

Sadness and Acedia Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit*

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Abstract:

One of the most common forms of mental illness is Depression. It is presumed that about 5% of the world's population is affected by this pathology. Depression represents 60 per cent of all psychiatric disorders. According to data from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in US around 15 million people suffer from depression. Today, in the aftermath of the sanitary crisis generated by the infection with the new virus SARS-CoV-2, the number of depressed persons has increased alarmingly.

All newly released data indicate that the passions of the human soul, which are very deeply rooted, lie in fact at the core of these disorders. Among these passions, we would like to raise the importance of Sadness and Acedia. Sadness is the beginning of a road that eventually leads to hopelessness. A man stuck for a long time in such states is a living testimony that his soul is in great pain, and this suffering is very likely to find immediately its expression in the psychic and biological spheres of the body as well.

The sinful passion of acedia is intricately bound to the feeling of sadness. Acedia brings fickleness to the soul and body. To cure this spiritual disease we need hope that is given only by repentance and remembrance of death.

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Sadness is cured through constant Prayer, Confession and Holy Eucharist.

What is certain is that the cure of the spiritual affliction is the first step in one's struggling to regain his mental and physical health. On the other hand, the rising number of diseases and sick people is a sign of the world's estrangement from God, Who Alone comforts and encourages the depressed and disquieted.

Keywords:

sadness, acedia, depression, prayer, confession

Sadness

Sadness, one of the capital sinful passions, manifests itself in two forms according to the patristic literature: grief that makes us mourn over our sins and sorrow that makes us weep over material things, high-ranking positions or honours that we could not earn. The first one is a redeeming sadness because it begets repentance, the second one on the contrary causes spiritual anxiety. Hereinafter we shall exemplify some of the ways sadness can occur:

In the first scenario, someone is getting sad because he could not satisfy a bodily desire and this deprived him of that pleasure. Saint John Cassian says that sadness comes when "someone sees shattered the hope built in his mind" (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 223), and that "it is conceived by its thwarted desires" (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 385). In this case, sadness shows how the victim stung by it, becomes one with the pleasure of the flesh and one with the worldly values and goods. In this regard, Venerable John Climacus of Sinai explains that "he who hated the world, escaped sorrow; and he who is a slave to those he can perceive, has not yet escaped sorrow. And how could he, who lacks the thing he loves, not be sad?" (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2008, 63) He also further says that "if someone thinks he does not feel any love for a thing, but his heart is saddened from the lack of it, such a man deceives himself utterly." (Sfântul Ioan Scărarul 2008, 65-66).

Therefore, in order to escape this evil spirit, one has to free himself of all earthly things. This does not mean to give it all up, but to not let himself get attached to material. The use of worldly goods is natural to man and yet he must not forget that possessions are fleeting and absolutely everything is ephemeral.

Then there might be situations where sadness is caused by anger. Man often becomes sullen for getting too angry or simply for no reason; other times, *per contra*, gets very frustrated for not letting it all hang out or because he did not see the expected reaction his anger was supposed to stir up in the other man (Larchet 2008, 130)... From this, it is understood that passions are intrinsically related to one another, and some of them reliably cause other passions.

The Holy Fathers draw our attention and state clearly that most of the times sadness is inflicted by demons as well. Saint John Cassian writes how sometimes, without any apparent reason, we get unsettled all of a sudden and we feel overwhelmingly sad (Sfântul Ioan Casian 2008, 145). Any sorrow is partly due to the incessant work of demons whether they sparked it, heighten it or keep it in our soul. Especially when dealing with deep *inner sadness for no apparent reason* (Larchet 2008, 131).

The devil, spreading sadness into our soul, day and night, tries to steal all the thoughts that guard our spirit so once is left desolate and all helpless, he could fill it full of wounds (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 158).

The intrusive demonic thoughts, filled with sadness, cause a great disturbance within us and then slyly tempt our soul to turn to the things behind. They come to us in sheep's clothing, meaning that they take on the appearance of righteous thoughts, "but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Matthew 7, 15) (Sfinții Varsanufie și Ioan 2016, 204).

Saints *Barsanuphius* the Great and *John* the Prophet say that everything superfluous, wrought in confusion and sadness, is the work of evil (Sfinții Varsanufie și Ioan 2016, 543).

But even when demons are obviously the ones who plot and establish the presence of overpowering sadness, they still need the consent of a weak soul, who falls down immediately before the wicked. That is why the great Patriarch of Constantinople, Saint John, who was

nicknamed 'Golden Mouth', says to his most beloved friend, Stagirios (an ascetic tormented by a demon): "it is not the devil that makes us feel sad, it is actually the sadness that strengthens the devil so much that he can put those evil thoughts in our mind" (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 159). Sadness often dwells in our heart and soul even before the devil's assault. Then all he does is hasten that sorrowful flow (Larchet 2008, 132).

Our ancient enemy is relentless, he always seeks to gain control over man by intensifying the feeling of sadness, and if he agrees to go down this road, he has every chance of ending up dramatically. "Devil has no stronger weapon than hopelessness, and he does not rejoice so much when we fall in his temptations as when we fall into despair [of God's mercy]" (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 1998, 6). Hopelessness is truly the culmination of all his efforts, and at the same the trigger that could lead even to suicide because man devoid now of all hope, thinks it is all over and sees no way of escape.

But if he had kept his mind clear of the spirits, he surely would have found a possibility to get to the root of his problem and solve it. "With God everything is possible" (Matthew 19, 26), and in His faithfulness, He does always provide a way out so that man can endure trials of any kind.

Since it is the cause of our spiritual death, despair can certainly cause our bodily death, too, for the man who no longer has desire for life, is left only with the thought of death, so he wishes solely to end his life. Saint John Chrysostom alludes to that, saying that this may very well be the work of demons, but insists at the same time upon man's responsibility:

[...] this thought is not only from the devil, it also originates from that overwhelming sorrow, and actually more from that than from the devil, and maybe ultimately only from that. This is shown by the fact that there are many people who are not demon-possessed, but the thought would still strike them only because sadness had fallen upon their souls (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 158).

Saint John urges all of us to stand against the unclean spirits and to not cooperate with them. In other words, we cannot justify ourselves by simply saying that everything bad comes from the evil one, because we always share a great part of the guilt as well.

Further on the great Antiochian hierarch says that

[...] sadness causes men a lot of troubles even when *Furies* have not taken over them and the devil does not possess them: do we not indeed know that behind most of the people who hung themselves, killed themselves by their own sword, drowned themselves or committed suicide in any other way, it was the sadness who actually made them die such a bad death? And if some of them were also suffering from the falling sickness (epilepsy) when they killed themselves, their tragic end should however not be attributed to the demons, but to the tyranny and violence of sadness (Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur 2008, 159).

The Church Fathers teach us, consequently, to seek to deprive ourselves of pleasures and material goods, but what they actually advise us is to make use of things, but to not let ourselves attached to material. In case we are grieved because of our anger, the Holy Fathers teach us all the time that in Forgiveness is Bliss, and that we should always look for this in our life.

Sadness is also cured by prayer with a pierced and restless heart and the constant confession of thoughts. The second part is important because by letting ourselves exposed to our spiritual father, we actually humble ourselves before God and thus make the work of demons lose its steam. Then our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ comes to us in the Holy Eucharist, the Mystery of His Body and Blood, and wipes out all trace of evil!

Acedia

Another sinful passion related to sadness having a lot of negative impacts on man is Acedia. These spirits are kindred to such an extent that the Western Asceticism – developed from the teachings of Pope Gregory I, commonly known as Saint Gregory the Great (Lat. *Sanctus Gregorius Magnus*) – actually finds them to be one and the same (Larchet 2006, 167). The Latin equivalent of the original Greek term of *ἀκηδία* is found in the transliteration “acedia”, and while the notion has been described in most of the modern languages in various ways, as “sloth” (laziness), “lack of care” (apathy) or as a state of “extreme ennui” (weariness of life – in Latin *taedium vitae*), all these words still fail to express the whole complex reality of this particular spiritual passion (Larchet 2006, 167).

The Holy Fathers speak with one voice asserting that there is a strong connection between acedia and sadness. Oftentimes sorrow may pass into acedia in the sense of depression. The root cause of this distressed state is the frustration stemming from a certain dissatisfaction (Bunge 2007, 82-83). Given its very complex nature, that unifies the most different thoughts, acedia has the peculiarity to persist for a long time, and this makes our soul get into this characteristic depressed state (Bunge 2007, 87). Saint John Cassian says that “acedia and sadness are born from the movements of the inner self” (Sfântul Ioan Casian 2008, 117).

Gabriel Bunge observes with sorrow that this malady becomes increasingly widespread in our modern society (Diac. Ioan I. Ică jr., *Introducere la o călătorie spre marginea infernului singurătății noastre*, apud Bunge 2007, 12-13). Even though this passion is depicted in detail by the Fathers of the Church, and most of the Christians know quite well its symptomatology, it is paradoxically taken lightly.

As regards to the source of this spiritual disease, Evagrius Ponticus tells us that on the one side there is the devil, and on the other side there is the man’s body: natural acedia occurs when man works himself to exhaustion, beyond his powers, and demonic acedia when on the contrary he sits around doing nothing, lazing his days away (Moghilevskii 2014, 38).

Abba Evagrius thinks this malady is not exactly specific to the anchoritic environment, being rather common among those who live in a community (Bunge 2007, 43).

The passions that oppress Humanity are always and everywhere the same, it is only their manifestations that vary depending on the circumstances in which people live. Laymen are especially tempted by material things, and that is why their spiritual passions are more ‘incarnated’. People who live together in a community, often in a small place, are confronted most of the times with the weaknesses of the brothers who do not succeed in keeping their true calling in focus. Anchorites – hermits in the narrow sense of the term – who have given up both things and frequent contact with people, have to deal with the ‘bare’ evil spirits, who take the form of thoughts (Bunge 2007, 44-45).

The spirit of Acedia is also named the *Noonday Devil* or the *Demon of Sloth* as he attacks the monastic at certain times of the day. Those who live in the Middle East know too well that between the hours four (ten

o'clock) and eight (two o'clock in the afternoon), there is a pause because of the heat during which things are calm and activities are diminished or even interrupted (Bunge 2007, 74).

Evagrius Ponticus says that acedia

is an ethereal amity, a walking in circles, hatred for work, fight against the peace of mind, storm compared with the psalmody, lazy praying, laxity in asceticism, dozing ahead of time, sleep that always comes back, burden of madness, hatred for one's own cell, enemy of any toil, the opponent of perseverance, a muzzle on the meditative self, laziness for studying the Scriptures, partaker in sadness, timekeeper of hunger (Avva Evagrius Ponticus 2006, 60-61).

The man controlled by this spirit is literally not in the mood to do anything – life and all that surrounds him seems dull and meaningless. His faculties are inconstant: his mind is not capable anymore to focus on a certain thing and wanders distracted from an object to another. This state is accompanied by restlessness and anxiety which along with the spiritual loathing (or inner emptiness) are the fundamental features of this passion (Larchet 2009, 264-265). Acedia causes instability of the body and soul: the helpless mind is unable to concentrate on anything. Moreover, he who suffers from this ailment is always roaming aimlessly.

He seeks at all cost to meet other people without a real need, so driven only by this passion, makes up all kinds of so-called 'blissful reasons' to justify himself. This is how he cultivates relationships, most of them frivolous, with various people, which in his tendency to pry he maintains through vain babblings and pointless chatter (Larchet 2008, 139).

Conclusively, the suffering finds everything annoying and can never be content.

The man who wishes to be cured of such a deadly passion has to act decisively and finally turn toward himself. On his way to repentance, a Christian needs to be really attentive to his inner self, and not to search for a remedy outside of himself. Saint Isaac the Syrian says we need a man illumined by an unwavering faith in God, who has been through such things and is truly able to give us guidance and strengthen us (*cf.* Sfântul Isaac Sirul 2016, 345-346).

For the cure of this spiritual disease we also need hope, repentance and remembrance of death. Hope because in times of trial God is the only

One who can deliver us from such desolating affliction, and simply because everything good comes from God. The repentance enables man to start all over again. A Christian has to be fierce because a real change of heart will not come to anyone without a fight. And the remembrance of death brings back to memory the redeeming thought that we are only passing through this world. And indeed David, the king and prophet, said pretty much the same thing but in a more eloquent manner: “surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.” (Psalms 39, 6) All that matters to us is gain everlasting life. Saint Anthony the Great instructed his monks to have eternity always present to their minds and to reflect every morning that they might not live till night, and every evening that they might never see the morning (Sfântul Atanasie cel Mare 1988, 204).

Nowadays many of us complain that there are not true spiritual fathers anymore, but we forget that when it comes to the grace of God, it is not the father that makes the son, but the son that makes the father. What most people lack in modern Western society is the spirit of “filiality” and without it there cannot be an authentic spiritual paternity (Bunge 2007, 129).

Saint John Cassian gives us the example of Abba Paul of Thebes, the first Desert Father, who actually had everything he could ever need but nevertheless

urged himself and kept working every day continuously as if his livelihood truly relied on it. Once the cave was filled with his supplies, he set everything on fire and burned the things he had accumulated so carefully within a year (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 239).

He did that to prove

that a monk is not allowed to idle away his time without working with his own hands and neither to ascend to the heights of perfection, and even if he did not need any labour for his food, he should still fulfil that only for the cleansing of the heart and steadfastness of the mind, so that he will not wander, but stay in his cell where he can achieve total victory precisely over the spirit of disquiet (Sfântul Ioan Casian 1990, 239).

From the presentation of these two spiritual passions, sadness and acedia, it is clear that they both cause great damage to the soul, psyche and body; and due to such unhealed wounds one can experience in time hopelessness, depression and may even resort, as it happens in some cases, to the final act of suicide.

Today's man has to regain that understanding that only by healing his spiritual distress, he can cure himself of his psychiatric and somatic disorders. The increase at present in so many diseases among the population of the world is undoubtedly a signal through which God calls us to repentance, because He wants us to change our lives so that we stop living according to our own will and embrace His holy will.

Depression

As announced previously in the title, the passions of sadness and acedia play a great role in developing depression, which is now one of the most common mental illnesses in the world. The word 'depression' comes from the Latin *depression*, which has the meaning of "heaviness" expressing the disposition of a downcast spirit (that dries up the bones), which is always doubled by apathy, weariness and a disheartening perspective on reality (Avdeev 2011a, 159).

Despite the fact the Holy Scripture does not make any actual reference to depression, we can nonetheless find between its pages descriptions of similar states of mind, and we encounter in the Book of Psalms a whole range of such characteristic emotional states like sorrow and pessimism, torpidity and fatigue (Psalm 31, 3-4), despair (Psalm 37, 2-4), isolation and accusation of the others (Psalms 37, 11 and 54, 6-8), the feeling and the persistence of guilt (Psalm 50, 3), the insufficient or troubled sleep (Psalm 41, 2-3) (Nistor 2015, 99).

As for the prophetic books, we shall dwell only on the Book of Isaiah (61:3) where there is a reference to the feeling of hopelessness, sadness and grief. The prophet sought to "appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness..." (Nistor 2015, 100).

There are protestant authors who are of the opinion that king Saul was in a state of full-blown psychosis with suicidal and homicidal tendencies accompanied by a severe depression (*Dicționar Biblic* 1995, 323) because they think this very attitude is described in the first Book of Samuel (16, 14-16) where in a certain verse we can see how it actually degenerated into a psychotic behaviour: “and he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night” (1 Samuel 19, 24) (Nistor 2015, 102).

The most representative model of psychosomatic suffering that we find in the Old Covenant is the case of Job, who laments his fate before his friends and deeply deplores his birth, wondering bitterly why he did not die then (Job 3, 11-19) and why God does not give death to those who are miserable (Job 3, 20-26) (Semen 2010, 116). Job is one of those rare men who thrown even into the abyss of despair, succeed to climb up to the highest heights of deification (Nistor 2015, 102). In the same book we note that Sadness with all its emotional states, up to the stage of depression, is finally healed by Faith.

The New Testament presents the chronic spiritual sadness or depression in a more nuanced way. Apart from His disciples, who surely had many moments of doubt, disbelief, discouragement or even unfaithfulness, Christ Himself experienced some of these emotional states at the Gethsemane moment when being overwhelmed by a deep sadness, He told Peter and the two sons of Zebedee that His “soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matthew 26, 37-38). That did not stop Him though from trusting Himself in the hands of His heavenly Father (Nistor 2015, 105). It is significant that in the New Testament suffering and sickness always have a soteriological role.

From a statistical point of view, the situation around the world is the following: estimates say that 264 million people (5% from the overall population) are affected by depression. Women are more affected than men (***) “Global, regional, and national incidence...”, 2018, 1817). They are however 2017 data and it is obvious that meanwhile these cases greatly increased their numbers. Most diseases have been increasing at an alarming rate amid the coronavirus pandemic and according to data

from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in US around 15 million people suffer from depression. Other surveys assess that this level rose even higher: over 26% for women and over 12% for men. Women get depressed twice as often as men (8-12%, respectively 20-26%) (Avdeev 2011a, 160).

Until recently, the highest depression incidence rate was situated between the ages of 30 and 40, but at the moment it may be said that depression has drastically “rejuvenated” because it affects even the young people aged below 25 years. The number of those born before 1940, who had to grapple with depression before the age of 25, constitutes 2.5 per cent. For those born before 1940-1959 this indicator reaches 10 per cent. With regard to more recent periods in time, the increasing tendency stays the same. For 2-3% of the sick people, depression does not depend on external circumstances but for the others is mainly a reaction to stress. The yearbook with the newest antidepressants came to be three inches thick (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 161-162). As we can see, in the last 50 years depression experienced a galloping growth. At the same time over the last half century man got increasingly sick with the devastating secular spirit. In the Western world it is absolutely normal to see a psychologist (informal in American, *shrink*) or a psychiatrist if you have certain problems. In contrast, the number of the people who attend church on a frequent basis is in a downward spiral, not to mention spiritual fathers because in the current “emancipated society” there is no such notion...

What is worrying is that “the risk of recurrence after a first episode is up to 50 per cent, 50-90 per cent after two episodes and above 90 per cent after three or more episodes.” (D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 474) In order to understand how this disorder manifests itself, we will outline the most common symptoms (Tudose 2007, 171):

- feelings of self-*worthlessness*, hopelessness, helplessness;
- indifference toward everything;
- unjustified feeling of guilt;
- prolonged sadness, uncontrollable and unexplained crying, irascibility or irritability;

- loss of interest in activities and social interactions which were once agreeable and pleasant;

- inability to concentrate or remember details;

- thoughts of death, suicide attempts;

- insomnia or, on the contrary, an increased need for sleep etc.

Observing all these details we realize that the person who suffers from this disorder must be treated with love and care. The spiritual father, in particular, will have to avail himself of all the possible levers at its disposal to support and comfort the penitent tormented by such a terrible anguish. The spiritual fathers and mental health professionals need to acknowledge these people surely must have good reasons for being in this situation because only by developing pain empathy and mobilizing them, they will be able to discover together with the patients the hidden causes of their pain. That leads us to St. Paul's exhortation. "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12, 15). The spiritual father has to show a rather maternal and gentle attitude towards everyone who exposes such weakness, and he can protect and caress the suffering by putting his spiritual wings of gentleness and prayer around him.

Among the strongest factors (*cf.* D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 469) that can initiate depression onset we mention:

- prior history of depressive episodes;

- genetic susceptibility to depression;

- feminine sex;

- age (of disease onset) under 40;

- sleep disturbance;

- postpartum period;

- somatic comorbidities (Parkinson's disease, diabetes, coronary disease, neoplastic disease);

- lack of social support, stress related to negative life events;

- consumption of psychoactive substances.

Factors (*cf.* D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 469) favouring a depression relapse:

- increased number of previous episodes;
- premature discontinuation of treatment;
- emotional overload within the ambient of care;
- somatic and psychic comorbidity.

Unfortunately, in some cases, depression if not treated leads unfailingly to suicide: 60 per cent of those who commit suicide have a prior history of major depression and 8 per cent of those diagnosed with depression will have at some point in their life a suicide attempt (D. Prelipceanu, *Tulburarea depresivă majoră (depresia monopolară, depresia unipolară)*, *apud* Prelipceanu 2018, 474). We take note with concern that 45-60 per cent of global suicides are committed by depressed persons (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 161).

Examining all these information, we tend to understand why the psychiatrist D. Avdeev thinks that given the complexity and diversity of depressive disorders at least half of the cases are of a spiritual nature. Depression is the most common spiritual disease and the living Tradition of the Church regards mental disorders as a manifestation of man's corruption by the original sin. By differentiating between a spiritual, an emotional and a physical level within the three-tiered personality organisational framework, the Holy Fathers also drew a distinction between the 'naturally occurring' diseases and the illnesses caused by the work of the devil or originating in the spiritual passions that enslave man (*cf.* Avdeev 2011b, 115). If we looked at our nature through the prism of this conceptual system, our healing could be in a way much easier and would require less money, but at the same time much greater spiritual efforts [In my limited experience, I "happened" to meet once a depressed mother with several such episodes in the past for which she had received medical treatment. As she came to me to confess her sins, I told her to pray regularly and urged her to attend the Divine Liturgy having in mind that in the period immediately following I was going to perform it daily for a long time. Over that whole period of time she did pray regularly, fasted,

attended the Divine Liturgy on an almost daily basis and received Holy Communion from time to time. I was glad to see that after about a month, she had grown to have a totally different state of mind, and actually told me she felt much better]. To treat our spiritual sickness we need to work hard on ourselves rather than spend a lot of money and time in specialist clinics.

As I have said, the Holy Fathers described with great accuracy this illness of the soul and listed it as being among the sinful passions of sloth and sadness, and that is why in this matter spiritual assessment is just as important and corresponds virtually with the medical diagnosis. Depression is a distress signal by which our soul let us know it truly reached a critical point (*cf.* Avdeev 2011a, 169) [If the psychiatrist is a Christian, he will lead the sick man in a straight path. Here is a relevant case with regard to that: Mr. Stathis went to see a psychiatrist for expressing the fear he may have homosexual impulses. He had long tried to deny and reject these desires, but eventually he was forced to seek help for his problem. The psychiatrist made it clear that he was unquestionably homosexual and that he should not evade the issue, but to address it and consider how he could live with that. Mr. Stathis walked away in despair after hearing his words; and because he did not want to accept this state of things, he went to see another psychiatrist, who diagnosed him with obsessive disorder (since this was a fixation) and prescribed him medication and psychotherapy. His fears started to back down and Mr. Stathis was thus able to continue the military service and then complete his career}. (*cf.* Thermos 2010, 98-99).

It must also be taken into account that man does not live anymore according to the way God intended him to be, in communion with Nature, but he lives a very artificial way of life and this is especially true for city people. Let us think of our ancestors who did not have such an easy life: women had to raise, in many cases, more than ten children, took care of the household, and in those days people generally had to deal most of the time with the challenges of war and to face famine, but despite all that they were not falling into depression, or leastways very few were suffering from such mental health problem. And that because Nature enables the

man to become more tranquil, to lift his heart to his Creator, and spending time in Nature always proves to be a godsend for our inner peace and mental psyche. I genuinely believe that returning to our roots, hence escaping from our urban prison, is a valid solution in our fight against depression. *The sine qua non of healing is* nevertheless an intensive spiritual direction focused on the experience of God in daily life and on the vital need for spiritual guidance.

Among the most common methods used in depression treatment are conventional therapies (dialogue, communication) and physical interventions, which include the pharmacotherapy and the shock therapy (Solomon 2017, 122). The Holy Confession is to be used along with other conventional therapies. The therapeutic part that comes through pastoral care can be a great advantage especially when the spiritual father has a profound sense of the spiritual reality, but also strong knowledge of psychiatry.

Andrew Solomon provides patients with a couple of criteria when they are in search of a psychotherapist, and this model corresponds to that of a true spiritual father as well: the therapist must act in good faith; the patient needs to be sure his therapist has an intimate knowledge of his specific techniques; the patient is entitled to feel safe and respected; and last but not least, the therapist must have the ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships based on understanding (Solomon 2017, 134). This portrayal fits thence very well with the profile of a spiritual father as he naturally acts in good faith, manifesting all his love to recover the lost sheep, and has all the sympathy and understanding for the infirmities of the repentant.

Faith and hope in God are the Christian's most precious spiritual gift.

The priest is the most suitable to impersonate a therapist. Tristan Rhodes, a priest I know, told me he actually treated for a number of years a woman suffering from psychotic depression, who kept refusing therapy, but came to him every week to confess her sins. She told him her stories and he talked in his turn about the most crucial things to a good friend, a psychiatrist, and finally told the woman the opinions formulated by his friend. She did receive that way in the most explicit terms mental health support but it actually happened in an exclusively religious context (Solomon 2017, 159).

This cooperation between spiritual father and psychiatrist, if the latter lives and thinks like a Christian, proves to be of a paramount importance in today's society [Some time ago, I personally had a case with a spiritual daughter, whom I urged to see a psychiatrist, but she ultimately had to stop going to him because he was an unbeliever and did not understand her spiritual needs. That is why it is very important for the specialist to be an ardent believer in God. Here is what Andrew Solomon says about one of his female patients: the evening prayers soothe her soul and help her rein in the chaos of depression. "It is such a powerful structure", she says. "You stand up and recite the same prayers every evening. Someone established what you are supposed to tell God, and other people also recite them with you. I lay down these rituals to contain all my emotions. The Holy Liturgy is like a crate made of planks; the texts from the Bible and the Psalms are like a very fine coffer to put in your emotions. Going to Church is a multitude of focus-attention practices which help you advance spiritually"] (Solomon 2017, 160).

From those presented so far we understand first of all that Depression has its spiritual causes and that only by healing our passions, especially Sadness and Acedia, we can cure ourselves of such a terrible disease. Faith alone, when it is complete, can enable man to rise from the overwhelming darkness.

Conclusions

In the present analysis we observe that sadness, which can be caused by a lack of material things, dissatisfaction of a desire of the flesh, anger or the work of the devil, when is not treated in due time, leads together with acedia, to hopelessness and then to depression.

Therefore, the spiritual father has to be very careful about all the details of the confession, and to dig deeper when he sees any traces of sadness and acedia to check whether their roots are not too strong and may not cause the development of some psychic or other kind of affections.

The cure must begin for every Christian with the Holy Confession, the Sacrament of healing, forgiveness and growth. In a more profound and

total sense, without the need of confessing the sins, Baptism or immersion of the Spirit – through which we are all, servants of God, clothed with the garment of righteousness and divine light – cleanses us of original sin, strengthening our spirit, soul and body for “our struggle with the evil spirits” (Ephesians 6, 12).

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