

ADDICTION AND SPIRITUALITY

THE ROLE OF RELIGION, RELIGIOUSNESS AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE PROCESS OF ADDICTION AND RECOVERY

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Introduction: This study represents part of the research on “Health, religiosity and contemporary subjectivity” being conducted in the Postgraduate Program in Theology at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná (PUCPR), Brazil. In this research that has started on 2010 and it is still ongoing, we sought to understand the role of religion and/or spirituality in the recovery process of addiction.

Method: From a qualitative approach, the method used was the phenomenological one, as it is discussed by Merleau-Ponty. It emphasizes the sensitive-body's place in the production of knowledge and subjectivity, and seeks to reveal the meaning of the lived experiences by the subject. The data were collected in the second semester of 2010, through a semi-structured interview consisting of 21 questions designed to allow the respondents to relate their experience with addiction and recovery, and the role of religion and spirituality in this process. The respondents were selected by convenience in two locations: the first, a private Therapeutic Community (TC), which has no religious confession. The other one is the so called “Sobriety Pastoral” (SP), represented by an open group of self-help that cares about the treatment of family members and people with addiction in the space of a Catholic parish. A total of twenty-four people, 12 of each location were interviewed. They were selected by the following criteria: 3 people in recovery for one month; 3 people in recovery for 3 months and 6 people in recovery for at least 4 months.

Results and Discussion:

- What differentiates Sobriety Pastoral (SP) from other groups such as A.A, Narcotics Anonymous (N.A) and others is its religious character of evangelization.
- The SP offers an open group for people with chemical dependence problem and their families. They meet weekly to share and study the Sobriety Prayer: a religious adaptation of the 12-Steps of N. A. into catholic tradition.
- The Therapeutic Community is a private and non-religious organization that offers a 6-9 months residential treatment. The Treatment is based on the 12-Steps of Narcotics Anonymous, labor therapy, Psychiatric care and group therapy.
- The data point that the uncompromising experience with different types of religion, or no religion at all, is a common thing during the active addiction. The treatment leads the recovering ones to value the engagement with a Higher Being as an important element in the development of spirituality, but this need is not necessarily linked to any particular religious group, and may even be syncretic.
- Spirituality is understood as personal and tends not to involve any religious organization. People with more time in recovery have deep involvement with religious activities and/or a daily search of spiritual development.
- For the majority of the respondents, religion is a source of strength, and the involvement in a religious community is a social, emotional and spiritual support that favors the maintenance of recovery.
- One year later (in 2012), we tried to find these 24 interviewed people in order to update their process of recovery. Twelve people were interviewed, 8 of them did not have any relapses. The common elements encountered among them were: meaning/purpose in life and spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation and church attendance. (See table 1)

“The spirituality helps me to have strength in times of weakness and being alert to follow the Program. It helps me a lot!” (12th Interviewed/SP - in recovery for 8 months. 2010)

“I take time to pray, I have learnt that my prayer requires an action, I learned to ask God for help, it works for me. I got used to attending services four to five times a week” (9th Interviewed/SP - in recovery for 5 years. 2010).

“The religion offers you a structure where you have to fit yourself in. Thus, you cannot forget your treatment in order not to become a fanatic person”. (7th Interviewed/TC – in recovery for 16 months. 2010).

“I don't believe that any religion can help you maintain your sobriety, but spirituality”. (10th Interviewed/TC – in recovery for 2 months. 2010)

“Everyone has to follow a Higher Being, not a step by step religion”. (TC - In recovery for 44 days. 2010).

Table 1: 24 interviewed people: one year later

	Re-interviewed	No Relapses	Reported Relapses	Back to a rehab
Therapeutic community ¹	5	2	10	4
Sobriety Pastoral ^{1 2}	7	6	5	0

¹ Emphasis on spirituality: Belief in a Higher Power. Spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation, and the practice of the 12-Step Program

² Emphasis on religiosity: Being committed to a faith community

The 12-Steps Program – Sobriety Pastoral

1. God, **I ADMIT** my addiction of vices and sins, and I cannot overcome alone. Set me free!
2. God, **I TRUST YOU**, hear my cry. Heal me!
3. God, **I SURRENDER** myself, my life, my dependencies in your hands. I hope in Thee. Accept me!
4. God, **I REGRET** all things I have done. I want to go back to your grace, to the Father's house. Welcome me!
5. God, **I CONFESS** my sins, and publicly ask your forgiveness and the forgiveness of my brothers. Absolve me!
6. God, **I REBORN** for Sobriety on your spirit. The old person has gone away. Now, I am a new creature. Baptize me!
7. God, **I AMEND** financial and morally all those I harmed for the sake of my addiction. Help me to recover my dignity and my confidence. Restore me
8. God, **I DECLARE** that I believe in the Trinity and ask the help of the Church, with the intersection of all the saints. Instruct me in Thy Word!
9. God, **PRAYING AND WATCHING** not to fall into temptation, we will be steadfast in your teachings. Give me Thy Peace!
10. God, **SERVING** others, like Mary, our mother, we want to be in favor of those who are excluded from society.
11. God, **CELEBRATING THE EUCHARIST**, in communion with our brothers and sisters, we will have strength and grace to endure this journey. Feed us with the Body and Blood of Jesus!
12. God, **CELEBRATING** the 12 Steps to Christian sobriety, united with all, with the same hope for a century without drugs, we want to share and proclaim through our testimony, Jesus Christ the Redeemer .

The 12-Steps Program – Narcotics Anonymous

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Conclusion and future directions:

- The results suggest that the more committed the person is in her/his spiritual/religious growth more chances of recovering he/she has, confirming by evidences that the spiritual/religious dimension is one of the most important aspects involved in recovery for drug addiction and the psychotherapists and pastoral counselors should take it into account in their work with this population.
- Future researches focused on spirituality/religiosity, personality traits and drug addiction should be developed in order to better understand the relationship between these aspects in the recovery process of addiction.

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