

## THE ETIOLOGY OF EXISTENTIAL CRISES - A PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL APPROACH

Petronela Polixenia NISTOR<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, Romania  
Corresponding author: Petronela Polixenia Nistor; e-mail: polixenianistor@yahoo.com

### Abstract

---

In the secularized contemporary society, marked by a profound moral-spiritual and material crisis, with deep implications on the physical and psychological health of the human and beyond, the psycho-spiritual understanding of the existential crises etiology represents an important advance in prophylaxis or therapeutics, depending on the case. This article approaches in an interdisciplinary way the analysis of the human being, more precisely of the existential crisis, from a social, psychological, medical, and spiritual point of view in a world devoid of any meaning. This perspective of analyzing the human being in a multidisciplinary way becomes obvious in the way of mutual respect between science and theology, as well as in the exchange of experience between them in approaching and treating the existential problems or mental and body health.

**Keywords:** *existential crisis, disease, healing, science, spirituality, interdisciplinarity.*

*"Self-transcendence outlines a fundamental anthropological concept, namely that human existence refers frequently to something different from it – to something or someone, more precisely, either to a meaning that needs to be accomplished or to the life of the people it has in view. Consequently, the human being becomes really a perfect creature only when consumed by a certain mission for a cause, or as love for another human person, when he forgets about himself or sacrifices himself. It is something similar to the eye that can fulfill its function of seeing the world only to the extent to which it can see itself" [1].*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

---

In the contemporary society, under the influence of so many currents of thinking, of numerous individual or collective anxieties, the human being is permanently asking about and looking for his origins, for the meaning of his final destiny. Religious experience, generally

understood as human's contact with the sacred world, appears as a universal constant in the history of mankind. In this respect, Mircea Eliade observes that "the religious person can live only in an open world: he wants to place himself in a Center, where he has the possibility of communicating with gods" [2]. In his turn, Lucian Blaga believes that "the essence of any existence is its scope and meaning" [3].

In the opinion of psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, human's ultimate fulfilment is to understand a meaning that should be accomplished or to sacrifice himself entirely to a cause or to another fellow creature. Nowadays, the human person suffers from numerous frustrations, being more and more anxious to find out the meaning of life, so that – according to the above-mentioned author - he comes to be subjected not to a general sexual, but to an existential pressure. The creature of our days does not experience a sense of inferiority, but rather the feeling of irrationality and lack of any meaning. This is usually accompanied by existential vacuum – more and more numerous proofs demonstrating that this feeling is gaining space.

Investigating a similar population formed of 500 apprentices, Alois Habinger demonstrated that the feeling of a meaningless existence was doubled within less than a few years [1], which explains the existential crisis we are living – a highly interesting and actual topic of analysis and research, when we refer to the multi-tasking clark who knows to do a lot of things, on one side; on the other side, we are frequently seeing depressive persons, suffering with psychic diseases, provoked by unknown causes. These are persons not capable of understanding the direction of their life, so that the following

question appears: In a world in which, apparently, we have all we want, which are the causes provoking such crises of direction?! Which is its source and why is their evolution so rapidly extending day by day?

As known, the topic of this existential crisis – characterized as “mysterious and terrible” [4] – has been approached mainly by philosophers and psychologists, always searching for the sense of life. However, if considering that, nowadays, medicine/psychiatry is confronted with an ever-increasing number of patients, many of them suffering from psychic diseases, attempts have been made at studying and explaining the existential crises from this perspective, as well.

Among the multiple approaches, mention should be made of the spiritual-pastoral perspective, once acknowledged that the Church has been permanently preoccupied to provide meaning to life. Roy F. Baumeister mentions four “needs of meaning”, among which the moral values with religious implications [5], which recommend “to share your goods with the others, to help the others, to pray, to have a heroic conduct, etc.” all of them representing, beyond any doubt, positive aspects. More than that, we can easily observe that “morality serves the two functions of the meaning”, namely of diminishing the unpleasant sensations and of provoking emotions, which “transcend sensations” [5].

If analyzing the paradigms explaining the existential crises, it is quite difficult to choose the one corresponding to the spiritual-pastoral perspective, as well. In the present study, the general paradigm considered is that of Viktor Frankl, A. Längle, Constantin Enăchescu, as well as that adopted by Roy F. Baumeister, quite close to what the Holy Fathers of the Church preach us, namely that the human being needs to know intimately its essence and to identify the sense of life.

As to the spiritual-pastoral and psychological content, we recommend observance of the general perspective of the contemporary Orthodox theologians and psychiatrists – Father Dumitru Stăniloae, Archim. Simeon Kraiopoulos, Priest Vasilios Thermos, Jean-Claude Larchet, Dmitri Avdeev, K. V. Zorin and others. The scope of the present analysis is of evidencing the causes of existential crises, of losing the sense and

finality of life, as well as their consequences, and the identification of some therapeutical methods to be applied from a psychological and spiritual-pastoral perspective.

## **2. ETIOLOGY OF EXISTENTIAL CRISES. A SPIRITUAL-ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE**

The causes of existential crises are not exactly known. Psychologists and psychiatrists assume the existence of a certain etiology, related to the traumas suffered during childhood or at adult age, to repeated failures or to stress, to the losses experienced in various moments of one’s life, to the meaningless character of our existence and to the poor sense we confer to our relation with the world and with our fellow creatures, as well as to the absence of love and to a feeling of excessive guilt. Mention should be also made of the situations in which such crises have no motivation at all. From a social perspective, some people believe that they might be caused by existential difficulties or by the exigencies and constraints of the contemporary society. For example, Roy F. Baumeister asserts that the various social crises – manifested in ex-communist countries, for example, in what we are now defining as post-communism – contribute to the depreciation of the personal values and vindications, as well as of efficiency: “When deprived of one of the sources from which the human being can draw out the meaning of his life, he begins to investigate the rest of the remaining resources, to compensate for what he had lost. It is only when such a tentative fails that he will attempt at finding a wholly different source, from which to extract a meaning for his life” [5].

On the other side, spiritual theology asserts that the real etiology of existential or meaning crises refers to the sins man had done and to his distancing from God. To support such an assertion, Simeon Kraiopoulos insists upon the awareness of the fact “sin is a fundamental, decisive reality in each one’s life”; it is a real state or a multitude of real states, which affects/affect man’s psychism and his life up to its bottom [6] as, in the human mind there occurs the drama through which he loses “the real understanding of the meaning”,

caused by "irrationalität and by blockage of the spirit, of the heart or of love" [7].

The patristic and theological studies had in view - completed, obviously, with the psychological ones - permit the observation that the nature of the human person includes three parts, namely: the objective element represented by body, the subjective element represented by soul and by the self-conscience represented by the personal Ego, which is related to the identity of the person. In a theological perspective, the personal values are represented by love, freedom, responsibility and creativity [8]. The person includes all values and, in the opinion of Father Dumitru Stăniloae, in the absence of the person, everything becomes meaningless [7].

Through God, the human person becomes immortal, which is his true vocation: to be God by his grace. However, the human remains immortal as long as he is longing to know, until he lives his life fully aware that there is always something new he must learn, namely until he experiences a conscious relation with God the eternal; involved here is not the monotony of the same laws, but, instead, of the relation with The One who may be known within His unimagined depths, through personal discovery. As a permanently new reality, knowledge of God, not observing some repetitive legislation, is its knowledge as a personal reality, such knowledge being concomitantly a loving relation.

Only by loving God and only by being aware that he is loved by God, man can advance in his life, of which he never gets tired [7]. However, Saint Atanasie? The Great believes that, even if the human being is naturally meant to live, because he forgot God and directed his steps towards evil deeds, he was deprived of his existence. In this way, he remains in death and in corruption [7], while his daily concern will be to return to the spring of existence, which is God. This is the cause - according to the psychologists of today - of the neglect, oblivion or misunderstanding of any inner experience and of one's authentic Ego [8].

In a psychological interpretation, but not only, starting from a theoretical and empirical analysis on the causes and elements of existential crises, the study entitled *Components of Existential Crisis: A Theoretical Analysis* [9] attempts at demonstrating

the existence of certain essential components to be encountered in any existential crisis - namely, the emotional, cognitive and behavioral one. Accordingly, the emotional approach involves emotional suffering, despair, helplessness, a perturbed sense of integrity, emotional vulnerability, guilt, fear, anxiety and loneliness; the cognitive approach includes the loss of meaning and scope, realization of one's own scope, loss of personal values and decision-making. Finally, the behavioral approach includes any restricting actions, the rituals, the loss of relations, addicts, antisocial behavior and the need of therapy.

Without attempting at classifying them according to their importance, a subjective selection - from the theological and psychological literature - of the most suggestive causes responsible for the manifestation of existential crises was done. In the present paper, considered in this respect were: existential suffering, man's departing from God, social anonymity, social complexes, denial of one's own self, sin, the accelerated rhythm of life, etc.

### **3. MAN'S DEPARTING FROM GOD**

---

Emotional pain is one of the fundamental aspects of the existential crisis. From a spiritual perspective, it involves existential suffering, defined as persisting even when all causes that might possibly provoke troubles are eliminated. It is the absence of a superior, transcendent *sense*, it is the existential anxiety experienced by the person who had lost all transcendental landmarks [10].

Called by the contemporary theologians as "ontological shock" or "existential vacuum", this existential pain is manifested as the "fear, despair, caused by the feeling that life is meaningless. We all have to believe in the necessity and non-accidental development of the universe. When losing this belief, we feel we are filled with fear, despair, sadness, estrangement from the aspects that confer to our life supreme value and meaning [11]." Specific especially to the non-religious man or to the one who lost his faith in God, existential suffering is similar in its manifestations with despair, namely it is similar to the sin done against the Holy Spirit, mentioned in Orthodox spirituality.

The Holy Scripture does not assert that God is love or that love is a quality or a feature of God, instead it grants that, essentially, God is love and that the way in which the existence of God is manifested is love [12]. Remaining in God, man feels he is accomplished, as God shows him everything. Konstantin Zorin, based on the argument of Archimandrite Platon Igumnov, considers that estrangement from God is experienced as an abandonment, as an unfounded sadness, inner solitude, uselessness and judgement.

The polarized – *i.e.*, departed from God – person is permanently restless and confused, when discovering he lost something important and vital; he suffers a moral-psychological contradiction, acting as a dual personality. Such a person is destroyed by spiritual suffering, feeling he is alone, a stranger for all the others, while his life is devoid of any moral sense [13]. As known, man is always searching his realization in God, so that, until he comes to know Him, he is experiencing a permanent crisis of sense and scope of life. However, there is a difference between: living in this permanent fall and coming to lose the meaning of life.

#### 4. SOCIAL ANONYMITY

The contemporary society forces man to live in an anonymous condition, yet imprisoned in reality. He loses his identity, thus becoming an object of the world, a being finally destined to death, as asserted by Heidegger [8]. The anonymity of the large human agglomerations, which negatively affects interhuman relations, as well as a poorer knowledge and communication, influences the valencies of relationing, of knowledge, communication and communion in holiness: "Social communion in the absence of God is an illusion, and the man who, at a certain moment of time, feels this communion, deludes himself that he is not alone; however, considering the temporal and spatial limits he cannot surpass, he comes to understand, painfully, that he is a an alienated person, a centrifugal and secluded individual, which provokes suffering and fear" [14].

Modern man's estrangement from God, who yields to egoism and self-love, restricts his capacity of understanding the existence and the

life as real love. The suffering and anxieties of the secularized person are more numerous and more difficult to bear than those experienced by the man belonging to the Christian society, once known that a secularized society is mainly concerned with the needs of the body, offering to it what it needs, thus neglecting, to a considerable extent, the spiritual needs.

Individualism, as a facet of social anonymity, takes man out the communion and philanthropy. From this perspective, man, as a unique being, is annulled. In this way, the communicative action or activity, viewed as a therapeutical measure for prevailing the existential crisis, would correspond, in a theological approach, not only to a practical theology, but to practising faith through actions and attitudes – a possible prophylactic path for overcoming anonymity. Viktor Frankl considers that the search for meaning is the most profound motivation of human existence. In this respect, he promoted the Logotherapy – the therapy and healing through the discovery of life's meaning [15], as an antidote of social anonymity.

A reputed psychologist and psychotherapist asserted that one of the most severe issues of our century is the void in the soul: "Man cannot live for long in seclusion: the absence of aspirations leads not only to stagnation, but also to blockage of his potential, subsequently transformed into a most dangerous malady" [13]. Such a mental void contributes to the destabilization of the human person in all his aspects. Or, one has never to forget a fundamental truth: "even if life is a process of continual change, the living being usually manifests a strong need of stability, so that the meaning of life could be one of the few modalities of reaching this desiderate" [5].

Numerous neuroses and psychosomatic diseases are provoked by the loss of life's sense; their installation affects the integrity of the Ego, who gets dissolved, one's own image about himself becomes increasingly intricate and contradictory, while the manner of living gets degraded to a certain extent. In relation with the neuroses, psychoses and other diseases of psychosomatic origin, psychologists and psychotherapists draw the attention on the intensification of the feeling of inner void (the existential vacuum), of depression, fear (phobia),

of hysterical and maniacal reactions [5], which requires specialized interventions in the spiritual dimension of the person.

Worth mentioning is also the fact that the anonymity of the large urban agglomerations provokes cooling of human relations and the bitter awareness of a life lived in solitude, whereas the technical progress we are witnessing causes, in its turn, existential anxiety and a deep spiritual crisis. Apart from the technological causes, there is also the negative influence of the false models promoted nowadays, which induce feelings and sensations of inferiority *versus* the non-models invading the TV programs; massmedia and technological communication [16] may cause a dangerous fall in the existential void.

## **5. THE SOCIAL COMPLEXES**

---

Alongwith the brief analysis devoted to the devastating role of the existential vacuum, also considered should be the social complexes and the observation made by Roy F. Baumeister in this respect: "The modern society has no clear and categorical message upon what is good and what is evil in life, as traditional societies used to". Which is the consequence of such an attitude? Religion or religious faith are now in a paradoxical situation: they have been affected by what Peter Berger calls "the structure of plausibility", which helped religion offer "certain justifications and explanations", and also to be more "suitable for responding to all valoric needs the man of today requires" [5]. In this way, the society orientates the contemporary man towards material things, richness, in relation with the realization of communitary welfare. More precisely, it imposes the acknowledgement of the so-called homo economicus, who – by an ethical transformation of passion – becomes the maker of richness and of value, thus producing a social, strongly inter-relational and cohesive structure, in which personal interest is intricately correlated with the realization of communitary welfare [17]. If the man of today is not capable of attaining this social desiderate he is stigmatized and isolated.

In a psycho-social interpretation, the social complex is defined by the social suffering caused by social collectivities or institutions. Social

suffering is differentiated as a function of the social contexts, which interpretate individual suffering, as well as of the collectivities to which they belong. The types of social suffering include not only social exclusion, but also cases of discrimination, hostility, persecution, incapacity, disability, shame, lack of confidence, atrocity, subdue, violence etc. Existential suffering, combined with mental suffering, is expressed as the fight for understanding the meaning of life, which questions the significance of life or of life in itself [18].

One may deduce from here that the distortions, complexes, unilaterality and traumas influence individual experience, its manifestations, emotions and perceptions, appearing as causes that may provoke the crisis of sense. The scope of existential analysis, promoted by Viktor Frankl, is that of identifying and orienting the experience of life - in an authentic and free manner – towards some objective, different from the material one, preferred by the contemporary world. This may be attained through practical methods, which help the individual live with some inner peace or with the ability to assert what he is doing [19].

This type of existential analysis lays stress on continuous dialogues, on the inter-human relations and on the mutual influences between the individual and the surrounding world, thus leading him towards a meaningful existence [19]. Firstly, without neglecting a human psychological reality: "People are inclined to avoid action when they are faced with conflicting and ambivalent requirements"; nevertheless, it is also true that "they spend more time thinking of them, when confronted with other types of requirements" [5].

## **6. THE CONSCIENCE OF GUILT AND SIN**

---

Another cause which hinders us to find out the sense of life is – according to the Holy Fathers – the sin. The man driven by sin can no longer grasp spiritually the reality of the Holy Spirit and, as a result of his perception deformed by sin and passions, he cannot understand them correctly, any more [20]. This explains his incorrect, both pastoral and secular, orientation.

The struggle with the sin, as well as with negative emotions, the asocial behavior and the bad habits, is essentially the struggle for attaining a healthy mode of living. This does not involve substitution of the traditional prophylactic-therapeutical and sanitary-hygienical measures; on the contrary, it enriches their content by a Christian attitude. Preaching of repentance in church appears as a type of pastoral sanitary education; it is a pastoral hygiene, within which the central place is attributed to faith and to the conscience activated for the re-evaluation of personal life [21].

According to the spiritual Orthodox theology, sin is viewed not only as an infringement of law or of the Commandments as such, but, as already stated, as an "existential failure" at the level of our life, therefore a deliberate breaking or refusal of the relation with God. Christos Yannaras believes that the sin as an existential failure represents breaking of the live relation with the Creator. Paradoxically, the background of this live, developing relation, offers the possibility of spiritual, ontological recovery or the return to God: "Sin is not a bad nature, existing fundamentally as a pole of existence opposed to divine life, to life and love. Nothing from the creation of God is fundamentally and naturally evil, not even the devil. Sin is an existential and vital failure of the persons incapable of attaining their scope, to confirm and preserve the uniqueness of their hypostasis as love" [12].

Sin, as an existential failure of our forefathers, transmitted to the human nature, may be explained in the following way: as a free creature, man came to be influenced by devil's suggestion, who deluded him that he will become like God; not with the help of God, but without God. Thus, in their condition of freedom, our protoparents? Adam and Eve gave up grace, thus losing the qualities assured by it, which conferred to them a quasi-supranatural condition. The disequilibria that were to be suffered by Adam and Eve, as a result of their sin, belong to the logic of their deliberate estrangement from the communion with God, which would make them share the joy of being together with Him.

The same interpretation of the sin as an existential failure, as ignorance [22] or, even more, as "an ever-increasing intensification of

despair", is provided by Kierkegaard, who states that "any sin for which we have not repented is a new sin, and any moment in which we do not regret it leads to another sin" [22]. Or, in the interpretation of J. Delumeau, "unhappiness exists because the evil exists, both being caused by sin" [23]. Considered from a social perspective, sin appears as a perturbation of man's social relations, within the community in which he lives his life while, psychologically, sin is only a personal guilt, related to disorders in our psychological equilibrium [24].

The Orthodox doctrine shows that man has in himself, objectively, the power to initiate a profound change of the human person (namely, of its intimacy with God), which is also the scope of the psychotherapies of reconfiguration or reconstruction of one's personality by the investigation of his conscience, however not through self-contemplation, but through active steps, taken for understanding one's intimate nature, one's specific manner of thinking, feeling and acting.

Constantin Enăchescu discerns the connection between anxiety and culpability, stating that the oscillation between these two vital sentiments accompanies us, while concomitantly configuring "the tragic pattern of existence". In the opinion of this psychologist, guilt is defined as a "deviation" from the rule which, from a psychoanalytical perspective, springs from an interdiction. In such situations, "violation of an interdiction" is determined by the feeling of culpability, which provokes the loss of one's inner freedom; consequently, the guilty person should respond for his actions, an aspect which, implicitly, leads to anxiety [25].

## **7. NON-ACCEPTANCE OF ONE'S SELF**

Archimandrite Simeon Kraiopoulos also identifies, in one's unacceptance of the self, another cause of existential crises. As a matter of fact, this Father advises everyone to accept himself as it is, which includes a certain self-content, motivated by his abilities and talents. Such a piece of advice starts from the fact that some people do less than they could have done in life, and do not use their capacities on the

whole, while others are not satisfied even if they are wealthy and accomplished. In this way, they experience disappointments, coming to envy their fellows and even to hate them [6]. However, both situations produce emotional and spiritual disequilibria and destabilization if they are not turned into fruitful actions for life.

Asceticism and a contemplative life situates the person in the ontological register of the aspirations suitable to its inner Ego, thus discovering meanings and paths which deliberately detach him from the reality, through the retiring off the world, as a result of its perisability. This aspect of Ego's dynamics reveals a double possibility of person's manifestation in the world and in himself [25]. The same Simeon Kraiopoulos says that a man threatened by some disease will obtain it more easily. Yet, when talking about nevrotic tendencies, we use to assert that the respective person does not possess the necessary resources to face the adversities of life, so that when he will have contacts with the surrounding world he will be conflicted with himself and, without having sufficiently powerful resources, he will fall ill [6].

## **8. THE ACCELERATED TEMPO OF LIFE**

---

The man of our days, obliged to face the agitating activities of everyday life and its too accelerated rhythm, suffocated by the speed at which everything occurs, by instability, uncertainty and uneasiness, is frequently affected by the stress of his work, by diseases or by unexpected situations he is not able to solve, thus experimenting, more and more, in his seclusion, the *syndrom of desocialization*.

In the postmodernism of our days, this syndrome is continuously increasing, as a result of individualism, manifested as an egoistical need of evidencing one's own qualities and of one's personal freedom of imposing his own pleasures, desires and even caprices. In such situations, no sincere communion among people, no friendship and human solidarity are possible, any longer [26].

Even if it is not viewed as a cause of existential crises, but rather as a self-healing method

involving "self-oblivion", the accelerated rhythm of our lives or the alert tempo of the contemporary society may be perceived as a sort of self-anaesthesia, a form of self-intoxication, as the human creature, attempting at avoiding the inner void, the feeling of futility, finds himself thrown in a solitary agglomeration, which only intensifies the existential void and makes him collapse [1]. We are witnessing nowadays what came to be defined as a more intense personal accomplishment and personal satisfactions. This explains why "the self substituted traditional morality as a high value foundation". Some people attempted even at "hiding their past" for "maximizing their level, especially if they want to be personally recognized for their accomplishments and successes" [5]. This explains the inner conflict experienced by many, manifested against the more and more rapid tempo of our world.

## **9. PSYCHO-SPIRITUAL PATHS FOR HEALING EXISTENTIAL CRISES**

---

How can people react in a world devoid of any meaning, a world affected by a profound crisis, as the world we are now living in? The existential dimension of the human creature calls for salvation, however, the modern psycho-social sciences cannot achieve this desiderate by themselves. Psychology cannot answer man's existential questions, an aspect that all professionalists of the field of psychic health should carefully consider. First of all, they should accept the truth that the support provided by faith and by Church comes from a different category of people - that represented by priests and pastors.

Trying to elucidate this aspect, V. Thermos asks himself: which psychotherapy could restore the meaning of life to the so deluded contemporary human creature, making him capable to prevail over his own psychic depression, over his own life, over degradation and death?... continuing with the following observation: The new generation of psychotherapists should have in view the new types of psychopathologies manifested, caused by the shortcomings of our civilization, which require existential guidance for

going beyond the lack of meaning, estrangement, void, stagnation, thirst for God etc [27].

In a relation efficient for both domains - the scientific and the religious knowledge - inevitable epistemic bridges should be built up, for attaining a complex healing, resulted from the complementary methods applied for easing suffering, for giving hope in fatality and faith in doubt [28], the more so that it has been happily observed that "religious faith exceeds by far all the other things of nature. Religion - as a human phenomenon and not as a manifestation of the supernatural is indeed the most extraordinary element, born and developed from the human need of meaning". In this way it contributes - in a morally, spiritually and religiously debusolate world - to the identification of the major sources of life's meaning, which "provides scope, value, efficiency and self-esteem" [5].

Vasilios Thermos asserts that "absolutely no motive exists to believe that the absence of meaning is less essential than that of self-esteem or than the others issues psychotherapists are expected to solve". In this respect, we consider, starting from theological arguments, that pastoral competence is essential in situations of existential vacuum [27]. Faith is the only one that can save us and help to face the difficulties of life, teaching us to give meaning to our life and to the troubles we meet.

When discussing the same aspect, Moise Aghioritul appreciates that "the pain of failure, of inferiority, of diseases, the pain of loss or of isolation, of poverty, the pain of unhappiness of any type contributes to the knowledge of the essential depths, appearing as an element of personal remodelling, which facilitates love" [29]. In other words, the most correct, expressive and wise modality of solving crises is, in the opinion of this Father, of investing all our sufferings and crises with an eternal meaning.

Specialists state that the scope and meaning of life represent two important dimensions for a normal psychological human functioning, relevant for a large range of aspects which assure the quality of life. Finding of the meaning of life is based on self-understanding, on world's understanding, as well as on the manner in which we respond to certain contextual factors, by learning as many as possible things about the

human creature, asking the most profound, spiritual questions a man can utter: Who am I? Which is the meaning of my life? Which is the scope of my life?

Once facing openly these questions, the patient, supported by the psychotherapist, reorients the therapeutical approach towards an expansive and positive vision upon psychological development and improvement, by focusing on the infinite potential, by enduring and understanding the mystery of human existence [30].

This essential aspect should be particularly had in view as - we know it all - "sufferings, misfortunes and threatenings, among which that of death is also included, stimulate or intensify the need for meaning" [5].

The theory of existential analysis proposed by A. Längle, the follower of Viktor Frankl, discussing the therapeutical managing of existential crises, outlines the basic structure of an accomplished existence, alongwith the criteria for a healthy psycho-social and spiritual life, stress being laid on 5 essential human dimensions:

- ✓ Human existence is fundamentally a dialogal one, the human creature having an inextricable relation with the world;
- ✓ Human life is full of meaning, of value, dignity and it is unique;
- ✓ The human fellow has landmarks, targets, ideals, obligations, values and scopes, an aspect which grants authenticity to each individual life;
- ✓ Life is not static, but a continuous evolutive development, man having the ability to change both the things surrounding him and himself;
- ✓ Existential analysis is not an idealistic attempt, once it starts from the existing realities of the human nature [5].

Synthetically, the above observation shows that the existential crisis or the crisis caused by the absence of life's sense and scope may be solved to the extent to which man is predisposed to look for them inside him, guided along this path by his psychologist, psychotherapist, physician or father confessor. Roy F. Baumeister does not hesitate to assert that "if we want a society in which nobody doubts the existence of life's meaning, we should necessarily look for it within some small

homogeneous societies, with a well-established social structure, with common values and unanimously accepted religious directions" [5]. Or, such societies can be but the religious or parish structures, which observe the common rural values and the revealed truth of religious faith.

One may observe that, in the contemporary society, psychiatrists treat cases that, once, had been the responsibility of the priest. Once limited exclusively to his medical abilities, the psychiatrist is obliged to treat any problem as a pathological one, making the patient approach his crisis as a disease that has to be healed, and not as a challenge; this narrow understanding deprives the patient of the results of his efforts, of the inner and spiritual reserves of healing faith.

In crises caused by the absence of life's meaning, Viktor Frankl assures us of a possible healing, asserting that a suffering person is greater than a healthy one. If this is not recognized, the man should not be a psychiatrist, any more, as the psychiatrist should devote himself not only to an affected psychic mechanism but also to the human side of the ill one, who is placed behind and above anything else" [1]. In this respect, abbot Paisie Aghiorite says that people suffer because they do not understand the meaning of life and also that, once grasped, everything goes well. That is why, he used to advise parents to help their children understand what the good is, in his opinion the good being to explore and also to assume "the most profound sense of life" [11]. This brings about the acute need that neither psychotherapists should leave aside the idea of death - which makes people think of the ultimate aspects of life's meaning". In this way, people would understand that treating of modern man's crises exclusively by "the response of our culture to aspects related to a longer duration of life and not to its quality" is not sufficient. The real problem is not of living long, but living better, living spiritually [5].

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

---

In a world more and more devoid of any meaning, the maladies of modernity register millions and millions of victims, the solutions proposed being almost always of medical nature.

If certain psychic disorders are undoubtedly of somatic origin, justifying a corresponding medical treatment, most diseases are related to the so-called *mal de vivre*, namely to people's existential issues, in front of which clinical psychiatry is powerless [31].

As observed by Viktor Frankl, the crises which the human person is confronted with make him lose any support, scope and sense in his life, so that the physical or psychic suffering prevent him to understand the meaning of life and of his pain, making him feel that he lives in a hostile world. The existential crisis may be defined as a confrontation as well as a relation with the existential realities; consequently, any type of crisis becomes an existential crisis. The feelings inherently accompanying the existential crises are: emotional pain, split integrity, hopelessness, powerlessness, anxiety, feeling of guilt, fear and solitude, as well as low spirits, frequently associated with the incapacity of facing the challenges of life and with the abdication from the responsibilities for himself and for the others. In this respect, it is important to understand that, in the absence of its sense, one could never appreciate the gift we have received: life. That is why, people should be encouraged to permanently think of and seek for the sense of life, as the real miracle is the question, and not the answer. "Looking for the meaning of life helps us, indeed, to be human beings", asserts Roy F. Baumeister [5].

Another important observation is that an existential crisis has not only negative, but also positive aspects. By the torments he experiences during an existential crisis, man discovers new meanings and personal values. The emotional, spiritual, existential crises appear as inevitable decisive moments along the path of life, each of us seeking to trace their significance and to find it out in the therapeutical relation, whichever its nature: medical, psychological or spiritual.

In such situations, the mission of the priest, as well as of the **psychoterapist, is of easing the** moral pain, on also considering his limitations in the process of healing. Even if medicine, with its multiple specializations, attempts at re-establishing the health condition of the affected regions, the long-time experience has shown that the only thing it cannot accomplish is to give man spiritual ease. This is the exclusive mission of the Church.

To conclude with, the assertion may be made that a facile psychotherapeutic approach for treating the human fellow and the various crises manifested in the world prevent the reciprocal deference between science and theology, the change of expertise related to the cases of spiritual and bodily health, as well as the efforts of establishing common relations and support for the future, for the development of new prophylactic and therapeutical perspectives.

A successful therapy should be based on the analysis and synthesis abilities of the therapist, backed up by medical knowledge and skill, and by the diagnosis of his colleague physician; however, therapeutical success may come from God, by means of the Church and, implicitly, of the priest.

## References

- Frankl VE. Teoria și terapia nevrozelor. Introducere în logoterapie și analiză existențială (translation by Ștefănescu D). București: Trei Publishing House; 2008.
- Eliade M. Sacrul și profanul (translation by Chira R). București: Scientific Publishing House; 1992.
- Bădescu C. Reflecții și maxime. București: Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House; 1989.
- Săndulache S. Consiliere și psihoterapie pastorală. Oradea: House of the Book Publishing House; 2009.
- Baumeister RF. Sensuri ale vieții (translation by De Kallay E). Cluj-Napoca: ASCR Publishing House; 2011.
- Kraiopoulos S. Păcatul și stările patologice (translation by Rogobete C). București: Byzantine Publishing House; 2012.
- Stăniloae D. Chipul nemuritor al lui Dumnezeu. vol. I. București: Cristal Publishing House; 1995.
- Enăchescu C. Experiența vieții interioare și cunoașterea de sine (de la Socrate la Freud). 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. București: Paideia; 2006.
- Butėnaitė J, Sondaitė J, Mockus A, Romeris M. Components of Existential Crisis: A Theoretical Analysis. International Journal of Psychology: A Biopsychosocial Approach. 2016; 18:9.
- Rășineanu V. Paradoxurile facticității sau despre trăirea suferinței într-o lume fără sens. In: Suferința în orizontul preocupărilor rațiunii umane, Sensul vieții, al suferinței și al morții. Referatele Simpozionului Internațional Sensul vieții, al suferinței și al morții; 2008; Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House; 2008. p. 54.
- Zorin KV. De ce suferă copiii? (translation by Ciornea L). București: The Orthodox Book Publishing House; 2006.
- Yannaras C. Abecedar al credinței (translation by Coman C). București: Byzantine Publishing House; 2007.
- Zorin KV. De ce suferă copiii? (translation by Ciornea L). București: Sophia Publishing House; 2006.
- Citirigă V. Omul fără rugăciune și suferințele lui. In: Sensul vieții, al suferinței și al morții. Referatele Simpozionului Internațional Sensul vieții, al suferinței și al morții; 2008; Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House; 2008. p. 341.
- Längle A. A Practical Application of Personal Existential Analysis – A Therapeutic Conversation for Finding Oneself. Bulletin der Gle. 1993;10(2):3-11.
- Moreno MA, Jelenchick LA, Egan KG, Cox E, Young H, Gannon KE, Becker T. Feeling bad on Facebook: depression disclosures by college students on a social networking site. *Depress Anxiety*. 2011;28(6):447-55.
- Pulcini E. The Individual without Passions: Modern Individualism and the Loss of the Social Bond. UK: Lexington Books; 2012.
18. Anderson RE. Human Suffering and Quality of Life. Conceptualizing Stories and Statistics. New York, London: Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg; 2015.
- Längle A. The viennese school of existential analysis the search for meaning and affirmation of life. In: Barnett L, Madison G, editors. Existential therapy: legacy, vibrancy, and dialogue. New York: Routledge; 2012, p.163.
- Larchet J-C. Terapeutica bolilor spirituale (translation by Bojin M). București: Sophia Publishing House; 2006.
- Zorin KV. Scoală-te și umblă: pași spre însănătoșire (translation by Tănăsescu A). București: Sophia; 2009.
- Kierkegaard S. Boala de moarte: Un expozeu de psihologie creștină în vederea edificării și a deșteptării (translation by Diaconu M). București: Humanitas Publishing House; 1999.
- Delumeau J. Păcatul și frica. Culpabilizarea în Occident (secolele XIII-XVIII), volume I (translation by Ilinca I, Chiriac C). Iași: Polirom Publishing House; 1996.
- Vlachos H. Spovedania și vindecarea sufletului (translation by Deciu N), București: Măiastra Publishing House; 2005.
- Enăchescu C. Tratat de psihanaliză și psihoterapie, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Iași: Polirom Publishing House; 2007.
- Cosma S. Spiritualitatea și misiunea creștină în contextul actual. Arad: „Aurel Vlaicu” University Publishing House; 2013.
- Thermos V. Om la orizont! Psihologia și psihiatria ortodoxă (translation by Ciule V). București: Sophia Publishing House; 2010.
- Scripcaru G. Complementaritatea științifică: bioetică, ecolofie și creație transcendentă. In: Buta MG, editor. *Medicii și Biserica*. vol. 5. Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea Publishing House; 2007. p. 38.
- Aghioritul M. Binecuvântarea durerii și durerea iubirii (translation by Ciulu C). București: Sophia Publishing House; 2005.

30. The Search for Meaning and the Spiritual Side of Psychological Health: Alfried Längle's Theory of Existential Analysis. 3rd International Conference about Spirituality and Mental Health; 2007; Ottawa. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Saint Paul University; 2007. p. 2-3.
31. Larchet J.C. Terapeutica bolilor mintale. Experiența creștinismului răsăritean al primelor veacuri (translation by Bojin M). București: Sophia Publishing House; 2008.