

MARINEL LAURENȚIU MARCU

**THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN CHURCH FATHERS
AND PASTORAL COUNSELING -
SPECIFIC PATRISTIC PASTORAL APPROACHES**

Marinel Laurențiu Marcu

School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy (SCOSAAR), Bucharest, Romania.

Email: marinellmarcu@yahoo.com

Abstract: The primary purpose of this study is to bring awareness to today's Orthodox pastoral counselors that the pastoral counseling approaches of the Holy Fathers are still applicable. Ignorance of the Orthodox Faith can lead to poor Orthodox pastoral counseling, so it is necessary for an Orthodox pastoral counselor to understand the "mind of the Fathers" in order to be effective. The theoretical section of this paper presents Orthodox patristic pastoral counseling approaches and suggestions, while the project facet of this study is a demonstration of that theory in practice. This paper is based on the underlying assumption of the Orthodox doctrine that the Fathers were collectively given to know the reins of the heart, despite their individual limitations. The Fathers spoke and wrote after having lived the mysteries of God, having undergone prayer, fasting, and spiritual labor, and coming to the vision of God and His creation in a heart purified by divine grace. From this Orthodox Christian perspective, since the Fathers had the whole of creation revealed to them by the Holy Spirit, one can learn from them.

Key words: pastoral counseling, spirituality, Orthodox Church, Orthodox theology, Church Fathers, spiritual elders, patristic literature.

1. Introduction

Orthodox Christian patristic pastoral counseling methods have traditionally been passed down from one generation of believers to the next, forming an integral part of the Church's rich, unwritten tradition. This was done through spiritual elders, fathers, and disciples. Nowadays, many Orthodox pastoral counselors are turning to external sources for guidance in their pastoral counseling ministry. This is partly due to the decrease in the number of Orthodox spiritual elders, which means that fewer of today's Orthodox pastoral counselors are able to immerse themselves in the Orthodox Christian pastoral counseling tradition and, therefore, are unaware of the pastoral counseling methods of the Orthodox Fathers. This is significant because the "witness of the Fathers belongs, integrally and intrinsically, to the very structure of the Orthodox faith". Thus, a lack of knowledge of the Fathers' Faith leads to a lack of knowledge of the Faith itself, as Orthodox theology, spirituality, faith, and pastoral counseling are intertwined. Consequently, inadequate Orthodox pastoral counseling is the result of ignorance of the Fathers' Faith.

2. The Church Fathers - living testimonies and guides for Orthodox Christians

Although the witness of the Fathers and the Holy Apostles is at the very core of the Orthodox Christian faith and practice, Jesus Christ remains the sole "Head of the Church" (Ephesians 5, 23; Colossians 1, 18). To be sure, as regards the Church, Christ is the Head, and His is the Body (1 Corinthians 12, 27; Ephesians 1, 22-23; Colossians 1, 18). By extending this concept, then, the holy Fathers may be understood as the entire nervous system, transmitting all the "signals" from the Head to each and every other member of the Body of true believers.

Likewise, this exalted view of the Fathers does not negate the fact that they were sinful people, as much in need of divine grace and salvation as any man or woman. Saint Peter the Apostle thrice renounced the Savior (Matthew 26, 69-75; Mark 14, 66-72; Luke 22, 54-62; John 18, 15-18), and Saint Paul the Apostle was once an ardent persecutor of the Christians (Acts 8, 1-3; 9, 1-22; 26, 9-18; 1 Corinthians 15, 9; Galatians 1, 13; Philippians 3, 4-6; 1 Timothy 1, 13). Saint John Chrysostom (344-407) was once "entangled in the lusts of the world" (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 33) and Saint Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) says of himself that he was worse than all the serpents and beasts, "having defiled my body, ...having sullied my soul..." (Saint Symeon the New Theologian 2012, 60).

Having repented of their former ways, however, the Fathers sought their salvation with true ardor. They were gifted by the Holy Spirit while they were still in this life, despite each of their personal limitations. They

were blessed to profoundly comprehend the divine revelation of the God-Man Jesus Christ. Hence, according to Rev. Fr. Georges Florovsky, their collective witness is an extension of Holy Scripture: „The *mind of the Fathers* is an intrinsic term of reference in Orthodox Theology, no less than the word of Holy Scripture, and indeed never separated from it” (Florovsky 1972, 107). The “mind of the Fathers” refers to the entire Orthodox spiritual outlook and way of life of the Church Fathers. This term denotes the spirit by which the Fathers lived, their religious understanding, and their pursuit of virtue and the knowledge of God. Inevitably, the more one is immersed in the patristic mind, the more Orthodox one becomes. To be genuinely immersed, however, and not merely superficially tainted, one must be an Orthodox Christian actively engaged in the spiritual struggle and the life of the Church.

From the Church’s perspective, the line of Fathers begins with the Holy Apostles (the Twelve and the Seventy). Their unique calling, service, and position in the Church, however, do set them apart in their own distinct grouping. Consequently, formal patristic scholarship usually views the Apostolic Fathers, the immediate successors to the Apostles, as the starting point for any listing of the Church Fathers. The Apostolic Fathers are those men who lived in the period between the second half of the first century and the year 200. Included in this grouping are Orthodox Christians from both East and West, such as Saint Clement of Rome, Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, Saint Ignatius The God-Bearer of Antioch, Saint Justin Martyr the Philosopher and Saint Irenaeus of Lyons. There are no time parameters on the Church’s designating of a Saint as “Father”. Often, the Fathers who lived during the periods of great doctrinal controversies (especially between the fourth and eleventh centuries) are referred to as the Church Fathers. Their spirit inspired and courageous witness to Orthodox doctrine and their numerous writings on Orthodox Faith and order constitute a living testimony and guide for the Church to this very day. In this respect, they are distinguished from other Church Fathers. Included in this group are such men as Saint Athanasius the Great (295-373), Saint Maximus the Confessor (580-662), Saint Photios the Great (820-891) and Saint Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).

Nevertheless, the total practice of the Church, again as manifested in and by its worship, renders the appellation, “Father”, to other holy men. Among them are Saint Anthony the Great (251-356), Saint Benedict of Nursia (480-547) and other ascetic Fathers, Saint John Cassian (360-435); Saint Gregory the Great (540-604), Pope of Rome; Saint Gregory (540-594), Bishop of Tours; Saint Methodios, Patriarch of Constantinople; Saint Tikhon (1724-1783), Bishop of Zadonsk; Saint Mark Eugenicus, Metropolitan of Ephesus; Saint Seraphim of Sarov; Saint Nectarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis etc.

For Orthodox Christians, these Fathers are regarded collectively as the standard for Orthodox pastoral counseling. Knowledge of these

Fathers and their counseling methods is indispensable to Orthodox pastoral counseling. This paper draws upon sources such as Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Basil the Great, the Desert Fathers, Saint Gregory the Great, and Orthodox pastoral counseling approaches.

The Fathers ascribe all healing to the Holy Spirit, rather than to any action of their own. This is likely why there is a lack of extensive literature on pastoral counseling approaches from this period. However, there are still specific counseling approaches which can be identified in patristic literature. This study seeks to make these approaches more accessible to modern pastoral counselors, as well as to make the use of these approaches more apparent to readers.

The pastoral counseling areas included in this study are: general Orthodox pastoral counseling guidelines, grief due to separation, fornication and despair.

3. Church Fathers and Orthodox pastoral counseling guidelines

To begin with, the Fathers establish that pastoral counseling is a necessary component of the Orthodox Christian's spiritual struggle. For example, Saint Basil the Great says that one must "with much care and forethought set about finding a man skilled in guiding those who are making their way toward God who will be an unerring director" of one's life (Saint Basil the Great 1962, 19). Saint John Climacus (579-649) urges the spiritual struggler to select a spiritual guide (counselor) who can help him with the passions most troubling him (Saint John Climacus 1959, 96). Several centuries later, Saint Simeon the New Theologian repeats this advice: "If you wish to renounce the world and learn to live accordingly to the Gospels, place yourself under an experienced teacher with knowledge of the passions, lest instead of life according to the Gospels you are taught the life of the devil. For good teachers give good lessons, and bad teachers bad. A bad seed invariably produces a bad plant" (Saint Simeon the New Theologian 1975, 103).

Indeed, the very fact that the Church requires confession of its members demonstrates how indispensable counseling is for Orthodox Christians. Now, there are some basic criteria the Orthodox pastoral counselor must meet. Saint Simeon concurs with Saint Basil when he refers above to a "knowledge of the passions" and good character as two criteria. Saint Basil also notes that the spiritual elder is a person who is capable of discerning, confronting and correcting the counselee's sins, troubles and issues (Saint Basil the Great 1962, 19). He is skilled at applying the proper treatment. The good counselor is "a man rich in virtue" (Saint Basil the Great 1962, 19). Above all the virtues, he is humble (Saint Basil the Great 1962, 293).

Saint John Chrysostom adds that the counselor must know how to admonish in a "brotherly way" (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 267). He

considers the counselee as a part of his own body, a member of the Body of Christ. Hence, the Orthodox pastoral counselor must also be empathic toward the counselee, accepting him for the person he is. He does not condemn or judge whomever is in trouble (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 267).

The following account from the life of Saint Moses the Ascetic poignantly illustrates this point: “A brother at Scetis committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, *Come, for everyone is waiting for you.* So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug filled it with water and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, *What is this, Father?* The old man said to them, *My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the errors of another.* When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him” (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 117).

Similarly, Abbot Poemen suggests that the wrongdoer who acknowledges his error not be condemned. Rather than be driven to despondency, the troubled individual would be encouraged of his new and better course of action and shown empathy for the difficulties he is facing (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, 1975, 113).

One other principle Saint Basil advances concerns supervision. He maintains that by obtaining supervision from others, the pastoral counselor will be able to examine his approaches to those seeking his assistance. The counselor’s positive efforts can be supported and reinforced. His errors can be corrected and he can be helped through difficult counseling situations (Saint Basil the Great 1962, 330).

These patristic criteria for the Orthodox pastoral counselor constitute a significant aspect of the patristic approach to pastoral counseling. As the Fathers themselves indicate in some of the examples cited above and as the reader can readily infer, approaching the counselee with these attitudes can influence the course of the counseling relationship.

Another important patristic approach to counseling centers about the primary objectives of Orthodox pastoral counseling. The Orthodox pastoral counseling is ultimately concerned with the soul and the struggle therein between the divine and the demonic. Consequently, the fundamental goal of Orthodox pastoral counseling is the individual believer’s eternal salvation. The pastoral counseling approach, then, is to consistently move from external concerns to inner “psychological” issues to innermost spiritual conflicts.

Addressing himself to the counselee, Saint Mark the Ascetic states: “Thus compelling yourself to turn inwards, you will meet principalities and powers, which wage war against you by suggestions in thoughts” (Saint Mark the Ascetic, 1976, 90). In his homilies on the spiritual struggle, Saint Macarius the Great constantly refers to this inner arena. For

example, note how he draws the reader's attention inward with the following opening lines from one of the homilies: "The man who wishes really to please God, and is in truth an enemy to the opposite party of evil, has to wrestle in two conflicts and two contentions—one in the visible affairs of this life...—the other, in hidden things, by fighting against the spirits of wickedness themselves..." (Saint Macarius the Great 2009, 168).

By referring to the inner spiritual plane during a counselling session, the Orthodox pastor is employing a patristic approach to direct the counselee's attention inwards to the conflict within their soul.

There is an additional patristic approach designed to turn the counselee's struggle inward. On the surface, it may appear to be an indirect method. In essence, however, this approach most directly delves into the very heart of the matter. This method is the counselee's revealing his thoughts to the pastoral counselor. By so doing, the counselee automatically focuses his attention on the inner conflicts and issues. To this end, Saint Gregory the Great urged the pastor to utilize "careful questionings" by which to arrive at "hidden" thoughts and to closely investigate these innermost matters (Saint Gregory the Great 1976, 21). In addition, Saint John Climacus instructs the following concerning thoughts: "The devil suggests to those living in obedience the desire for impossible virtues. Similarly, to those living in solitude he proposes unsuitable ideas. Scan the mind of inexperienced novices and there you will find distracted thought: a desire for quiet, for the strictest fast, for uninterrupted prayer, for absolute freedom from vanity, for unbroken remembrance of death, for continual compunction, for perfect freedom from anger, for deep silence, for surpassing purity. And if by divine providence they are without these to start with, they rush in vain to another life and are deceived. For the enemy urges them to seek these perfections prematurely, so that they may not persevere and attain them in due course. But to those living in solitude the deceiver extols hospitality, service, brotherly love, community life, visiting the sick. The devil's aim is to make the latter as impatient as the former" (Saint John Climacus 1959, 96).

Having the counselee's thoughts accessible to him permits the pastoral counselor to exercise another patristic approach to counseling discretion. Discretion is so important that Saint Anthony once said, "There be some that wear out their bodies with abstinence: but because they have no discretion, they be a great way from God" (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 98). It is incumbent on the Orthodox pastoral counselor to discern the source and motivation behind the counselee's behavior and thoughts. With this insight, it is more likely that the counselor's applied remedy, treatment, or penance will be appropriately suitable to the spiritual level and condition of the counselee.

The following account from the Fathers of the desert graphically illustrates discretion and discernment in pastoral counseling practice:

“There came three old men to the abbot Achilles and one of them was ill spoken of. And one of the three said to the abbot: *Father, make me a fishing-net; but he refused. And the second said: Make it for us, so that we may have something to remember thee by in our monastery. And he said: I have not time. Then the third, he that was ill spoken of, said to him: Make me a net, so that I may have a blessing from thine own hands, Father. And he straight-way answered him: I shall make it for thee. Then the first two whom he had refused asked him privately: How was it that thou would not make it for us when we asked thee, and yet said to this man. I shall make it for thee? And the old man made answer: I said to you, I shall not do it, because I have not time and you were not grieved but if I did not do it for this man, he would say, ‘The old man has heard about me, that I have an ill name, and for this reason he would not make the net: and I straightway set to upon the cord to sooth his spirit, lest he should be swallowed up of sadness’*” (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 98-99). As we can see in this passage, the Elder met the material need of the third brother as well as his psychological/spiritual need. This concern for the counselee’s physical welfare as well as his spiritual condition is a typical feature of the Fathers’ Orthodox pastoral counseling methods. The Fathers endeavor to address the whole person. Of course, they attempt not to overindulge in material goods and concerns.

It is the Theology of the Church that forms the underpinnings of the patristic approach to pastoral counseling. The Orthodox pastoral counselor is very much in harmony with the Fathers when he refers directly to the Church’s theology during his counseling sessions.

Related to this approach of interweaving theology with counseling is the Fathers’ copious use of scriptural passages. They cite a particular biblical quote or event either as the starting point of a given counseling situation, or as the focus, or to support their contentions, or to illustrate their statements, or to bring them to a conclusion. For example, in one homily alone, Saint Macarius the Great cites examples from the lives of the Old Testament figures, Joseph, David, Moses, Abraham, and Noah to illustrate his point (Saint Macarius the Great 2009, 69-71). In addition to biblical citations, and much in the same manner, the Fathers also refer to other Fathers. They also cite people and events contemporary with their own setting in much the same manner as biblical and patristic allusions are employed. They actually use any forum that seems appropriate to them as a vehicle for pastoral counseling. The most prevalent format is, obviously, personal, *one-to-one* counseling. There are examples of large group pastoral counseling, too, with the homily or discourse being the vehicle of communication. In this form of counseling the intimacy between counselor and counselee is greatly reduced if not altogether lost. Also lost in this form of counseling is the opportunity for the counselee to respond verbally to the counselor. Revelation of thoughts is also overlooked. Surely, this large group counseling approach is designed for such special settings as public worship and catechumen class. There is no

evidence that any Father ever used this approach in place of one more intimate. Indeed, this method indicates that any opportunity is appropriate to engage in pastoral counseling, as far as the Fathers are concerned. Furthermore, in all of these pastoral counseling settings, when physical separation was a reality, the Fathers felt free enough to use letters by which to maintain the pastoral counseling relationship. Today's Orthodox counselor may utilize any of these means of pastoral counseling as each situation may require.

There are rare patristic passages which lucidly delineate a systematized pastoral counseling method. Nonetheless, there are three such texts which will be mentioned here now as pertinent to this study. All three references are generalized approaches, applicable in any pastoral counseling context, and the first two passages are particularly brief.

In the first suggested plan of approach, Saint Gregory the Great instructs the pastor to deal with those counselees who have erred out of ignorance with nothing greater than mild reproof. He suggests the same approach toward people who unwittingly cause trouble for themselves or others. On the other hand, those who refuse to recognize their responsibility in a troubled situation are to be censured more sternly (Saint Gregory the Great 1976, 21).

The second approach to be mentioned here is offered by Saint Dorotheos of Gaza. When a counselee is in need of correction or critical feedback, the counselor must first be sure he is not coming across with an air of contempt or judgment. If the counselor's transference issues are an impediment, and the counselor's attitude is judgmental, he may seek another person to deal with the counselee. Second, the counselor is to approach the counselee with humility, empathy and acceptance, identifying himself as a person with problems and faults, too. If the counselee is truly experiencing difficulty hearing the counselor's input, the counselor may approach another pastor who has more rapport with the counselee to help the counselee incorporate the feedback. The counselor must be particularly aware of any possible transference issues he may have with the counselee which may color his external and internal responses to the counselee (Dorotheos of Gaza 1977, 115). The emphasis in this method of approach is on helping the counselee to hear and to bear the message.

The third pastoral counseling approach is the most systematized of these three methods. Saint John Chrysostom offers this method in one of his homilies on *First Corinthians*. This method consists of four steps, designed to establish a relationship with the counselee, to prepare him for the feedback, and to support his desire to grow. The first step is for the pastoral counselor to convey a sense of unconditional positive regard for the counselee. Saint John suggests praising the counselee for whatever strengths he has. The second step is for the pastoral counselor to empathize with the counselee. Here, Saint John suggests that the

counselor identify himself as a man with faults, which is the common lot of the entire human race. The third step involves the pastoral counselor's actually offering the feedback to the counselee, confronting him with the reality of his predicament. Saint John believes intermingling some praise and support with the confrontation at this point may help the counselee be more willing to perceive the message. The fourth step focuses on the counselor's directing the counselee toward a new course of action. Saint John suggests that the pastoral counselor presents the counselee with alternative choices, while striving to preserve the counselee's autonomy by reassuring him that the decision rests with him (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 266-268).

The similarities between the method Saint Dorotheos proposes and Saint John's approach are readily apparent. Both systems overlap and complement each other. Consequently, they could be used by the contemporary Orthodox pastoral counselor either interchangeably or as a single system.

4. Church Fathers' approaches to grief due to separation, fornication and despair

Besides the issue of establishing and maintaining the pastoral counseling relationship there are three other issues that will be raised in this paper. These issues are (1) grief and mourning due to loss or separation, (2) sexual concerns and (3) despair. To be sure, the aforementioned general approaches may be applied to these issues. However, there are a few more patristic texts dealing specifically with these areas that suggest more refined approaches when encountering them in a pastoral counseling situation.

The Fathers' approach to grief and mourning due to the counselee's loss of a loved one either by death or separation is one of empathy. In his letter to a general's widow, Saint Basil demonstrates much empathy. He concurs with the widow's perceptions of her husband, extols his virtue, and mourns the loss himself. He acknowledges the grief death brings to the survivors of the beloved, and he interjects some of the Church's theology on death. Finally, he closes his letter to her by stating: "And so regulate your grief that you may neither eject it from your heart, nor be overwhelmed by your distress" (Saint Basil the Great 1968, 307-308). Here, he again supports the mourning, requesting only that the widow not drive herself to despair.

In his letter to a young widow, Saint John Chrysostom essentially follows Saint Basil's approach. He tells the widow that he wants the grief to run its course unimpeded. His reason is twofold: to permit the survivors to mourn fully and thereby to pass through the grief and to avoid provoking either "increased lamentations" or the wrath of the mourners for his insensitivity (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 121). Saint John also

demonstrates much empathy, and acknowledges his own grief. He is sensitive to the burdens now placed on the widow, and he, too, praises the deceased's virtues. Like Saint Basil, Saint John incorporates theology into his counseling, and eventually encourages the young widow to begin to part with some of her grief so that it does not overwhelm her (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 128).

In his letters to Saint Olympias, Saint John is dealing with loss due to separation other than death. In this case, the deaconess is greatly grieved over Saint John's exile, and she misses him very much. In all of these letters, Saint John recognizes the good cause of his counselee's grief, and he even shares his own grief due to his separation from his dear friend. The concern Saint John has, however, is that Saint Olympias may be permitting her grief to control her so much that she is losing her physical health. Gently encouraging and exhorting her to part with some of her grief has apparently failed. Consequently, Saint John, as noted in the earlier reference to this passage, becomes firm with her. He employs the technique of establishing a condition for the continuation of this counseling correspondence in the futures she must demonstrate good health (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 296).

The sexual issue prevalent in the counseling sessions of this project was fornication. The patristic approach to this issue was twofold. There is no question, on the one hand, that the Fathers condemn the sin of fornication. This is to be distinguished, however, from their attitude toward the counselees. In all the patristic pastoral counseling texts on this subject, the Fathers practice and advise empathy toward the people. They accept them as others who have fallen but desire to change their way of life. The Fathers support them in their spiritual struggle. In one account, for example, a brother is so distraught over his having fallen into fornication that he believes he cannot live with an elder monk. When the monk finally learns of the reason for this and the younger's desire to mend his ways, the elder monk not only agrees that they live together, but also said: "I will bear the half of your sin with you" (The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers 1975, 58-59). Again, among the sayings of the Fathers is the followings: "An old man said *Judge not him who is guilty of fornication...*" (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 97).

Besides this uncondemning approach, the Fathers also are open about sexual issues. For example, the canons of the Church not only refer to sexual sins in general, but also deal explicitly with the various forms of sexual sin. Saint Basil the Great's canons 49 and 58 deal with adultery (The Rudder 1957; 824, 828). His 63 canon deals with bestiality (The Rudder 1957, 829). Canon 67 by the same Saint discusses incest (The Rudder 1957, 830) and canon 59 covers fomication (The Rudder 1957, 828), while canon 62 deals with homosexual fornication (The Rudder 1957, 829). Saint Timothy of Alexandria answers a question concerning wet dreams (The Rudder 1957, 896). The canons of Saint John the Faster deal with the

following sexual issues: masturbation (The Rudder 1957, 936), mutual masturbation (The Rudder 1957, 936), ejaculation while asleep (The Rudder 1957, 935), ejaculations while awake (The Rudder 1957, 936), homosexual rape of boys (The Rudder 1957, 943) and incest (The Rudder 1957; 940-941). In none of these instances, while there are recommended penances or canonical restrictions, is the repentant sexual sinner condemned. Indeed, the whole purpose of the canons is to guide the counselee along his path of repentance and to help his restoration into the Church.

This non-judgmental open addressing of sexual matters helps to impart to the reluctant counselee the sense that all of these occurrences are part of life. They are issues which may be frankly discussed with the pastoral counselor. This impression underscores the Orthodox Christian counseling premise that one's thoughts must be revealed if one is to truly begin to grow emotionally and spiritually. When Theopemptus was reluctant to share the thoughts troubling him, Saint Macarius the Great assisted him by naming for him what one of the issues seemed to be "thoughts of fornication". This technique, coupled with an open admission by Saint Macarius that he, too, was vexed by troublesome thoughts, served to have Theopemptus go on confessing. Soon his inner spiritual peace was restored (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 106-108).

The importance of the counselor's encouraging the counselee to reveal his sexual thoughts is emphasized by two other accounts from the Fathers of the desert. The first account is similar to the aforementioned passage. When a brother encouraged by an elder monk, persisted throughout the night in revealing his thoughts of fornication, he was eventually freed of the turmoil (Palladius 2009, 126). The second account recalls a terrible inner unrest a monk underwent "because he was not sufficiently humble to reveal his war unto the old men who were before him, and in a few days' time he fell into fornication (Palladius 2009, 138-139). He was on the verge of despair when he finally did reveal his sexual thoughts and behavior to an elder, who immediately comforted him by noting a sin worse than fornication and by recounting the salvation of the repentant harlot, unbeliever and thief. In both passages, the Fathers were non-judgmental, accepting and comforting. The remaining issue is despair. This feeling is frequently related to a sexual transgression or other serious fall. It may also result from a profound sense of alienation. In any case, the Fathers' approach to this issue is invariably to directly counter it by recalling the Lord's boundless mercy, as in the following instance: "An old man was asked by a certain soldier if God received a penitent man. And after heartening him with many words, he said to him at the last: *Tell me, beloved, if thy cloak were torn, wouldst throw it away?* He said: *Nay, but I would patch it and wear it.* The old man said to him: *If thou wouldst spare thy garment, shall not God have mercy on His own image?*" (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers 1975, 129).

Saint John Climacus responds to despair thus: “In times of despondency never fail to bear in mind the Lord’s commandment to Peter to forgive a person who sins seventy times seven. For he who gave this command to another will Himself do far more” (Saint John Climacus 1959, 224).

Saint John Chrysostom brings to mind Manasseh, Saint Matthew and Saint Paul to combat his counselees’ tendency to despair. He says: For what was worse than Manasseh? but he was able to appease God... What more wretched than Matthew? but he became an evangelist. What worse than Paul? but he became an apostle” (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 413).

Again, in the Fathers of the desert, one finds a brother sorely troubled by his many sins and’ being tormented by the demons because of them. As soon as he trusts in God’s mercy, however, the demons are overcome (The Wisdom of the Desert Fathers 1975, 45).

By far, the most cited account of God’s mercy is the Old Testament episode of the Prophet-King David’s fall and rise. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem exhorts the catechumens to remember the Holy David when they feel despair about to overtake them. Saint Cyril reminds them concerning David: “Great as he was, he fell... And because he candidly confessed, he received a most speedy cure... Thou sees the swift relenting of a merciful God” (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem 2013, 10). Saint Cyril then continues to list other Old Testament people who fell, but received mercy from the Lord (Saint Cyril of Jerusalem 2013, 11-13).

A very dramatic retelling of David’s fall has been handed down from St, John Chrysostom. His first intent is to have his listeners appreciate how gravely David sinned. He was a premeditated murderer and adulterer, after having been richly blessed by the Lord Almighty. Saint John declares: “Perhaps, seeing the charge against him amplified, ye tremble and fear, and marvel at me, as though I were going down a precipice. But I am so confident on that righteous man’s behalf, that I will proceed even farther; for the more I aggravate the charge, so much the more shall I be able to show forth the praise of David” (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 182).

Then, having etched a most bleak picture of David’s fall, Saint John recounts David’s swift repentance. He notes how David did not despair, how “He stayed not with his face covered...” (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 183). And he concludes with his counsel: “Having then these examples, let us be sober, and let us strive not to despond and if at any time we fall not to lie prostrate” (Saint John Chrysostom 1975, 184).

6. Conclusions

The Church Fathers undertook everything within the context of the Church. Their counseling efforts were imbued with the fullness of a life in Christ. For Orthodox Christians, it is paramount that counseling occurs within the Body of Christ, in accordance with Orthodox Theology. Even in

other areas of life, the canons of the Church urge the faithful to avoid non-Orthodox teachings. This is not because the Orthodox Church is contemptuous of other doctrines. Rather, the reason for this is because involvement with the non-Orthodox exposes the faithful to the possibility of being influenced by non-Orthodox teachings and ethics, which could lead the emmbers of the Church astray. Saint Paul had this same concern. In *Romans 16, 17-18*, he exhorts the believers to avoid those holding false teachings because they may deceive the undiscerning members of the Church. Indeed, the present-day history of the Orthodox Church unequivocally validates this apostolic and canonical concern. Many of the Orthodox people today have become indiscriminately involved with non-Orthodox peoples, ideas, and ways of life. Essentially, these Orthodox have surrendered the Orthodox Faith and piety and the Orthodox mind of the Fathers. In some instances, they have lost their very participation in the Body of Christ. Consequently, it is as imperative today that pastoral counseling and as much of a Christian's life as possible occur within the Church community as it was in Apostolic times and later periods of the Christian era. This study is motivated by this imperative. The main purpose of this study is to redirect the attention of those Orthodox pastors seeking guidance elsewhere to the pastoral counseling ministries of the Orthodox Church Fathers and to bring to the awareness of today's Orthodox pastoral counselors that the pastoral counseling approaches of the Holy Fathers are very much applicable nowadays. In addition, this study is intended to support those Orthodox conselors who are now relying on the Fathers for pastoral counseling direction. As noted in the abstract, the effect of this subject approach is to demonstrate that the patristic methods are, indeed, applicable to Orthodox Christian pastoral counseling today. Hence, the intent of this proiect as set forth in the abstract is achieved.

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