.4.4. Logotherapy and theology.....	128
1.4.5. Existential analysis and its sources .....	139
<u>II. INCURSIONS INTO LOGOTHERAPY</u>	
2.1. Orthodox psychotherapy.....	150
2.2. The need of psychotherapy .....	156
III. LOGOTHERAPY PRINCIPLES IN THE THEOLOGIC WRITING AND IN LITERATURE .....	175

3.1 Psychoanalysis in the Romanian psychiatry during communism .....	177
3.2 Logotherapeutic approaches in the writings of Father Constantin Galeriu.....	190
3.3 Psychology of sin – mirrored by psychoanalysis .....	193
3.4. Psychology of heights and the human perspective .....	200
3.5. Orthodox logotherapy in the light of christological theandria .....	208
3.6. Logos and logotherapy according to Nicolae Steinhardt .....	213
3.6.1 Psychoanalysis and the knowledge of horrors of concentrationary regime ....	217
3.6.2 The attempt of identifying the way back home .....	223
3.6.3. Receiving the Baptism and the Communion with the Holy Sacraments .....	226
3.6.4. The prayer of the heart and the gift of tears .....	237
3.6.5. Contemplation of God's light .....	241
3.6.6. Attaining the Heavenly Kingdom: the supreme goal of the Christian believer .....	247
IV. SUFFERING AND FAITH .....	255
4.1. Belief and its therapeutic power.....	261
4.2. Is it a paradox to speak of therapy through suffering? .....	276
4.3. Why cannot we speak of a meaning of suffering? .....	286
V. THE PRIEST AS GOD'S SERVANT AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST .....	298
5.1. The priest as confessor and psychotherapist.....	301
5.2. Means of the orthodox therapy .....	313
5.1.1. Prayer .....	314
5.1.2. The sacrament of Confession .....	319
5.1.3. Christian asceticism .....	326
5.1. 4. Psychological counseling today .....	332
CONCLUSIONS.....	342
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	346

The thesis contains 346 pages, of which 14 pages of bibliography and 988 quotes from the works referred to.

The research topic is in line with the actuality of the Romanian Theology due to the behavioral reversals we attend during these last decades, reversals which require the involvement of orthodox psychotherapists and of logotherapists whose mission is to provide guidance towards the healing faith. Due to individualism cultivated by the Latin West, psychotherapy, a field which deals with the therapy of human existence, re-centered philosophical thinking towards the guidance of persons towards future using “the word” which acts upon the soul. The therapeutic role of orthodox spirituality is pointed out by the spreading of heavenly grace and the spiritual counseling of the Fathers of the Church, of the confessors in monasteries. Through a systematic approach, the work points out the missionary and apologetic importance of the logotherapy-related developments and the role hereof in pointing out the therapeutic dimension of faith.

In the Romanian Theology, logotherapy was approached in the writings of those who passed through the sad experiences of the communist regime, writings that belong to remarkable personalities.

## **1. Introduction**

The Introduction contains an incursion into the development of psychologism at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the psychology of Freud was very popular, being later continued by the identity and the angst crises of modernity. The emergence of the psychology schools of Vienna prove that man is the center of reality and in his capacity of personal being, the discovery of the own existence is a real survival condition.

There follows the short presentation of the psychoanalysis of Freud, of the individual psychology of Adler and the one of Carl Gustav Jung for pointing out the major importance of the new direction in the field of psychotherapy, the one acknowledged under the name of logotherapy.

### **1.1 Psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud**

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Psychoanalysis grants special attention – through an assisted self – analysis– to the intrapsychic conflict between the subconscious and the conscious, conflict which marks the entire life of man, and in which the subconscious is prevalent. S. Freud starts from comparing the neurotic symptom, approached from the perspective of the meaning of life.

In spite of all criticisms and controversies applied during the last years, the merit of Freud –

the one of explaining human personality through the existence and action of the subconscious in the psychic life – cannot remain in the shadow. His theory and methods are used even nowadays by psychotherapists, that consider the therapeutic effect is successful. The only inconvenient of this psychotherapy is this need of testing the abyss of human being; this explains actually the prevalence of the past over the present. Prevalence is the will of pleasure .

## **1.2 Psychoanalytic theory of Carl Gustav Jung.**

The psychology of C. G. Jung is based on his experience regarding men, whom he classifies in: normal, neurotic and psychotic. Although he took into account the pathological elements, his theories are suggestions and attempts of stating a scientific psychology founded on the unmediated experience with the human beings. Protagonist of the manner of symbolic expression, C. G. Jung prefers to speak of the soul or of psyche, rather than the psychic. He declares himself the adept of encouraging a psychology of the soul, that is of promoting a theory of the soul, based on the postulate of an autonomous spirit. His analysis identifies the man's need of meaning inscribed in the arche and manages to show that it is in the personal subconscious "our most intimate, ultimate and incomparable uniqueness" is revealed.

## **1.3 Individual psychology of Alfred Adler**

Alfred Adler comes with a new perspective in exceeding the human complexes elaborating the principle of the will of power. Together with the psychoanalysis of Freud and the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung, the psychology of Adler counts as one of the trends of the Viennese psychology. Adler's thinking is dominated by Nietzsche's philosophy, understanding the will of power in a wider meaning. The individual psychology promoted by him is a psychology of an undividable whole, which refer at the same time to the individual as such and the relation hereof with the entire community. He pleads for the development of the feeling of social communion. According to Adler, the biggest problems of life are life in society, work and love. He points out the social dimension of psychic life in general and for the subconscious in particular. From this pointing out of the subconscious it is pointed out the fact that the entire individual life is centered towards I.

## **I. Viktor Frankl. Life and work.**

The first chapter draws the portrait of Viktor Frankl, the founder of a new school of psychology, and also the promoter of a new form of existential therapy, which proved its

power during the post-war years and also in this depressing post-modernity. Being less known in Romania, except for those working in the field of psychology, the biography of Viktor Frankl and his work are described in detail throughout 23 pages. Choosing a way different from Freud's, who denied any possibility of approaching psychoanalysis and religion, Viktor Frankl, after having crossed spiritual crises, discovers a new way of answering the need of the human being. Logotherapy came to give a meaning to the meaningless life. Starting from the personal experience, V. Frankl combined humanism with science, introducing the most important psychological concept since Freud and Adler. His own dramatic experience determined him to undertake a truly existential analysis, thus reaching to the object and content of logotherapy. A Jewish physician, V. Frankl experiences life in four concentration camps and concerns himself with finding the meaning while following the biblical thinking with hope and not with despair. Holding the position of president of the Neurology Section within the Polyclinic of Vienna for 25 years, V. Frankl faces the sufferings of men, fact that lead him to the approaching of the researches through scientific studies and the clinical streamlining of logotherapy. Starting with 1949, V. Frankl writes 30 books which were translated in more than 32 languages; he gave more than 200 seminars at Harvard University, the University of Dallas, Stanford University and Pittsburg. To these one can add 5 documentary films, and the therapy shall be used also in the prisons of the USA within the rehabilitation programs of America. The University of California opened an Institute of Logotherapy coordinated by V. Frankl - in the context of the spreading of Frankl's scientific researches – supporting the logotherapeutic activity.

### **I.1 Searching for the meaning of life**

Logotherapy focuses on the meaning of human existence, on man's search of the meaning. Moral and religious values are ways of access towards the discovery or re-discovery of the meaning of life, these consisting in the living of creative, attitudinal or existential values. These values help the self-transcendence that mark each man fighting guilt, suffering and death. Discovering the meaning is a priority for the modern and contemporary humanity. The need of meaning, of expression is perceived in various circumstances or situations provided by the existence of each person, and the transition from the simple hope of life to the living of an amazement confirms us of the truth that the need of meaning is of existential-human need.

## **1.2 The meaning of life and the four needs of meaning of human life**

The meaning of life can be defined according to the four human needs of meaning: the purpose of life, positive value of life, the efficiency of life and dignity. Through will, with responsibility, man has the freedom of choosing on the background of the being's deep interior. The meanings of life are divided by V. Frankl into a creationist, experimental and attitudinal. The target of reaching the purpose is connected to the human perspective. Meaning is real and fulfills important functions in defining the human person; at the same time, meaning is also the one that determines the person's skills of controlling behavior; notwithstanding the renewing or innovative ability thanks to which any human being searches for ways for getting out of the patterns.

Meaning is the one that stimulates and develops human becoming, which any person feels called upon to accomplish, helps people make decisions for managing actions and affective states. Meaning and a human's person need of meaning – as resulting from the aspects outlined in the discussion – equate to the confirmation of existence, of freedom, of happiness, of friendship; meaning thus appears to be related to the existential experience and – in the case of believers, especially of the Christian ones – to redemption. To V. Frankl consciousness is the organ of meaning, through it man can estimate the meaning of situations according to the moral law.

## **1.3 Introduction into logotherapy**

We often speak of the perfect order of the universe, but forget that man's importance, in his capacity of *God's image*, needs to be pointed out as although he is part of this order, man can bring into the world he lives in that brightness of the Creator; in other words, he is called upon to reveal the heavenly light, in his turn, to the entire creation, that is to the entire universe. As we partake of the universe, we must find for the nowadays troubles an answer as a remedy for the existential raptures we suffer in those moments when meaning is lost; we are called upon to discern, within creation, *the steps of God*, Who calls us and offers us at the same time an answer. Assuming this answer of the Heavenly Father we shall become more conscious of our responsibility as persons. At the question pertaining to the meaning of life, the psychotherapy tries to provide an answer, taking into consideration the human psychology and man's connection to the religious values.

Viktor Frankl speaks of the so-called tragic triad, when he refers to events that can stress the negative or dark side of life: suffering, guilt and death. We must replace suffering



with faith, guilt with love and death with hope.

#### **1.4 Novelty of logotherapy and the renewal of human hope**

Logotherapy is a young research direction, open to further progress, due to the fact that psychotherapy focuses on the identification of the meaning of life. The main points of Frankl's theory were developed and applied in the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Dachau, points that valorize the future through the past or the past is projected from the perspective of the future.

It seems that praying suggested to Frankl the therapeutic role of the word, thus penetrating into the depth of human experiences. It is for this reason that we could say that logotherapy points out the religious nature of the humans and for this reason it needs religion and its values that cultivate luminous perspective of the human being. It achieves a re-humanization of the psychotherapy using existential philosophy.

##### **1.4.1. Logotherapy and the finding back of the human perspective**

Logotherapy, that is meaning- and reestablishment-oriented psychotherapy, claims a link between aesthetic or cultural values, the religious ones and the moral ones pointing out the work shaping role through which these values can shape the human being itself.

Logotherapy is the one that helps the sick discover the meaning of life – which cannot be exempted of the holiness of life – by fathoming the spiritual and cultural dimension, not less religious; penetrate into the depth of existence, demonstrating that it is a psychotherapy that treats with interest not the idea of being but the meaning of being. Therapy through communication, in the Christian meaning, the talking that takes place in the confessional chair; Logotherapy comes to speak of a supra-meaning, a meaning that exceeds by far the possibilities of human logics. Holiness is the one that changes man, that heals traumas, referred to by psychiatrists as psychic troubles; it is the one that imposes the self-analysis of the inner content of the soul and the outer form of behavior. Referring to this retrieval of meaning which gives a new perspective to a human's life, Viktor Frankl identified three different ways. According to logotherapy, meaning can be found as creating something, experiencing something or through the attitude we have in front of an unavoidable suffering.

#### 1.4.2. Logotherapy principles and methods

In this subchapter are presented the five principles on which the logotherapy theory was based: freedom of will, will of meaning, tragic triad, neuroses and paradoxical intention. For all principles, V. Frankl uses the personal example, pointing out that man must not wait for something from life, but feel that life expects something from him. Men want to be free, when it comes to thinking and the manifestations of the own personality, but for many, the will of meaning is not connected to man's natural existential need. The tragic states a man crosses are also events which are part of his life: suffering, death and guilt. For Frankl, guilt is treated as existential guilt; he connects guilt to suffering and death, but also to the existential void at the same time. The existential void is also related to the noogenous neuroses which are not always pathogenic. The paradoxical intention, a method through which patients receive encouragements for eliminating fear, is continued by a dereflection for cultivating trust in one's own person.

#### 1.4.3. Logotherapy and psychoanalysis

The psychoanalysis of Freud was very much connected to the principle of pleasure, speaking of a "will of pleasure"; the Adlerian individualist psychology refers to the "will of power", while the logotherapy of V. Frankl speaks of the "will of meaning". Hierotheos Vlachos characterized the school of Freud through the usage of the concept of *self-expression*, the school of Adler through the one of *self-achievement*, and the logotherapy through the *self-advancement*. The psychology of Freud explains the syntagm "I am" through "I must", the one of Adler, explains "I am" through "I can", while the one of Frankl, through "I owe", finding out – like Charles Pegny – that evil is the one opposing the organization of spiritual life, without which our human existence as such has no meaning.

At a more analytic view – according to the theory of Freud – behind any human action there are existential instincts, referred to by C.G. Jung under the name of archetypes. V. Frankl himself needed himself to show the difference between psychoanalysis and logotherapy within a seminar as follows: If "throughout psychoanalysis, the patient must lie on the sofa and tell himself things which are sometimes very unpleasant to be told", through the therapy of Frankl – that is through "logotherapy, the patient can stand, listening though to things which sometimes he does not like to listen to."

#### **1.4.4. Logotherapy and theology**

For defining the relation between the medical spiritual assistance and the priestly one, Viktor Frankl starts precisely from “the objectives hereof: the purpose aimed at by the medical spiritual assistance – in general the purpose of psychotherapy – is the healing of the soul. On the other hand, the aim of the spiritual assistance provided by a priest– in general the purpose of religion – is the redemption of the soul.” If psychotherapy does not contain redemption but only a mere suggestion hereof, the reality of redemption contains the healing of man in his entirety that is body and soul. For this reason, the spectrum of religion is much wider; and also more archaic, since the great religions speak of redemption.

V. Frankl completes this point of view, mentioning the fact that religion – more than logotherapy – has a psycho-hygienic effect; this fact is the one offering the believer the feeling of safety and the equilibrium of the soul. Religion is the one offering people the possibility of spiritual rebirth, and also the opening towards the human’s anchoring into transcendence.

The purposes of psychotherapy and religion are not at the same level of existence as, one refers to the health of the soul and the other to the redemption of the soul. The dimension towards which religious man points is much more containing and higher than the one of psychotherapy. This attachment of religious man to the higher dimension takes place not within knowledge but within faith. Mention should be made of the fact that logotherapy is not meant to discover religious values but uses them; even in the case of the non-believers.

#### **1.4.5. Existential analysis and its sources**

Viktor Frankl uses two concepts for formulating his theory regarding spiritual therapy : logotherapy and existential analysis. As Viktor Frankl himself points out – the roots of existential analysis are formed of the evidence provided by the philosophic and theological sources, and also by those of medicine and logotherapy. The existential analysis applies the principle of motivation, principle which allows the treatment of neurotic troubles. This form of existential analysis– with its multitude of techniques and methods of intervention, as well as the complex approach of the history of personal life explains the existence and shows – at the same time – that at the basis of each human existence is always the understanding of the world.

## INCURSIONS INTO PSYCHOTHERAPY

This chapter points out that– unlike psychoanalysis – psychotherapy has many common aspects with religion, religious and moral values helping much more patients in rediscovering the meaning of life and logotherapists in finding out easier the spiritual references through which they mediate the identification of the highest purpose of human life.

### 2.1. Orthodox Psychotherapy

All psychotherapeutic orientations include a therapy that is based first of all on the relation between people. The love of the fellow man and the care to man are rooted into the Word of God, Who guides us so that all in despair can recover hope, freedom and love.

Church and hospital are two institutions that help and heal man, which aim at maintaining his health of the soul through listening, patience, devotedness; and last but not least through caring. By taking care of the souls, the priest and the doctor are really “God’s collaborators”, are guides of the soul into understanding the meaning of suffering and of life.

### 2.2 The need of psychotherapy

Together with stress – *neuroses*, which are formed following perturbations occurred due to the nervous context into the life relations, are a cause which involves the needs of therapy nowadays. The causes of the neuroses pertain to a great extent to the inner disturbance and also to the discontent and unhappiness caused not only by sin but also by solitude. The clinical picture of the current suffering can be described also as a spiritual void completed by the chronic fatigue that determines irascibility, lack of living pleasure, of optimism reaching what could be called the fight of the Church and of the religious denominations for the recovery of the spiritual dimension of the therapeutic action. If suffering is the one that led to conceptualizing psychotherapy and in the end logotherapy, it also contributed to raising awareness as for the divine pedagogy, manifested by God through suffering.

Like logotherapy, the orthodox faith has the same role, giving priority to the meaning in a man’s life; and more precisely, the cultivation of the communion of man and God. The need of psychotherapy, of man’s redemption through the healing of the soul approaches the orthodox psychotherapy to the logotherapy of Viktor Frankl, but also differentiates them; and it radically differentiates it from spiritual experience and the orthodox logotherapy. Such

differentiation is due first of all to the work of the Holy Spirit through the philanthropic service of the confessor - priest and psychotherapist or logotherapist. Spiritual life accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit – through the communion with the Holy Sacraments, starting from Baptism until the Holy anointment – illuminates the way to the ultimate meaning of mankind: the communion with God.

### **III. PRINCIPLES OF LOGOTHERAPY IN THE THEOLOGIC WRITING AND IN LITERATURE**

As pointed out throughout the work the theory of Viktor Frankl refers to the search of the meaning of life and the promoting of the will of meaning. To illustrate this truth which was not avoided by the Romanian writing – be it theological, philosophical or literary, apart from the psychiatric specialized approaches– three Romanian personalities expressed their opinion in this regard: psychiatrist Petre Brânzei, monk Nicolae Steinhardt, and Christian writer and Priest Constantin Galeriu, one of the greatest orthodox missionaries of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **3.1 Psychoanalysis in the Romanian psychiatry during communism**

The communist society, through the social discrimination – the splitting in two classes: the reactionary class and the working class –contributed to the object of psychiatry if one considers the total denial of human behavior during the specified period. Using the pressure of the social group – in fact of the socialist society, whose oppression instruments were well known–priority is given to that biological side to which pertains the *instinctive-emotional lability*, which transforms man from personal beings into individuals. Through progressive social degradation and depersonalization of individuals it was possible to reach the estimated formation of strong personalities, that would adjust and structure their “behavior into socially useful directions. Psychiatry , as all human sciences, among which psychology , neurology, medicine in general, which also includes psychoanalysis and its therapeutic methods, progressed starting with 1970, the Romanian Psychoanalysis Society being created in 1990.

#### **3.2 Logotherapeutic approaches in the writings of Father Constantin Galeriu**

Generous until the own sacrifice, altruist until forgiveness and love of the enemies, patient until self-forgetfulness, wise and equilibrated in every aspect, Father Galeriu has been a real *Father and confessor*, carving out of the souls of students and parishioners real Christian characters. In forming characters he used his wide theological and secular culture, the intuition of a good psychologist that determined his approaching of the logotherapy of Viktor Frankl, adding the wide ascetic and philocalic literature, and also the unattained zeal of a missionary.

### **3.3 Psychology of sin – mirrored by psychoanalysis**

For Father Galeriu who focused on the psychology of sin as resulting from the ascetic literature, following the theological line, the fall of man from the paradise happiness condition is a fall from the order of values, a fall that is clearly mirrored in philosophy. Creation reveals a new dimension in the believer's consciousness, through the power of faith. It is not only a repetition, a monotonous cadence of original archetypes, of cosmic rhythms but it is also renewal; renewal through blessing, through redemption. Through psychoanalysis, existence becomes dynamic, undergoes a regime of continuous foundation and renewal, God intervening in creation, while the Self starts identifying itself with the *goal of life*, with the meaning life can get.

### **3.4 Psychology of heights and the human perspective**

Since the Genesis, the entire deployment of history was set under the light of climbing, so that – in Christian teaching – meaning also has a vertical dimension, not only through the connection of man to God – consecrated by the incarnation of Our Lord the Christ – but also through the call addressed to man to advance from the condition of restored *image* to the one of *similitude* to God, that is of becoming similar to the Archetype according to which we were created. *The divine Archetype* that resides in each person's secrete depth defines the look of the human being towards a perspective that forms a real ontological call.

### **3.5 Orthodox logotherapy in the light of christological theandria**

The redemption or healing brought by Christ – the incarnated divine Logos is in fact Logotherapy, which is at the same time the expression of God's philanthropy. Christian logotherapy

is much wider than any other form of therapy through the cultivation of the *will of meaning*. No other form of logotherapy cannot provide the perspective of the Heavenly Kingdom, which means the highest possible fulfillment of man's call for searching holiness and fulfillment.

### **3.6 Logos and logotherapy according to Nicolae Steinhardt**

Nicolae Steinhardt states that the Holy Cross is the one that expresses best the dimensions of human existence; this explains the confessed special devotion of the monk of Rohia to the Cross of Jesus Christ the Savior. The symbol of the Cross fully expresses the human condition related to the reality of this world, through its materiality and also the call of man for self-advancement – not only in his condition of man on this world – regarding the heavenly perspective which Our Lord Jesus Christ opened to him through the Sacrifice on the Cross and through His Resurrection, followed by His Ascension. The effective solution for solving many crises mankind faces nowadays is the one of understanding a fundamental truth of the human being: man cannot be separated from the religious faith, which is not a phenomenon but a constitutive aspect of the human person.

#### **3.6.1 *Psychoanalysis and the knowledge of horrors of concentrationary regime***

Psychoanalysis was a concern not only in his youth; it continued to be a concern for the restless reader and searcher of answer that Nicolae Steinhardt was also during his detention years. To him, it mattered the fact that the emergence of psychoanalysis is connected to the depersonalization which the 19<sup>th</sup> century, technicist and industrial, caused in the European soul, getting further and further away from Christian values in which he kneaded his culture and spirituality, the manner of considering and construing the world he lived in and whose main features were not to be found in the world in which gods waned – in Nietzsche's words – nor in his own inner universe overwhelmed by the primordial and inform mire.

#### **3. 6. 2. *The attempt of identifying the way back home***

Nicolae Steinhardt proved to be curious towards knowing the way things went in the world and the specificity of European culture, attempting to divine within this labyrinth in which mankind lived since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until World War II that only in the pain that spread within humans can he find an answer to the questions troubling him. This is the starting

point for the identification of the self and the spiritual transfiguration.

### ***3.6.3. Receiving the Baptism and the Communion with the Holy Sacraments***

For Nicolae Steinhardt, Baptism was a real lesson of faith, transforming him. His intuitions were rendered in gifted and eloquent expression, driving the belief in the rejuvenation of life offered by the faith in Christ; and particularly in the courageous assumption of this rejuvenation of being. The understanding that a two-millennia old spiritual therapy exists, offered by the creating and saving Logos, determines him to exhort us to this shared journey – which he endeavors to make together with the readers of the *Journal of Happiness*.

### ***3.6.4. The prayer of the heart and the gift of tears***

After receiving the Baptism, which cause him to live in a profound humbleness, particularly after the receiving of the Baptism, Nicolae Steinhardt will advance on the path of the prayer; refining it by continuous practice, he arrives to the Prayer of the heart or the Prayer of Jesus, which he eventually crowns it with the Gift of tears and the contemplation of Christ's vision.

### ***3.6.5. Contemplation of God's light***

Following the two visions he had during imprisonment, Nicolae Steinhardt begins to feel the presence of Christ by practicing the Prayer of the heart, which provides the inner power for a profound transformation: the vision of light or of Jesus Christ surrounded by light.

### ***3.6.6. Attaining the Heavenly Kingdom: the supreme goal of the Christian believer***

After receiving the Baptism and the contemplation of God's light, Nicolae Steinhardt understands that the only logotherapy is the one of Christ, the divine Logos incarnate. The eschatological perspective given by Steinhardt to logotherapy was not available to Viktor Frankl, as the latter did not know the illumination and transfiguration through Christ. The aim of the eternal perspective of the Logotherapy fulfilled through Christ is the achievement of happiness and of eternal life.

## **IV. SUFFERING AND FAITH**

This chapter is meant to contribute to the understanding of the relation between suffering and faith, particularly on the level of the therapeutic dimension of faith, as final reality as well as loyalty to this reality, which transcends the limits of world and knowledge. Faith appeals to the feeling rather than reason and it drives our feelings and our emotional life.



### ***1.1. Faith and its therapeutic power***

Faith pertains to the spiritual side of the human being and, for the believer, is not only the fulfillment into the divine gift, but also the extension of life beyond the sensible world. The acceptance or assumption of suffering is only just spiritual openness – starting from within – of the sufferer, to the aim of allowing the redemption to work inside the person. The sub-chapter defines faith and describes the modalities in which God revealed Himself to humankind, making possible to know Him. The knowledge of God would have been impossible if the need of communion as well as the need of salvation would not be real. Faith has an evident healing dimension, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit the human person is capable again to cooperate, giving meaning to the existence. The suffering – and other tragic experiences as well – is healed by sharing the divine gift, as well as by the sanctifying works of the Church.

### ***4.2. Is it a paradox to speak of therapy through suffering?***

The points of view expressed by V. Frankl focus on his own experiences, which caused him to meditate deeply on the relation between meaning and suffering, pain and death. Finding the meaning of the sufferings he experienced leads to survival and to the desire to help others to find the lost meaning of life. Even though one cannot always penetrate the mystery of suffering – caused by fear of death, egoism and the atrocity of pain – one should not forget that the suffering helps to find answers to many existential questions, helping in understanding that sufferance and spiritual strength make the basis for enduring the pain-sacrifice, which enriches us spiritually. Suffering is a pedagogical means employed by God to bring the Man closer to Him and to determine him to open oneself to the heavens for which he was created. If one uses this way of interpretation, then is possible to have a meaning mediated by suffering; to summarize, the suffering helps the Man to self-identify as being essence of son of God Almighty.

### ***4.3. Why cannot we speak of a meaning of suffering?***

Suffering is a challenge to pass a life test, an existentially defining one. All people are called to be tested in this way, in front of themselves and in front of God; the non-believers add difficulty to this test, and are then more hesitant and less self-confident.

One needs this threshold of suffering in order to be returned to the state in which Man was created by the heavenly Father. People should overcome their sufferings after they understood their spiritual aim, arming themselves with the sufferance that strengthens – like a medicine – the one tested by the suffering of life. One's powerlessness can be overcome only by following the example

of our Savior; as well as by partaking to the gift of saints, from which flows hope and endurance, purification and the love of God.

## **V. THE PRIEST AS GOD’S SERVANT AND PSYCHOTHERAPIST FOR BELIEVERS**

The final chapter of the doctoral thesis emphasizes the importance of the priest towards the spiritual and bodily healing of Christians, taking into account that priesthood means commitment, ministration, calling, spiritual training, vocation, sacrifice, prayer and having the consecrated power to officiate the Holy Sacraments.

### ***5.1. The priest as confessor and psychotherapist***

The contemporary context determines the priest to take also the role of ad-hoc psychotherapist – the roles of confessor and minister aside – due to the new situations arising within the Romanian society; the consequences of Post-Communism and the secular influence might generate completely new developments. As psychotherapist, the priest must not judge his fellow humans; on the contrary, he is required to be open towards dialogue and relations, in order to achieve cooperation and to prevent the development of unfortunate cases by fostering a responsible Christian behavior. The difficult mission, which implies interdisciplinarity and knowledge proving the confessor competence of a priest, is discussed in the following sub-chapter.

### ***5.2. Means of orthodox psychotherapy***

As experienced before, even those who declare themselves non-believers are waiting to meet a good confessor to help them to return home, i.e. within the faith. In these cases, the whole spiritual care and attention of the priest must be more refined and supported by pastoral means and methods employed for the spiritual strengthening of those who ask for his help, even without expressing it.

#### **5.2.1. Prayer**

The first of these means is the prayer; it provides the unmediated connection to God. As form of confessional therapy, the prayer involves the power of mind, heart and thoughts; it involves, as well, a continuous endeavor sourced in humility and kindness. The thoughts descend from the level of the reason into the heart, increasing the desire to partake in prayer, to overcome the

suffering and the sin.

### **5.2.2. The Sacrament of Confession**

The therapeutic value of the Confession sacrament depends also on the confessional strength of the priest, who, by his pastoral considerateness and openness towards the patient, succeeds in being a good psychotherapist. An experienced confessor knows how to discern the religious lassitude from the pathologic attitude. Within the Sacrament of Confession, the advice or recommendation and eventual absolution aside, the confessor also provides the penitent the personal example, i.e. the way of combining the prayer for others with the shared endeavor, the correct diagnostic of illnesses and the right methods of healing.

### **5.2.3. Christian Asceticism**

By practicing the asceticism, one aims to achieve the spiritual fulfillment of a human being aspiring to partake of the loving holiness of God; this fulfillment is attainable by spiritual and bodily effort, by uninterrupted prayer – the Prayer of the Heart or the Prayer of Savior's Name – as well as by fasting. As a systematic testing of will, employed in the service of practicing the virtue the asceticism may uphold the safeness of the mind – i.e. the direction of the thought to the higher matters from a spiritual point of view – and of the soul. This method is more than actual in a world where the so-called personal or personality development is pursued.

### **5.2.4. Psychological counseling today**

The psychological counseling is another psychotherapeutic method prioritizing the self-knowledge, aiming at helping the prevention rather than the healing. It converges nowadays to that guidance discussion that is also part of the Sacrament of Confession, lacking though the authority of the divine Word employed by the confessor or the spiritual guidance priest. Following the orthodox tradition, the spiritual counseling – similarly to the psychological one – can be employed to help both the believers and non-believers towards their personal development; to this aim, it can take place in the church, in a religious venue, at school or in an educational venue. In this way, it is taking a more and more defined place in the present day, if one takes into account the multitude of fields in which it is applied, e.g. education, family, finance, management, parenting.

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