

**„AUREL VLAICU” UNIVERSITY OF ARAD
INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL SCHOOL
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DOCTORATE FIELD "THEOLOGY"**

DOCTORAL THESIS

ABSTRACT

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:
Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil. CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ**

**DOCTORAND:
EMANUEL CLAUDIUS NICOLESCU**

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**SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING OF ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH
RELATED TO ADDICTIONS. A THEOLOGICAL
INTERROGATION OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCES IN THE
ROMANIAN EVANGELICAL CONTEXT**

**SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:
Prof. Univ. Dr. Habil. CORNELIU C. SIMUȚ**

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ABSTRACT OF DOCTORAL THESIS

In this paper we have conducted a theological inquiry mapping external influences as well as counselling methods in our country, which are based on and practice elements of the religious domain, drawing on the Bible in the counselling approach and looking at the challenges and struggles of those counselled through the lens of Christian faith.

Our research aims to identify external influences in the practice of evangelical spiritual counselling in Romania offered to adolescents and young people facing addictions. Although we live in a majority Christian country, we can observe that the evangelical Christian minority environment is enriched by several approaches to counselling from a Christian perspective. We have seen that each aims to support and empower people going through challenging situations to overcome those more delicate moments and bring them closer to God. Throughout our country, this practice of counselling is found in the Christian-evangelical world and people going through various challenging events in life can benefit from this ministry. The content of this approach to supporting those in need can be found across a fairly broad spectrum, although the essential elements are the same, faith in Christ who has transforming power.

In this paper we present a Christian perspective on addiction counselling that we can find in the lives of adolescents and young people in our country and the responses that a counsellor can give on this topic, thus describing the principles that guide evangelical counselling in our country.

The paper is structured in two parts; in the first part the theoretical presentation of the research is elaborated, discussing the topic of the thesis and this is structured in three chapters.

In the first chapter we make a presentation of Evangelical Christian Spiritual Counselling as we can find it in our Romanian context.

The first sub-chapter deals with the approach to identify and analyze which are the types of Christian Spiritual Counseling as we can find them in the evangelical context in our country. To begin with, we have identified as present in Romania Biblical Counselling, which is based on the BIBLE and its rich history in the United States of America, starting with its spiritual father, Jay E. Adams.

A second type of counselling we have identified across the country is Christian Counselling, which is different from Biblical Counselling in that the basis on which this approach is built is Psychological, but contains Biblical elements that are integrated into the therapeutic approach. The history of the Christian Counselling movement began in the United States of America, its fathers being Gary Collins and Larry Crabb.

Another approach related to Christian Counselling from an Evangelical perspective that we have identified in our country is the one offered by Ellel Ministries. As a historical debut, this

organization began its existence in Great Britain, a representative name would be Peter Horrobin, it offers different courses in which Christian people who feel the call of the Lord for the ministry of deliverance and healing (counseling ministry) can prepare themselves for this ministry.

The fourth perspective that I have identified in our country related to Evangelical Christian Counselling is the approach that KwaSizabantu Christian Mission Romania has. This Christian Organisation was established in South Africa under the guidance of Pastor Erlo Stegen, who began to seek the face of the Lord more deeply and discovered a new practice in the counselling approach, namely confession.

In the second sub-chapter we show that the Evangelical Churches in Romania saw the opportunity to get involved in the social life of the local community and thus led to the establishment of various non-profit organizations and associations that aimed to help the needy and vulnerable. Some organisations aimed to educate, providing formal or non-formal education, targeting people at pre-school, pre-university or university level. Other organisations chose to facilitate informal education by producing written materials, which were often translations of foreign books. Thus the need for books in Romanian was fulfilled. In this sub-chapter we review the resources that are found in our country and have a considerable influence on the Christian spiritual counselling approach from an evangelical perspective. First of all, Romanian Publishers and Associations are listed as important information resources for people involved in the field of spiritual counselling from an evangelical perspective in Romania. These para-church organisations have provided and/or make available resources that can be used in the practice of spiritual counselling. The contribution of these organisations to the development of counselling in Romania is extensive and their impact is considerable in improving counselling practice. If it were not for the contribution of these associations and organisations we would undoubtedly not be at the point we are now in the vast field of Christian spiritual counselling.

The third sub-chapter is devoted to introducing some of the evangelical Christian counsellors and authors whose writings can be found in our own land and who have influenced our counsellors and continue to do so. Here we first list authors who belong to biblical counseling: Jay E Adams, Heath Lambert, June Hunt, David Powlison, Edward Welch, Neil T. Anderson, Paul David Tripp.

Then we present authors belonging to Christian counselors, here we have: Gary R. Collins, Larry Crabb, Josh McDowell and Bob Hustetler, Jim Burns, James Dobson, Elyse M. Fitzpatrick, Mark R. Laaser, Joe Dallas, Tim Clinton, Richard Cohen, Edwin Louis Cole, Lena and Otto Rimas, Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III. Next are Peter Horrobin who belongs to the counselors of Ellel Mission and Erlo Stegen who belongs to the counselors of KwaSizabantu Mission.

In the second chapter we give a brief overview of addictions and the response that Evangelical Spiritual Counselling offers to this topic. We begin in the first sub-chapter by looking at addictions by

defining terms such as dependency, addiction and addiction. We have defined physical addiction, which is an adaptive condition due to the occurrence of severe disorders, and mental addiction which is characterized by the compulsive need to use toxic products again and again. Related to the fact that there are people who have developed a particular addiction, this term expresses the reality that there are elements in a person's life that are detrimental to the smooth running of life, without which he or she cannot live, but whose presence damages his or her life.

We will continue by discussing the subject of addictions in the present context, and when we talk about addiction we refer primarily to the effect that the subject feels in relation to the object of addiction, here the term addiction of the subject to that object appears. We continue by listing several types of addictions.

A first and most important category of addictions is that related to the use of psychotropic substances.

A second category of addictions refers to addictions related to unfulfilled personal needs, which develop actions aimed at fulfilling them in negative ways. This category includes elements that are primarily related to the person's sexual life, and this need can lead to addictions that are harmful and destructive to the person who practises them. Then elements related to eating, namely bulimia, which is a disease that excessively accentuates the consumption of food.

A third category of addictions is related to addictions that relate to social behaviour or the relationships that the individual has with other social participants in the communities in which they live. There are people who have an addiction to speaking dirty words, to using foul language; we can also find an addiction to gossip and an addiction to lying.

A fourth category of addictions has to do with playing games, watching movies, participating in gambling. Particularly for children, teenagers and young people, one problem is computer games, developing an addiction, spending a lot of time but also having harmful effects on them. Long time spent on the computer, or more recently on smart phones, on social networks have the effect of alienating young people from the real world and making it increasingly difficult for them to socialise with each other. This generation is increasingly anchored in the virtual at the expense of the real, great efforts are made to first create a perfect image in the virtual world, then this effort is directed towards the real world, which creates the greatest frustration, thus producing much psychological harm.

A fifth category of addictions we have identified as spiritual addiction, here referring to the contact that the individual consciously and willingly has with the world of unclean spirits, the demonic world.

In the second sub-chapter, the approach of Evangelical Counselling to the subject of addictions in general is analysed. It is rooted in the Bible, the inspired Word of God, by which we understand

God's plan with man. We say of evangelical counselling, which emphasises the preaching of the Gospel, that it sees the need of sinful man to repent.

In the third chapter of this paper we will examine the approach to addictions in Evangelical Spiritual Counselling in our country. We begin in the first sub-chapter by noting that the Bible has answers and these can be found in the practice of evangelical spiritual counselling in relation to substance addictions among adolescents and young people in Romania. One of the very dangerous traps that a teenager or young person can fall into is addiction of any kind. The teenager may become addicted because of carelessness, not giving importance to certain things that in time can make him/her addicted to them; or because of an overconfidence in his/her own strengths, going on the premise that he/she cannot become addicted to those things that have become habits and behaviours.

Addiction to alcohol, tobacco and drugs in adolescents and young people is common because they show their nonconformity, challenge adult authority or are coping with their own shyness and anxiety. The addictions that can arise in the life of a teenager or young person do not leave without an impact on the family, the presence of addictions does not remain without a trace in the life of both the user and those around them.

The solution that Evangelical Spiritual Counselling has to addictions is a simple one: Connect with God and disconnect from substances. The Bible explicitly condemns substance use, drunkenness is condemned in no uncertain terms and is mentioned as evidence of a sinful nature.

In the second sub-chapter we will analyse the responses that evangelical spiritual counselling has to the addictions related to social relationships encountered by adolescents and young people in our country. We begin by stating that lying, a tendency to alter the truth, although it seems very popular among teenagers to lie, this is not a pleasing thing to God. Also in the form of revenge can sometimes occur in teenagers stealing, seeing adults who are not honest and fair, or who have taken advantage of them.

In the third sub-chapter a more taboo topic is addressed, but one that is very much in need of discussion, so here we offer the answers of evangelical spiritual counselling about addictions in sexuality found in adolescents and young people. Relating to the components that have led humanity into the sexuality crisis, it's all about the false propaganda that has led today's youth to live in a post-Christian world, and there is nothing firm and trustworthy for them in terms of religion and morality.

The distortion of sexuality is increasingly prevalent in the world in which we live and young people are developing. Although we wish young people were more protected from these addictions, practice reveals that more and more addictions of this type can be found. We can say about sexuality that it is a major challenge of adolescence, if not the greatest challenge that could have serious consequences for the rest of life. The morality lipa of the contemporary world strikes at God's

command to live sexually clean and recommends just the opposite. The erotic influence of the media on young people has become so pervasive that it is extremely devastating. The world in which today's teenagers live views sex as a natural part of any relationship and the fact that young people live together before marriage is no longer out of the ordinary, and homosexual relationships are seen as just another lifestyle. When we talk about sexual addiction, which takes different forms, we are talking about sexual behaviour problems that are rooted in the behavioural problems the person is experiencing.

So, as components of sexual deviance, we start by talking about prostitution, which we define as a deviance that is found almost exclusively among girls and refers to engaging in sexual relations for the purpose of receiving payment. But even on this type of addiction the grace of Christ can act and the Holy Spirit can break the bonds of sin.

Also in the category of sexual deviancy is homosexuality, which has become a very controversial sin, not so much because of its subjective nature, but more because of its morality and social acceptance.

There is no reason to regard homosexuality as a genetic condition in the light of Scripture, since it declares the homosexual act to be a sin. Although, unfortunately, some people who engage in this type of sexual intercourse come to consider themselves no longer sinners. What we can see nowadays is that distortion of the truth in order to no longer criminalize sin, or to eliminate it.

From the perspective of Christian Counseling we understand that Scripture reveals that we were created to have sexual intimacy with people of different genders, and in our sexual expression to have joy. When that expression is outside the framework in which we were created, it is no wonder that something does not work as it was meant to work. The life many choose to live is one conditioned by the acquired element, it is in connection with family, friends, society. If one accepts the reality that the Word describes related to homosexuality and turns to Christ, regretting what they have done and desiring change in their life, it will be offered to them by the grace of God. Reparative therapy aims to redirect the person back to heterosexuality. The responsibility for the consequences of the actions falls on the shoulders of the person who has chosen to live this way of life. But the responsibility for change is also that of the person in question, not chance or destiny. Scripture does not differentiate between sin that is natural, or born, sin exists in every human innately through the corrupt nature we inherit from our parents.

Considered another sexual deviation, masturbation is sexual self-stimulation that will not have beneficial effects on teenagers. One thing is certain about masturbation, and that is that this habit cannot give full sexual satisfaction to the practitioner. Although nothing concrete is specified in Scripture about this practice, this does not make us understand that it is a good thing. Masturbation is intertwined with other sins such as lust, pornography, being very destructive and we can easily

conclude that it really is a sin. This practice of masturbation also has the negative effects of guilt and anxiety. When the mind is sexually stimulated by pornographic images or imagination, which are against what God's Word teaches about focusing our thoughts on what is good and pure, we can say that masturbation is a sinful practice of inward lust. The Christian counselor directs young people to look to the heart, which is fed by the flesh, as an enemy that can separate from God and so they are called to guard it with great care. But they must be careful to follow Jesus as we find Him in the Scriptures, not one to personal liking, not condemning or accusing when sinning.

Exhibitionism, Voyeurism and Pornography are other sexual deviants that deal with the public exposure of sexual intercourse or sexual organs, either their own or those of others. Another sexual deviation is exhibitionism, which is an obsession of an individual with an impulsive nature to display his genitals in public leading to sexual gratification. The voyeurist collects pictures, drawings and engravings that contain sexual elements and it is not difficult for him, because this industry that promotes the visibility of sexuality is very rich every day and we can certainly say that Romania is becoming an increasingly voyeuristic culture.

Pornography is the activity of presenting video material or pictures, images or graphics with sexual content for the purpose of inciting, sexually stimulating viewers. This activity is aimed at the sexual gratification of the recipient of the material, but more importantly, it brings a major financial benefit to those who produce it. If we are talking about adolescence, perhaps the key word is curiosity, and the sexual side is fuelled by the curiosity of sexual self-discovery. What pornography does cannot be called education, it merely presents the carnal side of the sexual act with the aim of inciting and arousing the viewer, the teenager or young person in particular. The way in which pornographic material presents things leads to the degradation of the human being and the sexual act, presenting an unreal side to this human activity.

We went on to see what the consequences are of the facts that are widely promoted about sexual behaviour and what we concluded is that there is very active and murderous behaviour among adolescents and young people.

The emotional costs of sexual immorality are almost impossible to estimate. Sexual immorality gives rise to suspicion, disappointment, distress, stress, emptiness and other devastating feelings. Sexual relations damage a relationship and also make it very hard to break up in a couple. Premarital sexual relationships often make participants feel trapped, and what remains is a terribly traumatic experience

But not only is it very easy to get into premarital sex, the problem is with sexual practices that fall into the minority category. Teenagers have to take a stand against non-heterosexual relationships, which seem to be increasingly invading their lives. Words such as gay, bisexual, transgender and transvestite are frequently encountered in the vocabulary of today's teenagers, who are exposed to a

wide range of different types of sexual expression. These offerings invite the young and uninitiated to choose as their role models what they like and stimulate their curiosity.

Having seen the ways in which the distortion of sexuality takes place, we will continue by looking in this paper at the ways in which Evangelical Counselling sees this disaster can be prevented. Preventing the sexual addiction disaster that is now in the world has one drastic solution, and that is only one, abstinence. This will come through the education given to children or through the involvement of Christian counselors who promote what is good or acceptable from God's point of view. If those around mock all that is holy and pleasing to God, it should surprise no one, for this is how Satan works on this earth, namely by mocking all that is beautiful and divine, and those who want to live according to God's plan he wants to destroy in every way.

The evangelical perspective on the sexual life of unmarried teenagers and young people is sexual abstinence. This is the key to a beautifully lived sexual life among adolescents and young people, a life according to God's will.

In the fourth sub-chapter of this paper a more delicate area of counselling is examined, that of the spiritual sphere, but which has different implications from Christian spirituality. This subject of spiritualism and occultism is not a taboo area, but is less discussed in the evangelical sphere. Therefore we will present the responses of evangelical spiritual counselling to the addictions related to the spiritual world that can be found even among adolescents and young people in Romania. We will examine two aspects of this field, namely spiritualism and occultism, which often involve the search for hidden knowledge or sources of power beyond the natural realm. Although both spiritism and occultism involve beliefs and practices related to the supernatural, spiritism focuses specifically on communication with spirits or supernatural entities (communicating with spirits or the dead through mediums or rituals), while occultism encompasses a wider range of esoteric beliefs and practices associated with hidden or secret knowledge. It may involve rituals, spells and ceremonial practices designed to harness supernatural forces or to achieve spiritual enlightenment or empowerment. From the point of view of evangelical counseling, the Christian is forbidden to engage in spiritualism and occultism, as this practice involves exposure to some significant spiritual risks.

Evangelical Christian Counselling's response to young people who are experiencing problems related to Spiritualism and Occultism starts with informing young people properly about Spiritualism and Occultism. We believe that we should approach the curiosity of young people with honesty and sensitivity, recognizing their need for guidance and support in navigating these spiritual matters. There is a need to highlight biblical principles related to these issues. With counseling grounded in biblical truth, we can discuss relevant Scripture passages that address spiritualism and the dangers of engaging in occult practices. Introducing spiritual warfare and developing critical thinking and cultivating Christian identity are important for teens.

Then we look at Satanism, which is a cult with ideology involving the worship or veneration of Satan as a deity. In Christian theology, Satanism is frequently seen as part of a spiritual confrontation; Christians believe in the reality of spiritual warfare, which involves a cosmic struggle between the forces of good (aligned with God) and evil (aligned with Satan). Within this framework, demonic influences in satanic cults are seen as manifestations of spiritual warfare, in which individuals or groups are targeted by evil forces to draw them away from God and the Christian faith.

By appealing to the vulnerabilities of young people, Satanism will have destructive consequences, they have to do with the impact on the mental health of the person involved, the destruction of the relationships they have with those around them. Involvement in Satanism has eternal consequences as it alienates people from God's grace and salvation. We will present practical ways to keep teens and young adults away from Satanism from a Christian Counseling perspective, namely praying for divine protection and facilitating redemption and healing, which are important for teens.

In PART TWO of this paper we elaborate on the practical side of our research related to the Evangelical Spiritual Counseling perspective on addictions and we will see what the approach of Evangelical Spiritual Counseling is in our country. So this will emerge by analysing twelve interviews that were taken with counselling practitioners from all four types of Evangelical Counselling that we found in our country.

In the first chapter we will present the research methodology, presenting the research problem, namely related to Spiritual Counselling from an Evangelical perspective in Romania, which focuses on restoring balance and harmony in the lives of adolescents and young people affected by addictions, offering them hope and encouragement.

We aim to conduct qualitative research using semi-structured interviews to explore addiction-related spiritual counselling of adolescents and young people from the perspective of contemporary evangelical counselling in Romania. This approach offers unique opportunities to gain an in-depth understanding of the specific experiences, perceptions and needs of adolescents and young people navigating the challenges of addictions in the specific Romanian cultural and spiritual context. The rationale for choosing the interview method in qualitative research is related to the ability to build a relevant knowledge base for spiritual counselling practitioners, theologians, researchers and policy makers.

In this paper we will encounter the two terms Evangelical Christian Counselling or Evangelical Spiritual Counselling which are interchangeable, they really designate the same thing. A first concept used in the research is that of Evangelical Christian Spiritual Counselling is a term that describes the Christian element in the counselling approach from an Evangelical perspective. Another concept used is that of the adolescent or young person, followed by an introduction to the concept of addiction. The

next section describes the population structure, which refers to the people we contacted for this research, adults involved in counselling.

In the second chapter of this part we will look at the individual interviews, starting by describing the research techniques and instruments.

The interview, as a qualitative research method, can range from structured interviews with pre-defined questions to semi-structured or unstructured interviews, which allow for more open dialogue and deeper exploration of the topics of interest. The present interview is a semi-structured one, which allows the respondents to present their own opinion, but they are also guided to provide answers to the questions asked, on the topic of spiritual counselling of adolescents and young people related to addictions

The research group consists of twelve respondents who practice different types of spiritual counselling in an evangelical context in our country.

The results obtained were presented in the form of a narrative report, being the most suitable form for qualitative research of the semi-structured interview - individual interview type.

A common aspect stressed by all respondents is the importance of applying biblical principles and Christian teachings in the counselling process. Scripture is the manual of life, stating the importance of being born again and spiritual maturation, or inner healing and freedom from negative powers. Counselors also recognize the importance of community in preventing and treating addictions and supporting spiritual growth.

As a final conclusion we draw from the responses received from respondents is this: counselling in the Christian context is profoundly transformative and holistic, impacting on the whole being, and the counselling approach is not limited to solving the immediate problems faced by the counselee, but aims to help the counselee grow and mature both spiritually and personally.

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