CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS FOR ADDRESSING SPIRITUALITY IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Habilitation Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Conceptual frameworks for addressing spirituality in social work practice

The present thesis is a synthesis of the research which I have conducted since the completion of my PhD (London, 1998), as well as a short presentation of my specific plans for research in the coming years. The thesis focuses on my contributions to the development of conceptual frameworks for addressing the issue of spirituality in social work practice. These contributions have been published by prestigious publishers (including Cambridge University Press), as well as in important international journals (such as *International Social Work Journal).*

An introductory chapter sets out the stage for the thesis. It places it in the wider international context by referring to some of the key contributions in the field and the trends which they represent. Also, this chapter describes my personal connection with the subject. A review is then offered of some of the key factors which would seem to underline the legitimacy and the importance of addressing issues of spirituality in the practice of social work. Such a concern, it is argued, is in line not only with the history of the social work profession but also with several important contemporary trends in the field of social work, such as the systemic models, the strength-based approaches, the practitioners' need for cultural competence and self-reflection (Neagoe, 2011d; 2013c).

Given the extremely wide spectrum of beliefs and experiences which may be associated with the notion of spirituality, the second chapter narrows down the object of investigation to Christian spirituality. However, as indicated in subsequent chapters, many aspects of the relationship between social work and Christianity are also applicable, in modified forms, to the practitioners' relationship to other faith groups. As far at Christianity is concerned, a key period for reflection is that of early Christianity (mainly its first century) given the programmatic role of this period for all later generations. Hence, specific attention is paid to the relationship between faith and society during the early church. Such an analysis of early Christianity, through the canonical writings belonging to this period, has a significant academic history (Neagoe, 2013a). My publications in this area have highlighted a number of aspects: (i) that early Christians have made important efforts towards the social legitimation of their relatively new faith (Neagoe, 2002; 2004; 2009a) and to stress the positive contributions which Christians could offer in the struggle against existing social "evils" (Neagoe, 2014).

Building on insights from the study of faith versus society in the early church, chapter 3 of the thesis moves to the present context, commonly understood (at least in Europe and the West) as being characterised by postmodernity and secularism (Bauban, 1982; Haarvey, 1989), or, according to certain authors, even postsecularism (Habermas, 2008; Morozov, 2008; Betz, 2009; Neagoe, 2013c). My research in this area has sought to highlight some of the most dominant features of this context, as well as to articulate possible implications related to the relationship between profession and faith in such an environment (Neagoe, 2013c; Neagoe & Zorgdrager, 2009). Chapter 4 discusses this relationship even more specifically, bringing to the fore situations where social workers may be faced with important dilemmas resulting from the dynamics between their professional commitment and their personal values or beliefs (Neagoe, 2011c, 2013c).

One of the most important fields on which social work practice meets spirituality is that of faith-based communities. It is common knowledge that many such communities develop social care services. Although the professionalism of some of these services has been (often on legitimate grounds) called into question, there can be no doubt that faith communities continue to be important players in the field of social work. Recognising this fact, chapter 5 presents some of my research, in which I have sought to identify and explain a number of typical characteristics of social care projects within such settings, as well as to compare and distinguish "regular" social work with this type of social work, often referred to as "diaconia" (Neagoe, 2006a, 2006b, 2011d).

Beginning with chapter 6, the thesis focuses on specific categories of service users. Of primary interest has been social work with families, and specifically a systemic approach to working with families (Neagoe, 2007b, 2007c, 2009b, 2012a). The systemic approach is of special significance to the subject of this thesis because, ultimately, a systemic approach to social work services is the key to understanding and practicing social work in a way which integrates and addresses (among many other factors) the spiritual elements which may be present in the helping process.

Chapter 7 focuses on another category of service users, for whom the systemic model, as well as the family factor and the spiritual dimension are often very important – namely the elderly population (Neagoe, 2009b). My work in this area was based on the observation that in many cases the difficulties which the elderly encounter are aggravated by disfunctionalities in their families. In this respect, the whole family system needs to be regarded as a *target* for the social worker's intervention. At the same time, it is equally important to understand that

the family represents a crucial *resource* in the effort of increasing the quality of life for the elderly.

Similarly, chapter 8 indicates another area of social work in which I have applied the systemic model, i.e. that of delinquency, especially in its relation to the family environment and to spirituality. Thus, one section of this chapter focuses on the subject of systemic-based rehabilitation programs for penitentiary inmates (Tiurean & Neagoe, 2011), while another section seeks to illustrate the relevance of spirituality in relation to delinquency by presenting the role of one specific faith community in this respect: the Baptist community in Timişoara, as part of similar initiatives in other areas of the world (Neagoe, 2012c).

Chapter 9 returns once again to the subject of family welfare, this time in relation to the phenomenon of Romanian migration. The issue of migration is described as part of a broader "socio-spiritual" reality, namely people's struggle for better living conditions and the price they are willing to pay for this "better life" (Neagoe, 2011a).

Another phenomenon of great contemporary importance in Romania is that of drug use among the young population. Chapter 10 deals with this subject and presents a research project in which I have been involved (Tomiţă & Neagoe, 2013). The goal of the project was to explore the potential of Christian spirituality in limiting the incidence and the effects of drug use among youth. The results were indicative of the broad spectrum of possibilities and resources which Christian spirituality can offer in this area of social work.

Finally, the last section of the thesis presents a number of intended directions for my research in future years: (1) an inter-cultural study (in cooperation with representatives of Baylor University, USA) aimed at analysing some of the key factors which shape the approach of spirituality among social work students, professionals, and academics; (2) an analysis, in partnership with teaching staff from the University of Bradford, of the impact of religion and belief on social work professional practice in Romania and the United Kingdom; (3) a further extension (in cooperation with teaching staff from Georgia State University, USA) of my previous research related to use of drugs among youth and the possible role of spirituality in the limitation of this phenomenon. My teaching and administrative roles will undoubtedly continue to provide important incentives for the further development of the areas of research which are presented in this thesis, alongside other areas.

REZUMAT

Repere conceptuale privitoare la abordarea spiritualităţii în practica asistenţei sociale

Lucrarea de faţă reprezintă o sinteză a cercetărilor pe care le-am efectuat după finalizarea studiilor doctorale (Londra, 1998), precum şi o scurtă prezentare a planurilor de cercetare pentru anii următori. Lucrarea se focalizează asupra contribuţiilor mele în direcţia dezvoltării unor repere conceptuale necesare unei abordări corespunzătoare a problematicii spiritualităţii în practica asistenţei sociale. Aceste contribuţii au fost publicate de către edituri de prestigiu (inclusiv Cambridge University Press), precum şi în reviste importante (precum *International Social Work Journal).*

Un prim capitol, introductiv, stabileşte cadrul pentru restul tezei, amplasând-o într-un context internaţional, cu referire la unele dintre principalele contribuţii în domeniu, respectiv trendurile pe care acestea le reprezintă. De asemenea, acest capitol descrie conexiunile mele cu tematica tezei, după care se face o trecere în revistă a câtorva factori cheie care subliniază legitimitatea şi importanţa abordării problematicii spiritualităţii în practica asistenţei sociale. O astfel de preocupare este prezentată ca fiind în linie nu doar cu istoria asistenţei sociale dar şi cu unele trenduri importante actuale în domeniul asistenţei sociale, precum: modelele sistemice, abordările focalizate pe punctele tari ale beneficiarilor, datoria practicienilor de a demonstra „competenţă culturală" în raport cu beneficiarii şi de a fi autocritici cu privire la propriile valori şi convingeri (Neagoe, 2011d; 2013c).

Dat fiind spectrul foarte larg de credinţe şi experienţe care pot fi asociate cu noţiunea de spiritualitate, cel de-al doilea capitol al tezei îngustează obiectul investigaţiei la spiritualitatea creştină. Desigur, după cum s-a arătat şi în capitolele precedente, multe aspecte care descriu relaţia asistenţei sociale cu spiritualitatea creştină sunt aplicabile în forme modificate şi la relaţia acestei profesii cu alte credinţe. În ceea ce priveşte creştinismul, o perioadă importantă pentru reflecţie este cea a creştinismului primar (în principal primul său secol), dat fiind caracterul programatic al acestei perioade în raport cu generaţiile ulterioare. Prin urmare, este discutată în mod special relaţia dintre credinţă şi societate în viaţa bisericii primare. O astfel de analiză, prin prisma scrierilor canonice creştine ale acestei perioade, are o istorică academică semnificativă (Neagoe, 2013a). Publicaţiile mele în acest sens au evidenţiat câteva aspecte: (1) că lideri ai bisericii primare au depus eforturi importante pentru sublinierea locului legitim al credinţe creştine în societate (Neagoe, 2002; 2004; 2009a) şi

pentru sublinierea contribuţiilor pozitive pe care creştinii le pot aduce în lupta împotriva „relelor" sociale (Neagoe, 2014).

Clădind pe concluziile studiului asupra relaţiei dintre credinţă şi societate în cadrul bisericii primare, capitolul 3 se îndreaptă înspre contextul actual, cunoscut la scară largă (cel puţin în Europa şi Occident) ca fiind unul postmodern şi secular (Bauban, 1982; Haarvey, 1989), sau, conform anumitor autori, chiar postsecular (Habermas, 2008; Morozov, 2008; Betz, 2009; Neagoe, 2013c). Cercetările mele în această direcţie au urmărit să evidenţieze unele dintre caracteristicile cele mai dominante ale unui asemenea context şi totodată să prezinte anumite implicaţii posibile pentru relaţia dintre profesie şi credinţă într-un astfel de context. Capitolul 4 descrie această relaţie şi mai specific, aducând în centrul atenţiei situaţii în care asistenţii sociali ar putea sta în faţa unor dileme importante izvorâte din relaţia dintre angajamentul lor profesional şi valorile sau credinţele lor personale (Neagoe, 2011c, 2013c).

Unul dintre terenurile pe care profesia de asistent social se întâlneşte cel mai adesea cu spiritualitatea este cel al comunităţilor religioase. Este bine cunoscut faptul că astfel de comunităţi dezvoltă adesea servicii de asistenţă socială. Deşi profesionalismul unora dintre aceste servicii a fost pus sub semnul întrebării (deseori pe bună dreptate), nu poate fi nici un dubiu că astfel de comunităţi religioase continuă să fie actori importanţi în domeniul asistenţei sociale. Recunoscând acest fapt, capitolul 5 prezintă anumite cercetări în care am căutat să identific şi să explic anumite caracteristici tipice ale serviciilor sociale dezvoltate în astfel de medii, servicii cunoscute adesea cu numele de „diaconia" (Neagoe, 2006a, 2006b, 2011d).

Începând cu capitolul 6, teza se concentrează asupra unor categorii specifice de beneficiari. O atenţie specială este acordată asistenţei sociale a familiei, respectiv abordării sistemice în lucrul cu familiile (Neagoe, 2007b, 2007c, 2009b, 2012a). Abordarea sistemică este deosebit de importantă pentru subiectul tezei, întrucât, în ultimă instanţă, o astfel de abordare este cheia înţelegerii şi practicării unei asistenţe sociale care integrează şi abordează (alături de mulţi alţi factori) elementele de spiritualitate care pot apărea în procesul asistenţial.

Capitolul 7 se focalizează asupra unei categorii de beneficiari pentru care modelul sistemic, precum şi factorul familie şi problematica spiritualităţii au adesea o importanţă deosebită şi anume populaţia vârstnică (Neagoe, 2009b). Cercetarea mea în acest sens s-a bazat pe observaţia că de foarte multe ori dificultăţile cu care vârstnicii se confruntă sunt agravate de către anumite disfuncţionalităţi în familiile acestora. În acest sens, întregul sistem familial trebuie să fie privit ca o *ţintă* a intervenţiei asistentului social. În acelaşi timp însă

este la fel de clar că familia reprezintă o *resursă* crucială în efortul de ridicare a calităţii vieţii acestor persoane.

În mod asemănător, capitolul 8 indică un alt domeniu al asistenţei sociale în care am aplicat modelul sistemic, respectiv cel al delicvenţei şi în mod deosebit relaţia acestei cu mediul familial şi cu spiritualitatea. Astfel, o secţiune a acestui capitol discută potenţialul programelor sistemice de reabilitare a deţinuţilor (Tiurean & Neagoe, 2011), iar o altă secţiune îşi propune să ilustreze relevanţa spiritualităţii în raport cu delicvenţa, prezentând rolul unei comunităţi religioase specifice în această privinţă: comunitatea credincioşilor baptişti din Timişoara, ca parte a altor demersuri similare în alte părţi ale lumii (Neagoe, 2012c).

Capitollul 9 revine încă o dată la subiectul familiei, de data aceasta în raport cu migraţia românească. Problema migraţiei este descrisă ca parte a unei realităţi „socio-spirituale" mai ample şi anume eforturile populaţiei pentru ridicarea nivelului de trai, respectiv preţul pe care o parte din populaţie este dispusă să îl plătească pentru „o viaţă mai bună" (Neagoe, 2011a).

Un alt fenomen de mare însemnătate în România este cel al consumului de droguri în rândul populaţiei tinere. Capitolul 10 abordează această tematică şi prezintă un proiect de cercetare în care am fost implicat (Tomiţă şi Neagoe, 2013). Proiectul a avut ca scop explorarea potenţialului spiritualităţii creştine în vederea limitării incidenţei şi efectelor consumului de droguri în rândul populaţiei tinere. Rezultatele au indicat gama largă de posibilităţi şi resurse pe care spiritualitatea creştină le poate oferi în acest domeniu al asistenţei sociale.

În sfârşit, capitolul 11 prezintă un număr de direcţii de cercetare pe care mi le propun pentru anii următori: (1) un studiu intercultural (în colaborare cu reprezentanţi ai Universităţii Baylor, SUA), în vederea analizării factorilor cheie care influenţează abordarea spiritualităţii în rândul studenţilor, practicienilor şi cadrelor didactice din domeniul asistenţei sociale; (2) o analiză, în parteneriat cu cadre didactice ale Universităţii Bradford, privitoare la impactul religiei şi credinţei asupra practici profesionale a asistenţilor sociali din România şi Regatul Unit; (3) o extindere (în colaborare cu cadre didactice ale Georgia State University, SUA) a cercetărilor mele anterioare pe tema consumului de droguri în rândul tinerilor şi a rolului posibil al spiritualităţii în limitarea acestui fenomen. Responsabilităţile mele didactice şi administrative vor constitui, fără îndoială, un factor motivator important pentru dezvoltarea ulterioară a direcţiilor de cercetare specificate în lucrarea de faţă, precum şi a altor direcţii.

PART ONE:

A SUMMARY OF MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

1. Introductory aspects

1.1. Previous research

Over the last couple of decades, an impressive number of academic publications have dealt with the relationship between religion, spirituality and social work (to name but a few: Becvar, 1998; Bullis, 1998; Canda & Furman, 2009; Cree, 1996; Crompton, 1998; Dezerotes, 1995, 2006; Ellor, 1999; Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Richmond Garland, 1992; Gilligan, 2003; Gilligan & Furness, 2006, Hugen, 1998; Lindsay, 2002; Mathews, 2009; Meinert *et al.* 1998; Nash & Stewart, 2002; Neagoe, 2011b, 2013c; Netting *et al.*, 1990; Ram *et al.*, 2001). Also, a significant number of scholars have argued recently for the inclusion of certain elements of religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum – even if opinion is divided as to what exactly those elements are that should be included (Furness & Gilligan, 2010, p. 7; Netting *et al.*, 1990). Moreover, various professional associations in the field of social work have started producing materials which are designed to assist practitioners in dealing with religious matters (Furness & Gilligan, 2010, p. 7). Some authors have even argued that the end result of such efforts is that the spiritual dimension of social work practice is moving from a merely peripheral position towards a mainstream role (Weinstein-Moser, 2008).

For Romania, however, this field of academic research is still relatively new. More significantly, when it comes to the practice of social work, although religion and spirituality represent important aspects in the lives of a high percentage of Romanians, these elements are commonly overlooked by social work practitioners, or, if addressed, this is often done without the benefit of an adequate theoretical framework in this respect. The way in which such issues are dealt with depends very often almost entirely on the personal values and preferences of the social worker – values and preferences which can range from fundamentalist religious positions (even imposing one's personal values on the service users) to complete antagonism towards everything that smacks of religion or spirituality.

1.2. Personal considerations

As an attempt of addressing this subject in an academic way but also as a reflection of my personal educational trajectory between religious and social studies, much of my research activity following the completion of my doctoral studies in 1998 has been concentrated on this complex but important relationship – the relationship between social work and spirituality. I have been involved with the subject area of the present thesis in several ways, both academically and practically.

On the academic side, for the last thirteen years I have been involved in initiating and subsequently coordinating a Master's program on "Values-Centred Social Work Practice" at the West University of Timişoara (www.valori.socio.uvt.ro), a program which is aimed at enabling social work graduates to adequately address issues of spirituality and personal values in the social work practice. Throughout the running of this program, from its start in 2001 (first as a one-year postgraduate degree and then as a two-year Master's program), I have written and coordinated a number of research grants which have provided the funding which was necessary in order to ensure the high academic standards which have been set out for the program. Thus, these grants have enabled us to cover the costs associated with international visiting lecturers, a specialised library, scholarships for the students with good academic results and low personal income, etc.

Another aspect of my academic interest in this subject has been related to my teaching activity at an undergraduate level, within the Department of Social Work of the West University of Timişoara, where, for several years, I have been in charge of a course on spirituality and social work.

Last but not least, I have coordinated several international conferences (and the subsequent publication of the conference proceedings), focusing, to various degrees and from different angles, on the relationship between social work and spirituality.

On the more practical side, as a co-founder and current president of CRISDU Areopagus (a non-governmental organization in Timişoara, working in the area of social integration and human development), I have had the privilege of substantial direct contact with the field of social work, including its relation to various types of spirituality.

Beyond the more personal and subjective reasons for such an interest in the development of a spiritually-aware social work practice, there are also a number of widely recognised aspects which would seem to highlight the legitimacy and the importance of this

overall project. I will refer to a number of these, as indicated in my previous publications (Neagoe, 2011b).

1.3. Reasons for a spiritually-aware social work practice

1.3.1. Historical connections

The historical ties between religion and social work cannot be easily overlooked. Religious communities and representatives of such communities have been in the course of history some of the most notable providers of social work services (Admiraaland & Ubels, 2000; Hugenand & De Jong, 2001; Leiby, 1978). Christian philanthropy, in particular, has been often described as the cradle of the social work profession. This fact has often been connected with the observation that for many providers of social work services their religion or spirituality represent key motivational factors (Furness & Gilligan, 2010) and this, in turn, has to do, among other reasons, with the fact that many of the sacred texts of world religions include (to different degrees and in different forms) incentives to social responsibility and human solidarity (van Hook *et al.*, 2001).

1.3.2. The systemic model

The systemic model within social sciences in general and within the social work field in particular has become very dominant especially over the last few decades (Hartman & Laird, 1983; Imber-Black, 1988; Janzen & Harris, 1997; Neagoe, 2007b, 2007c; Zastrow, 1981; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1994). According to such models, a good level of professionalism in social work practice implies the social worker's awareness in relation to everything which may significantly impend on the wellbeing of the service users. Needless to say, personal faith, as well as religious or spiritual practices, very often play a major role in this equation. This implies that the social worker is obliged to pay attention to such factors and to deal with them in an adequate way.

1.3.3. A strength-based approach

One of the widely-accepted expectations within current social work practice is that the practitioner identifies and builds on the strong points of the service users. Such strong points

may refer to any skills, resources, or beliefs which can play a positive role in the service users' progress and resilience (Alexiu, 2003; Wright & Leahey, 1994, p. 193). It is a well-known fact that although religion and spirituality may at times hinder the helping process, there are many other situations in which religious or spiritual resources can represent important strengths on which the social worker should be able to build.

1.3.4. Cultural competence

Another important concern for social workers must be that of developing "cultural competence" in relation to the users of their services. Such competence (or awareness) is presently being regarded as a basic requirement, when it comes to issues such as race, nationality, sexual orientation, etc. Starting from the observation that spirituality are just as much part of the cultural milieu of the service users, many scholars argue that it is equally crucial that social workers are willing and capable to address spiritual matters which impend on the service users' lives (Dezerotes, 1995, 2006; Ellor *et al.*, 1999; Gilligan & Furness, 2006, 2010; Lindsay, 2002; O'Hara, 2003).

1.3.5. The self-reflective attitude of the social workers

Social workers have a duty not only to pay attention to the beliefs of their service users but even more to be self-reflective regarding their own beliefs, worldviews, and motivations (religious or not) and specifically regarding the way in which all these may influence their professional practice (Furness & Gilligan, 2010). Placing the professionals in the realm of neutrality and objectivity (i.e. regarding the professional as always neutral and capable to objectively observe and deal with the clients' beliefs) is, at best, an unfortunate shortcoming, but most likely the sign of a certain level of professional naivety. Only when the practitioners consciously strive to be aware of their own values and beliefs (the colour of their conceptual "glasses") they can hope to be able to truly understand and address the needs and the strengths of the service users. Moreover, such introspective efforts can help the practitioners better appreciate their own limitations and their own strengths.

2. The development of early Christian spirituality in relation to its social environment

Spirituality can refer to a very wide variety of beliefs, experiences, and practices. I have chosen to focus in my research primarily on Christian spirituality for a number of reasons:

a) My personal faith and much of my education have been connected with Christian spirituality.

b) Although, as stated in an earlier section, many world religions include elements of social care and human solidarity, the Christian religion has had a particularly significant role in the development of the social work profession (Beckett & Maynard, 2005; Hugen, 1998; Neagoe, 2011a; 2011b; 2013a; Vanderwoerd 2012a, 2012b). In the words of Charles Zastrow, "social work has its historical roots in religious organisations. Social work originated under the inspiration of the Judeo-Christian religious traditions of its philanthropic founders" (Zastrow, 1999, p. 317).

c) Christian spirituality continues to be the dominant type of spirituality among the social work students I regularly meet during my lectures and the service users they are likely to encounter in their professional work. I consider, therefore, that it is particularly significant for them to be assisted in their reflection on the relationship between the social work profession and Christian spirituality.

2.1. The sociological study of early Christianity and its writings

Scholarly interest in the social reality of early Christianity has a history of over one hundred years (Campbell, 1993, p. 2). However, it was only in the final decades of the twentieth century that the sociological study of early Christian literature became a full blown discipline in New Testament studies (Campbell, 1993, p. 2; Tidball, 1985, p. 94). Thus, in an article published in 1992, Carolyn Osiek writes: "The current popularity of the encounter between the social sciences and biblical study needs no demonstration: the mounting bibliography in this area is indicative of its increasing popularity" (Osiek, 1992, p. 86).

The primary focus of scholarly contributions in this area seems to have been the letters and the Christian communities which were associated with the name of the apostle Paul (Harrington, 1988, p. 18). Given the amount of literature in this field (cf. Hung, 1994; Malina, 2006; Schreiner, 2011), we have focused on a number of key scholarly contributions

during the 1980s – a period which registered particularly notable publications on the subject. More specifically, our focus has been on two areas of scholarly interest: the social status of Pauline Christianity and the sociological character of Paul's letters (Neagoe, 2013a).

2.1.1. The social status of Pauline Christianity

Traditionally, the general agreement among scholars was that the first century Christianity (Pauline included) was entirely a movement of the lower social strata (Meeks, 1983, 51-52). During the 1980s, however, a number of scholars started to come to quite different conclusions.

The first important contribution belongs to Gerd Theissen. He takes Paul's letters to the Corinthians as a study guide in his attempt of exploring the social level of early Hellenistic Christianity, of which Paul's communities were a part. First he considers the statements about the community as a whole. Then he looks at Paul's statements about individual members of the congregation, which leads him to the conclusion that most active members of the church belonged to the small percentage of upper class Christians. Thirdly, this picture of a socially mixed community is verified by the references to various conflicts, generally based on the difference of social status. Thus, for Theissen, Paul's Christianity, like the larger society, is stratified (Theissen, 1982, pp. 72-99)

Wayne Meeks, another important voice in the field, starts his study of the social status of Pauline Christianity by trying to define a system of "measuring" social level. His main criticism of those who had tried this before him is that they had done it "along a single scale". Consequently, he argues for a "multidimensional" measurement which takes into account "each of the relevant dimensions": power, occupational prestige, wealth, knowledge, etc. (Meeks, 1983, p. 54).

The result of his study is summarized by himself in the words "Mixed Strata, Ambiguous Status" (Meeks, 1983, p. 72). What he means by "Mixed Strata" is that "people of several social levels are brought together" (Meeks, 1983, 72-73), while when he talks of "Ambiguous Status" he intends to say that

> those persons prominent enough in the mission or in the local community for their names to be mentioned or to be identifiable in some other way usually…exhibit signs of high ranking in one or more dimensions of status. But that is typically accompanied by low rankings in other dimensions. (Meeks, 1983, p. 73).

Similar conclusions to those of Theissen and Meeks is also drawn by Derek Tidball and Abraham Malherbe. Tidball argues for a "socially mixed" rather than "homogeneously proletarian" image of the Pauline Christianity (Tidball, 1983, p. 94). He does this by listing a number of Paul's converts who are shown in the New Testament as having some wealth or influence (Tidball, 1983, 94-98). In a similar vein, Malherbe sets out to analyse the social level and the literary culture of early Christianity and on the social makeup of early Christian communities. His conclusion is that Christianity includes a smaller number of well-to-do merchants and scholars and a larger group of people belonging to the lower social classes (Malherbe, 1983; cf. Malherbe, 1987 and Malherbe, 1989).

2.1.2. The sociological analysis of St. Paul's letters

With such a mixed makeup of the Pauline communities it is not surprising that problems started to arise. Who was going to deal with them? No doubt, as their "spiritual father", as Paul liked to think of himself, he would have been in most cases the most appropriate and responsible. But hundreds of miles were often separating him from his communities and their problems. So the "second best" was for him to try to answer these problems through letters. In this way, his letters came to have not a purely theological but also a sociological character. The way Paul's letters sought to deal with such problems has been over the last twenty years a matter of serious debate.

In his study on the Corinthian community Theissen arrives at the conclusion that Paul's answer to the conflicts in Corinth was "the ethos of primitive Christian love-patriarchalism", which "takes social differences for granted but ameliorates them through an obligation of respect and love, an obligation imposed upon those who are socially stronger" (Theissen, 1982, p. 107).

T. Engberg-Petersen disagrees with this representation of Paul's solution on the basis that "it presents a formula for a feeling that seems widely shared: that there is a gap somewhere between Paul's radical presentation of the Gospel and his application of it in his discussion of certain specific problems in the Corinthian congregation" (Engberg-Petersen, 1987, p. 560). Thus, Engberg-Petersen argues, the Gospel which Paul presents at the beginning of the epistle is one of *agape*, which conveys not the idea of equal rights but that of selflessness (i.e. seeking no rights on one's side). Therefore, such a radical Gospel cannot be compatible with a "static" social application of it (just not to "offend" the weaker brother),

but it requires a much more "dynamic" one – to have "concern" for the brother (Engberg-Petersen, 1987, 574-581).

For Meeks, the big weight in Paul's response is on the symbolic power of the ritual of the Lord's Supper, as a key factor in preserving the unity and equality of the Christian community – regardless of social position (Meeks, 1983, 157-162). Moreover, Meeks also attributes an important social function to Paul's teaching on the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ (Meeks, 1982, 272-277). This teaching, he says, is often connected in Paul's letters with references to suffering and persecution in order to "enhance attitudes of group solidarity by emphasizing the dangers from without" (Meeks, 1982, p. 273).

On a slightly different topic, Francis Watson questions whether the theology of Paul's epistles can be correctly understood from the purely theological point of view of the Reformation (i.e. salvation by grace *versus* salvation by works), or it should rather be understood from a sociological perspective: Paul created sectarian groups of Gentile Christians who were not required to obey the Jewish Law and who were separated from the synagogue. In order to justify what he was doing, he had to develop an intellectual explanation for such a separation. Consequently, Paul's "antithetical terms" such as: faith, works, flesh, Spirit, law, promise, etc., are not to be understood as the starting-point for the understanding of Paul's epistles, but rather as various features which describe the sharp contrast between his communities and Judaism (Watson, 1986, 45-48, 177-179).

Another important dimension of the sociology of Paul's letters is that of social ethics. The perspective which J. A. Ziesler takes on this subject in his book *Pauline Christianity* (1983) seems to be very much grounded on the general description which he gives to Paul's Christianity earlier on in the book: "A people of the future living in the present world" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 67). Thus, on the matter of citizenship, Ziesler's assessment is of "apparently quietist, advising subservience to the ruling authorities" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 119), but this is said in the light of the fact that "there can be no thought of refashioning social structures whish are in the process of passing away" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 119).

On the position of women, as compared to that of men, Ziesler says: "What I suspect Paul means is that in the Lord, there are no distinctions…, but that in the present world there are" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 120). The same perspective is argued in relation to slavery: "the distinctions between slaves and free is declared defunct in Gal. 3:28. In the present world, however, it is not defunct, doomed as it may be" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 120).

The summary of Ziesler's assessment of the Pauline social ethics is given in his own words: "the state and society remain, but the theological realities of the New Age are already

undermining their inequitable, discriminatory and hierarchical foundations" (Ziesler, 1983, p. 120).

A final contribution to be reviewed in this section is that of Georgia M. Keightley. Her social analysis of 1 Thessalonians explores the collective memory theory of Maurice Halbwachs according to which "the memory of Jesus is understood to be constitutive of Christian community and to be normative for the collective self-definition" (Keightley, 1987, p. 149). She concludes that Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians indicates how the whole social life of the Christian community in Thessalonica, both as a group and as individuals was shaped by their collective memory of Jesus. At a corporate level, the memories of Jesus serve on the one hand as a point of unity and on the other hand, they help both those inside the Christian community as those outside it to define the identity of this community as being rooted in its founder's life. At an individual level, the identity of the Christian is defined as a member of a new society, having a new "set of relations": God as Father, Jesus as Savior and the fellow Christians as brothers and sisters" (Keightley, 1987, p. 155).

2.1.3. The value and limitations of the sociological study of early Christian writings

The main merit of such an approach is that it helps bringing early Christian texts alive: it helps the reader "feel" the atmosphere behind these writings, as one realizes that he or she it is dealing with regular humans, acting in a certain social setting.

Looking at the perspective of this kind of approach, Thomas F. Best asks: "What then is the promise of NT sociology?" and his answer is:

> Negatively it denies the tendency… towards an idealistic, theological understanding of the texts divorced from the real–world experience of the early believers. Positively, it hopes to bring us closer to that experience and thus to the full reality of the early Christian movement – including its theology" (Best, 1983, p. 184).

Without seeking to diminish the value of such a sociological approach of the early Christian writings, it is important to note some of the limitations and possible pitfalls which need to be remembered. In the already mentioned article of Carolyn Osiek, she identifies some of the main problems regarding the sociological study of the New Testament. Her observations seem particularly relevant at this point.

First, Osiek notes that "social science models formulated from the study of living contemporary cultures cannot be validly used on ancient cultures to which we have no access except through selective written documents" (Osiek, 1992, 89-90). Two further doubts spring from here: (i) Are there enough similarities in the basic cultural structures to allow us to draw a fair picture of a common Mediterranean type? (ii) Even if the answer is yes, can our modern Mediterranean type give us a correct image of a Mediterranean culture of 2000 years ago (Osiek, 1992, 89-90)?

Second, the validity of the social assessment of the early Christianity is also challenged by the fact that, as we have seen, the majority of its members (although by no means all) belonged to the lower strata which leave little recorded evidence (Osiek, 1992, p. 91).

Third, little recorded evidence is also available concerning women, as a result of the male-orientated society (Osiek, 1992, 91-92).

In conclusion, it may be said that the interest for a sociological study of the canonical writings of early Christianity has led (especially during the 1980s) to an important shift from the traditional view of a homogenous proletarian Christianity to a socially mixed image of it, basically mirroring the makeup of the wider society. Such mixed communities started soon to face various kinds of social challenges: conflicts among themselves; attacks from outside (especially mainstream Jewish groups); uncertainties regarding social ethics, etc. Through his letters, the apostle Paul addressed such issues. Thus, a major benefit of the sociological approach of these writings is that of bringing into focus people rather than concepts – even if the image we get is at times rather blurred, due to factors like time gap, lack of recorded memories of certain social strata, etc.

2.2. Early attempts of defining the role of the Christian faith within society

2.2.1. The trial motif as social legitimation in the writings of St. Luke

The canonical author who offers the most detailed account of early Christianity and its social environment is St. Luke, who has traditionally been regarded as the author of two of the lengthiest books of the New Testament canon: the Gospel of Luke, and the Acts of the Apostles. In my doctoral dissertation (Brunel University, London, 1998), I have proposed a new interpretation of Luke's description of the origins of Christianity and of its social context.

I subsequently revised this thesis so that it was published by Cambridge University Press in several editions: in 2002 as hardback and in 2005 as paperback and electronically (cf. also Neagoe, 2012d).

Luke is undoubtedly writing at a time when the Christian movement has travelled a long way from its rather obscure beginnings in Galilee. Indeed, the story of Acts is itself sufficient to indicate that Luke is aware of a church which is beginning to take the empire for its new home. The chronological, geographical, and cultural gap between Luke's Christian contemporaries and the events on which the gospel story is built provides the author of Luke-Acts with the occasion for writing a detailed and carefully-researched account of these matters (Luke 1:1-4). Yet the author is not satisfied with establishing the historical grounds for the Christian faith. Equally important is its theological basis. That is to say, Luke wishes to provide his readers (and those whom the readers will influence) with assurance not only about what has come to pass, but also about the significance of these historical events. One of the specific ways in which Luke builds towards his goal is by portraying the judicial or quasi-judicial encounters between major figures in the Christian movement and the opponents of the Way as 'trials' of the gospel itself, special attention being paid to some key and/or controversial episodes of the Christian story, episodes with which these figures were particularly associated. Accordingly, the overall function of Luke's trial narratives is an apologia pro evangelio, in the form of a trial and confirmation of the gospel and with particular reference to strategic episodes in the unfolding of the Christian story (Neagoe, 2002).

The first in this series of episodes is the story of Jesus of Nazareth, with its Christological implications. Accordingly, the trial of Jesus serves formally to test and confirm the (sometimes direct but more often indirect) Christological contention of the foregoing Gospel narrative - that Jesus is the divinely-appointed agent for the restoration of Israel. The plot of the Third Gospel in general and the passion predictions in particular prepare the reader for such an understanding of the trial narrative (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 2). The actual account of Jesus' trial strongly supports this reading (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 3). Finally, the issue of Jesus' Messianic identity, and particularly God's disclosed position on this matter, seems to be Luke's dominant concern in the post-trial section of the passion narrative, as well as in the passages of the resurrection narratives and of Acts where reference is made to Jesus' trial (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 4).

A second episode under Luke's scrutiny, narrated in the opening chapters of Acts, is the establishment of the Christian community under the banner of allegiance to Jesus. In

relation to this episode, the trials of Peter and his apostolic companions (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 5) serve to test and confirm the claim that it is in the name of Jesus and through the ministry of his followers that God is now visiting and restoring his people.

Third, a new important phase in the progress of the early Christian story is reached with the Stephen narrative: the culmination of the Jerusalem conflict between Jesus' followers and the Jewish leadership as well as the beginning of a theological and cultural transition within the Christian movement. Against this backdrop, the trial of Stephen serves to test and confirm the claim that the gospel's rejection by official Judaism and its gradual re-orientation towards new territory poses salvation-historical questions not about the church but about its opponents (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 6; Neagoe, 2004).

Finally, with the story of Paul, the church of Acts is beginning to discover and live out its identity and mission in an imperial setting. Accordingly, the lengthy accounts of Paul's trials (Neagoe, 2002, chapter 7) test and confirm the contention that the Christian faith has a legitimate place within the Gentile world and, more specifically, within the Roman empire. An apologia pro evangelio is therefore presented in relation to three groups of particular interest to Luke: Judaism, Hellenistic religions, and the Roman system. In relation to Judaism, the author continues to address the issue of Christology, bringing into discussion an additional major ecclesiological concern - the legitimacy of the Christian mission outside Judaism. In relation to Hellenistic religions, it is argued that the Christian message alone is able to reveal the One who would otherwise remain 'an unknown god'. In relation to those who identify with Rome, Paul's trials continue to argue that the Christian faith is not incompatible with the imperial socio-political order and that a good number of Roman citizens are regarding it with favour, if not (as Paul himself) positively accepting it. In short, the legal history of Paul in Acts is bound up with the presentation and legitimation of the Christian faith in relation to its first century social context.

2.2.2. Paul's role in the social legitimation of the early Christian movement

The same description of the apostle Paul, as a key representative of early Christianity who seeks to present and legitimate the new Christian movement in relation to its social environment is also visible in other segments of the canonical book of Acts (outside the trial narratives), as well and in Paul's own epistles (Neagoe, 2009a). His efforts can be defined

according to a number of lines: (i) The fact that, according to the book of Acts the presentation and legitimation of the Christian message comes in the context of Paul's missionary activity would seem to suggest that for Paul the social legitimation of the Christian movement was subordinated to his Christian mission. (ii) The exact role which social legitimation played in Paul's mission is suggested by the structure of the two speeches in Acts (chapters 14 and 17): the main defence comes each time before the application of the Christian message to the audience and deals with objections which were likely to prevent the audience from taking Paul's words seriously. (iii) Such an understanding of the role of social legitimation is also consistent with Paul's own writings (especially 1 Corinthian 15). There, as well, his main case was to show that the faith which Paul's (Christian) readers had embraced was intellectually sound and socially inoffensive (Neagoe, 2009a).

2.2.3. Symbols of conflict and hope. The apocalyptic genre in the canonical texts of the Judaeo-Christian literature

In a study on the apocalyptic genre of the Hebrew and Christian canon (Neagoe, 2014), I have argued that despite the complex symbolism of the canonical books of Daniel and Revelation, it is plausible to speak of these two books (individually and together) as having a unifying message which could be described as the victory of "good" over social "evils". To be sure, this unifying message can take a wide variety of distinctive meanings for specific groups and for specific settings. Thus, to the oppressed it tells of the divine control over their situation and of a time when this present social order will be changed; to the oppressors it is a reminder of the coming justice and judgement; to those who are living in situations where radical change is needed it may be an encouragement to act in that respect, etc. (Hanson, 1977, 62-64).

Our analysis of the books of Daniel and Revelation seems to afford the conclusion that the use of symbolism both 'intertextually' and 'contextually' (i.e. building bridges between the canonical Scriptures and people) should be regarded as a basic hermeneutical key in the interpretation of apocalyptic symbolism by all those who, in their own generations, are willing to act as agents of "good" in its battle against "evil".

3. The current European context for the social work practice: between postmodernity and (post)secularism

Moving from the analysis of the interaction between faith and society during the first century of the Christian history towards an investigation of this interaction today, we shall pay some attention to two widely accepted descriptions of the society and culture within which most social workers (at least in Europe and the Western world) are practicing their profession. The two descriptions are postmodernity and (post)secularism. My contributions in these areas will be mentioned in due course.

3.1. Postmodernity: key features

It has become common practice to refer to much of the society in Europe and the West as "postmodern". However, despite the wide usage of the term, little agreement has been achieved regarding the exact meaning of this notion, except that it "represents some kind of reaction to, or departure from modernism" (Harvey, 1989, p. 7). Even this amount of agreement can look suspicious, because it somehow implies that "modernism" is a unified enough concept to allow us to talk of its coming to an end, although it seems that its meaning, too, is almost equally ambiguous. Nevertheless, a number of features have been regarded fairly widely as appropriate descriptions of the postmodern condition. We have concentrated on some of the most significant ones (Neagoe, 2009a, 61-69).

a) Pluralism

One of the reasons which lay behind the optimism of the Enlightenment's project for humanity was its belief that there can be only one answer to any problem and that, consequently, that world could be rationally organized, if only we could represent it correctly (Harvey, 1989, p. 27). This in turn implied that there could be only *one* correct way of representing the world. Once the Enlightenment began to lose ground, the need for "multiple perspectivism" and "relativism" (terms almost synonymous with "pluralism" and "plurality of meaning") started to emerge. It needs to be said, however, that these features were undoubtedly developments within modernity. The aspect which Harvey regards as distinguishing postmodernity from this is that modernity was interested in a pluralism which would reveal what was still regarded as a "unified, though complex, underlying reality"

(Harvey, 1989, p. 30) while postmodernity doubts the existence and denies the accessibility of such meta-narratives: "Universal and eternal truths, if they exist at all, cannot be specified" (Harvey, 1989, p. 45). It is probably a similar picture that Gellner has in mind, in his attempt to find a definition for postmodernity: "It is almost impossible to give a coherent definition or account of postmodernism", he says. "All one can say is that it is a kind of hysteria of subjectivity…" (Gellner, 1992, p. 29) or "a living and contemporary specimen of relativism…" (Gellner, 1992, p. 24).

One area where pluralism poses particularly serious problems is that of ethics. Bauman notes a twofold consequence of pluralism in this realm (Bauman, 1992, p. 201). Positively, it promotes moral self-awareness and self-evaluation, as a result of having to decide for oneself between right and wrong. This, according to Bauman, explains the postmodern interest in religious and quasi-religious movements, which by their nature claims expertise in moral values. Negatively, the limits of the individual's autonomy become much disputed, and the common ground which the members of the society share in moral issues becomes increasingly small.

b) Fragmentation of Meaning

Closely related to the notion of pluralism is that of fragmentation of meaning. Once the belief in major metanarratives has disappeared and "multiple perspectivism" has been acknowledged as essential for a more accurate representation of the world, the immediate consequence is that the world itself can no longer be regarded as a unit, but rather as fragmented into an indefinite number of sub-worlds, often coexisting in quite contradictory forms. This close connection between pluralism and fragmentation is the fundamental characteristic of Bauman's description of the postmodern world-view (although the latter term is not explicitly mentioned): "a view of the human world as irreducibly and irrevocably pluralistic, split into a multitude of sovereign units and sites of authority" (Bauman, 1992, p. 35).

c) Consumerism

This term, strictly speaking, applies to postmodern economies and therefore would normally tend to qualify the "post-industrial society" rather than "postmodernity". In the economic context, its role would be to distinguish between two different phases of capitalism: the modern phase, in which the emphasis was on *production* (i.e. how to organize the economy so that it will have maximum efficiency in the process of production) and the postmodern

phase, in which the emphasis was on *consumption* (i.e. there are more goods available on the market than what people need or are able to buy, and therefore the problem becomes how to persuade them to choose *your* product).

It has become increasingly obvious, however, that the concept of "consumerism" no longer applies solely to economics, but has begun to extend to almost every area of life. The same idea, but with special emphasis on culture, is expressed by Harvey: "Postmodernism", he writes, "…signals nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural production" (Harvey, 1989, p. 62). This concept could be easily extended in the realm of science and knowledge, which very often are also sought not for their own sake, but rather for their exchange-value" (Neagoe, 2009a, p. 68).

3.2. (Post)secularism and its relevance for the social work profession

Like many other professions, social work has seen a gradual and, it would seem, an irreversible process of secularisation (Ellor, *et al.* 1999, 3-5; Furness & Gilligan, 2010, 4-8; Geertsema, 2011, pp.277-279; Hugen, 1998, p. 1; Ressler, 1998, p. 177; Vanderwoerd, 2012a, 2012b). Alongside this process, the idea has been spread that religion (both institutionally and ideologically) has nothing distinctive or significant to offer in the field of social care (Russel, 1998). Moreover, in both professional practice and academic circles many have begun to develop an evident suspicion, if not outward hostility, towards social work professionals who attempt in any way to incorporate a religious dimension into their practice (Hugen, 1998, p. 1; Spano & Koenig, 2007). The main explanation for this attitude probably has to do with the widespread influence which a number of well known "masters of suspicion" (Freud, Marx, Durkheim, etc.) extended, through their theories, into the whole field of social sciences (Furness & Gilligan, 2010, p. 5; Ressler, 1998, p. 177). In their estimation, the second half of the twentieth century was going to register a widespread decline in religious beliefs, if not their total disappearance (Hunt, 2005). Although their predictions did not materialise to such a degree, there is little doubt that the process of secularisation became evident in society as a whole and, inevitably, also in the social sciences, including social work (Neagoe, 2013c).

Despite the apparently irreversible nature of this secularising process, in recent years more and more specialists have noted a renewal of people's interest in religion and spirituality in many parts of the world, including in the West (Hunt, 2005; Macionis & Plummer, 2008; McIntosh, 2007). This increase, particularly in the areas of less

institutionalised forms of spirituality, has given sufficient grounds to certain authors for them to speak about the dawn of a "postsecular" era (Habermas, 2008; Morozov, 2008; Betz, 2009; Neagoe, 2013c). According to these observations, one of the most significant developments of this new context is that religion and spirituality, which had previously been largely relegated to the realm of values and private life, have started to regain some of their lost ground in the public and professional spheres.

This renewal of interest in religion and spirituality has undoubtedly made itself known in the field of social work. One telling indication of this is the sheer number of specialised studies, published in recent years, dealing with the relationship between religion, spirituality and social work (as indicated in the first section above).

4. Dealing with professional dilemmas related to the relationship between spirituality and social work

The evident challenge which results from the context which has been described is that, if religion is to be included as a legitimate component of social work practice, this must be done with great care and sensitivity, lest it create more problems than it solves. It is crucial that practitioners be aware not only of the areas in which the religious values of service users or of practitioners themselves can provide support for the helping process, but also of possible areas where the two sets of values (professional and religious) are in apparent conflict with each other. The way in which the professional is able to manage the dilemmas which result from such tensions is crucial for the quality of the services they provide. As an effort in this direction, we have analysed, in several publications, not only the areas of compatibility between the two sets of values, but also significant areas of tension (Neagoe, 2006b; 2011c, 2013c). The key aspects of these analyses are as follows.

4.1. The broad compatibility between social work values and Christian ethics

At first sight, at least, virtually all widely accepted values of the social work profession may be said to have a closely corresponding value in the area of Christian ethics (Ressler, 1998). We have taken, for instance, the core values of the social work profession, conveniently outlined by the British National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in its *Code of Ethics* (1996), it is not hard to identify their corresponding principles and beliefs in Christian ethics.

Thus, related to *human dignity and worth*, we find the creation of human beings "after God's image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26), with the implication that humans are endowed with special dignity and worth. For the notion of *social justice*, we find the similar biblical emphasis on social justice (Micah 6:8), demonstrated, most noticeably, in Jesus' acceptance of socially excluded groups (Mark 2:15-17). For the concept of *service*, one can identify similarities with the important Christian teaching on servanthood (Matthew 20:26-28). Related to *integrity*, important similarities exist with the well-known concept of holiness in the Judeo-Christian tradition (1 Peter 1:15-17). Finally, the principle of *competence* (in the sense of acting within, and seeking to improve, one's professional expertise) seems to find its Christian equivalent in the idea of serving God and people within the limits of one's gifts and with the challenge to multiply them (Matthew 25:14-30; 1 Corinthians 12).

4.2. Areas of tension between social work values and Christian spirituality

However impressive the similarities between the two sets of values may be, they cannot obscure the facts that there are also significant areas of tension between the two and that a social worker who holds Christian values may be faced at times with important dilemmas in this respect (Keith-Lucas, 1985, 1-7; Spano & Koenig, 2007; Ressler, 1998). We venture to offer a few examples of what in our opinion are some of the most common areas of such tension and to speculate on some possible ways of resolving the resulting dilemmas (Neagoe, 2013c). Thus, the first two subsections below will focus on dilemmas related to different *approaches* of social work practice, while the remaining two sections will discuss specific *domains* of practice where a Christian social worker is particularly likely to be faced with important dilemmas. In doing so, we recognise the diversity of groups and divisions within the Christian religion, but, unless otherwise specified, we take the notion of "Christian social worker" to refer to any professional practitioner in the field of social work who shares the core beliefs and values of the Christian faith.

Many of the specific issues discussed below may, of course, pose no significant challenge to certain categories of Christian social workers, such as those who are employed by faith based organisations – especially if the organisation belongs to the same religious tradition as the social worker. The discussion here refers mainly to Christian social workers who are employed by non-religious organisations or are members of and accountable to a secular professional association. Also, it should be admitted that the extent to which such

issues are of real significance to the social worker will often depend largely on the cultural context in which they practices. Certain cultures are significantly more religion-oriented than others, while the discussion here focuses on those situations and settings where the potential clash of values poses a real challenge to the practitioner.

a) Religious versus secular exclusivism

Given the lasting impact of secularisation on social work practice, an important dilemma for many social workers, including Christian social workers, has to do with the degree to which they may or may not feel free to integrate a spiritual dimension into professional practice. The situation in this respect has become fairly polarised between two subtle forms of exclusivism and intolerance (Beckett and Maynard, 2005: 59-60; Pell, 2009; Ressler, 1998: 175-180). As noted above, the dominant tendency within the helping professions (at least in Europe) has been to take pride in having 'come of age' by breaking away from any religious affiliation, with the result that any acceptance of religious elements in professional work has ended up being regarded as a negative interference with good practice (de Muynck, 2011). On the other hand, it is equally possible to find abundant examples of situations where, given the power imbalance between the social workers and the service users, a particular religious worldview is more or less imposed on the latter, where certain professional services and privileges are conditioned by the service users' willingness to embrace that particular religious faith, while those who manifest other beliefs or practices are discriminated against (Beckett & Maynard, 2005; Clifford & Burke, 2009; Thompson, 2012). Faith based organisations are, undoubtedly, the most prone to this kind of approach. It is our contention that both of these approaches are unnecessary forms of exclusivism and intolerance, ultimately running the risk of denying both social workers and service users fundamental human rights to freedom of conscience – the freedom to believe what one chooses and even to share one's faith with others, as stated in *The European Convention for Human Rights*, art. 9; *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 18. A more balanced approach is perfectly possible – one according to which social workers would have the liberty to speak to service users about religious matters in the same way in which they would be free to speak about any other subject (personal matters, sport, politics, hobbies, etc.), as long as inappropriate pressure is not exercised. Moreover, there seems no good reason for social workers not to have the freedom to include religious elements (prayer or reading of religious texts) as part of their service, as long as these elements are desired by the service user and as long as the social worker is qualified to offer that particular spiritual assistance.

Aware of the frequency of such cases in the social work practice and wishing to safeguard against the misuse of spiritual or religious elements, several authors have in recent years offered helpful insights into the way practitioners may develop a spiritually-aware social work practice and adequately integrate spiritual elements in the process of evaluation and intervention (Furness & Gilligan, 2010; Hugen, 1998; Mathews, 2009; Roberts-Lewis, 2012, etc.).

As for the situations where the service user does not show interest in spiritual matters or holds different positions from that of the worker, one needs to remember that, according to the Christian faith, free will is one of the greatest divine gifts to humanity.

b) Descriptive versus prescriptive approach to service

Another common dilemma for Christian social workers has to do with the question of the degree to which they may 'prescribe' what the service users should do or at least indicate what, in their view, is right and what is wrong. According to the general tendency in most professional fields, the role of the specialist is to present to the service users all alternatives and offer them total freedom to choose what they prefer (Batten & Batten, 1967; Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1996, 111-119). For many Christian workers such an approach (known also as the non-directive approach) becomes problematic in those situations in which, according to their understanding of the Christian principles, or according to available evidence, one alternative is clearly detrimental. In such situations, can the Christian worker simply 'describe the alternatives', or should (s)he have the freedom to 'prescribe' what is considered to be the better direction?

Perhaps the first thing to note in this regard is that 'prescribing' often works the other way (Batten & Batten, 1967). When people sense that they are being 'pushed' in a particular direction, they often feel inclined to choose otherwise, and therefore the worker must be extremely cautious with the 'prescriptions'. More importantly, due to the power imbalance between the social worker and the service user, "prescribing" can easily run the risk of value imposition, especially when a significant gap exists between the values of the social worker and those of the service user (Hasenfeld, 1987; Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1996). Adequate monitoring and accountability of the social worker's service is a crucial factor in minimising the risk of power misuse (Lackey, 2006). That said, it must also be admitted that the merits of a strictly 'descriptive' approach are often overstated. Service users would often *expect* the worker to help them choose the best line of action, and if the worker is relatively certain what that line is, there is no reason to be shy about indicating it. In the words of Loewenberg &

Dolgoff (1996, p. 111), "when a social worker does not challenge a client's behaviour, that client may think that she approves of what he does. The worker may intend her silence to be an expression of value neutrality, but in fact her silence may signal acceptance of that behaviour!"

An important element here is the *honesty* of the advice. As much as possible, the worker should let the service user know *according to whom* a particular line of action is considered to be helpful or not. If the worker believes that a particular choice is undesirable because it contradicts a Christian principle, it would not be fair to argue the case in general terms or as being based on the opinion of the scientific community, particularly if this community does not unanimously share that view. It would be much more honest and professional to admit that the specialised opinion is perhaps divided and at the same time show availability to discuss the religious implications of the various alternatives, if the service user shows interest in this dimension of the decision.

c) Abortion, euthanasia, and birth control

Some of the most contended topics in the field of ethics and values at the juncture of Christianity and social care have been the issues of abortion, euthanasia and birth control – described sometimes together as, literally, "issues of life and death" (Anderson, 1977; Ekland-Olson, 2012). While the opposing camps in these debates cannot be identified simply as religious *versus* secular professionals, it is true that Christian values have generally led to a "pro-life" position, highlighting the sanctity of life for the unborn baby or the suffering adult (Geisler, 1989; May, 2000; Stott, 1999), while social work values have typically encouraged a more "pro-choice" stance, arguing for people's right to choose (Rosenwald, 2006). However, despite the differences, it must be stated that even in such delicate issues social work values and Christian values meet on the common ground of the service user's self-determination. Once the alternatives have been described honestly and objectively from scientific and, where appropriate, from religious perspectives, it is then the responsibility of the service user, not the practitioner, to decide what to do.

d) Sexual and family ethics

A similar situation is to be found in the area of sexual and family ethics. Once again, opinion is divided both in the Christian and professional camps (Johnston, 1998, 78-79; Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1996, 114-115), but at the risk of over-simplification, it is possible to state that, generally speaking, Christians have preferred a more conservative stance than most other

professionals on issues such as sex outside marriage, same-sex relationships, divorce, etc. (Geisler, 1989; Farley, 2006). The way Christian social workers deal with such matters will depend inevitably and to a large extent on their professional and theological understanding of the subject as well as on their cultural context. However, it may be said once again that a balance between a descriptive and a prescriptive approach may be the best route to take.

4.3. Models and guidelines for dealing with ensuing dilemmas

Decision making in such delicate cases is never a simple task. The social worker is expected to carefully balance her multidimensional ethical duties – to herself, to the user, to the agency, to the profession and to society (Banks, 2001, 135-144; Beckett & Maynard, 2005, 21-24; Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1996, 52-56). In the words of Beckett and Maynard,

> In trying to come to the right decision about how to respond in any given situation the social worker struggles not only with her own personal feelings, the limitations of her own skill and knowledge, and the constraints imposed by the real world of limited options, she also struggles with a plethora of competing values – societal values, personal values, professional values and the prevailing values of her agency (Beckett & Maynard, 2005, p. 21).

It has been beyond our goal to elaborate a detailed decision-making model which would enable the social worker to adequately deal with situations when her personal faith (Christian or otherwise) is in tension with other sets of values encountered in her professional practice. However, some minimal guidelines, based on existing literature in the field may be suggested.

A broad variety of models and approaches have been developed in order to help social workers deal with such dilemmas (Beckett & Maynard, 2005; Carroll & Show, 2013; Congress, 1999; Hugman, 2013; Loewenberg & Dolgoff, 1996; Reamer, 2006). Of particular relevance to our subject seems to be that of Loewenberg & Dolgoff (1996) who have designed two guides, or "screens" which are aimed at helping social workers who are faced with conflicting values in their professional practice. The first screen consists of three *ethical rules*, which should be used as the starting point for decision making:

1. Examine the *Code of Ethics* to determine if any of the Code rules are applicable. These rules take precedence over the worker's personal value system.
2. If one or more Code rules apply, follow these.

3. If the Code does not address itself to the specific problem, or if several Code rules provide conflicting guidance, use the Ethical Principles Screen (Loewenberg & Dolgoff , 1996, p. 62).

The second screen − consisting of seven *ethical principles* − is meant to be used in those situations when the *ethical rules* do not provide satisfactory guidance. For such cases, it is argued, a *ranking* of the ethical principles is inevitable, so that an adequate decision can be made even when several principles apply simultaneously. In such a hierarchy of principles, a higher-order principle should take precedence over a lower-order one. The seven ethical principles identified by Loewenberg & Dolgoff (1996, 62-64) are (in hierarchical order):

1. The principle of the protection of life, both of the service user and of others.
2. The principle of equality and inequality: equal persons should be treated equally and unequal persons should be treated unequally, such as in the case of an abused child and an adult abuser.
3. The principle of autonomy and freedom: decisions should be made so as to foster people's autonomy, freedom, and independence.
4. The principle of least harm: the social worker should choose what is likely to lead to the least harm or the most easily reversible harm.
5. The principle of quality of life: the decision should pursue the best possible quality of life for all relevant people.
6. The principle of privacy and confidentiality: practice decisions should heed people's right to privacy.
7. The principle of truthfulness and disclosure: decisions should be made in such a way as to allow the social worker to offer all relevant information to the service user and to others.

Screens such as these, Loewenberg & Dolgoff specify, "can provide social workers with a guide, but it must be remembered that such a guide is not meant to be a magic formula that can be applied blindly" (1996, p. 619). This warning, we would add, must be heeded especially when one is dealing with religious beliefs. Claims such as that that the rules of the *Code of Ethics* "take precedence over the worker's personal value system" may be particularly problematic with certain religious beliefs, which may not be negotiated by the social worker without the intense feeling of personal compromise.

Indeed, there may come a time when the social worker needs to ask herself radical questions about her suitability for the present case, job, or even profession, but for most situations, a decision-making model such as that proposed by Loewenberg & Dolgoff may offer a very helpful guide – especially when applied together with other, more 'humane' and less rationalistic, notions. In practical terms, such notions may include virtues, character, and

relationships (Banks, 2001, 42-55) as a necessary counterbalance for a purely rational and principle-based approach to ethics:

> A virtuous person will tell the truth, it would be argued, not because of some abstract principle stating 'you shall not lie', or because on this occasion telling the truth will produce a good result, but because they do not want to be the sort of person who tells lies. Virtue ethics also tends to emphasise the particular relationships people have with each other. It could be argued that it makes more sense to see my kindness towards my best friend as arising out of the fact that I have a relationship of friendship with her, I like her and care about her, rather than from some abstract moral principle about promoting the welfare of others (Banks, 2001, p. 43).

4.4. Concluding remarks

The secularisation of much of the "civilised" world seemed to have settled the issue regarding the relationship between practitioners' spiritual values and their professional values. The exit of religion from the public realm (associated with facts) and its allocation to the private domain (pertaining to values) meant that there was virtually no room for religion or spirituality in professional practice, including social work. Nevertheless, things did not progress exactly as anticipated by many influential social theorists. Far from disappearing, people's interest in religion and spirituality continues to be evident. This includes interest in connection with their professional lives and arguably shows signs of renewal, albeit often in redefined and less institutionalised forms; so much so that the concept of a postsecular society has had to be constructed. These somewhat unexpected developments have had important implications in the field of social work practice, where religion and spirituality have once again started to become significant factors.

While trying to highlight and comment on such changes, we have also tried to argue (Neagoe, 2013c) that if religion and spirituality are to be included as legitimate components in social work education and practice, this needs to be done with much care and with adequate regard for other existing mindsets and alternatives. Taking the professional practice of the Christian social worker as a sample, we have sought (a) to indicate that, given the numerous areas of tension between spiritual and professional values, any inclusion of spiritual or religious elements in social work practice must be done with much care; (b) to argue that many points of tension between spiritual and professional values can be constructively solved when unnecessarily exclusivistic approaches of religious or secular

origins are avoided; (c) to indicate specific ways in which such areas of tension may be addressed.

In closing, it may be said that if the consumer orientation of our society is to be adequately heeded, it reminds us that in the professional market, and more specifically in the social work market, there is room for a wide variety of services and approaches (secular and religious), catering to an even wider variety of people.

5. Social work in faith-based communities

5.1. Distinguishing features of the social work practice in a Christian community

Building on a number of helpful insights offered by Diana Garland (Garland, 1988; 1992), I have described some of the distinguishing features of the social work practice in churches or other church-related communities (Neagoe, 2011d).

1) Churches, or similar faith communities, represent a "host" environment and not a main environment for social work practice. Social work practitioners who work in such settings must remember that they are not in such a place with the purpose of transforming it into an agency which focuses exclusively on social work, but with the purpose of helping the organisation reach its own objectives.

2) Churches are social communities, where the members receive and offer information, as well as emotional and interpersonal support. Consequently, the social workers are not there primarily to make use of the community resources for the benefit of their service users but to help build the community as a whole. Moreover, the social workers in such an environment must realise that in certain respects they are more privileged than their colleagues from other institutions (e.g. through the fact that they have abundant information about the social network of their service users), while in other respects they are facing more challenges (e.g. because the service users or other community members can take advantage more easily of the easy access to the practitioners).

3) Churches can be important sources of social services for their wider communities. Many social care initiatives which start in an informal and unspecialised way within the Christian community can easily turn into social work projects for of the wider society, without an institutional link to the church which has generated them. Given this aspect, it is

extremely important that the social worker carefully analyses (and discusses with relevant church leaders) how long a certain project is best to stay within the church community and when it may be the appropriate time to become independent.

4) Churches and faith communities have the potential of functioning as important advocates for social justice and for the rights of socially disadvantaged groups. They have the right (and, very often, the desire) to act not only on the behalf of their own church members but also to make a difference in issues of public interest. The role of the social worker, in such a situation, is to assist the faith community in becoming an efficient voice on behalf of those who may not be able to speak for themselves.

5) Churches are voluntary organisations. Most of the time the social worker relies on the time and the efforts of volunteers. The involvement of such people alongside the social worker is not motivated and cannot be controlled financially (which would be regularly the case in the majority of social work agencies). One important implication of this fact is that their participation depends to a large extent on the social worker's ability in helping them see the value and significance of their work.

6) Churches and faith communities function as subcultures. They operate with language, symbols, practices and values which are specific to their group. Social workers in these settings need to learn to adapt to such a subculture (if they do not already belong to it) or at least be sensitive to it. In situations in which certain values or practices of the church community are in tension with the values and principles of the social work profession, the social worker must carefully judge for how long it is appropriate to live with such a tension, when and how to negotiate, and maybe when it is time to move elsewhere.

5.2. The concept of "diaconia" and its relation to social work

In much of the Western world (particularly in its Protestant areas) the term "diaconia" is used to describe social services which are offered in a specifically Christian context or which include a Christian component. Etymologically, the term comes from the Greek word *diaconia* ("service, ministry"). Gradually, it came to be associated specifically with the church office of "deacon", based on a biblical passage from Acts 6:1-3, which describes a

situation in the early church in Jerusalem, where a group of seven "deacons" were appointed to deal with the social problems of the Christian community[1] (Acts 6:1-3).

Thus, in many respects diaconia refers to regular social work. Still, some clarifications are necessary regarding the exact relationship between diaconia and social work. I have attempted to formulate a number of such clarifications by comparing the two in a number of key aspects: (a) what levels of service they offer; (b) what human needs they address; (c) what skills and methods they employ; (d) on what values they base their endeavour; and finally, (e) who are the agents through whom the work is implemented (Beyer, H.W., 1964, pp.81-93; Neagoe, 2006b; Weiser, 1990, pp.302-304).

On the basis of this clarification, we have focused on the relationship between Christian diaconia and social work practice.

5.2.1. Levels of Service

Social work is commonly regarded as including several levels of service:

1. The Individual Level (Social Casework). The most widespread types of social service in social work practice are those designed to operate at individual level (Woods & Hollis, 1991). Among the most common types of service which the social worker offers to the individual are: counselling; practical help in overcoming specific difficulties; facilitating access to various types of resources; providing protective services for victims of abuse or neglect; etc.

2. The Group Level. Of great importance for the social worker is also the work at group level. Group, in this case, means "at least two people – but usually more, gathered with common purposes or like interests in a cognitive, affective, and social interchange in single or repeated encounters…" (Hanford, 1971, p. 26) Charles Zastrow (1981, 340-360) lists eight different types of intervention groups known in social work practice:

(i) *recreation groups*, most commonly used to prevent delinquent behaviour among youth;

(ii) *recreation-skill groups*, aimed at improving a set of skills (arts, crafts, specific sports) as well as to provide enjoyment;

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[1] The literal description of the deakons' service is: „to serve (at) tables" (Acts 6:2), but the context makes it clear that the office has a social character.

(iii) *educational groups*, aimed at helping the participants to acquire knowledge or learn specialised skills (childrearing practices, training of volunteers for certain tasks, etc.);

(iv) *problem-solving and decision-making groups*, aimed at contributing to finding solutions for community problems, deciding on how to improve services to clients, etc.;

(v) *self-help groups*, aimed at helping the members overcome a common problem or answer a common need (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers, etc.);

(vi) *socialisation groups*, aimed at helping the participants develop or change attitudes which would improve their social skills or would make them more socially acceptable (by diminishing inter-racial tensions, by developing self-confidence and motivation among elderly, etc.);

(vii) *therapeutic groups*, aimed at helping people with relatively severe personal or emotional problems to explore their problems in depth and to develop strategies for overcoming them;

(viii) *encounter groups*, aimed at helping people improve their self-awareness by close (and often lengthy) interpersonal encounters.

3. The Family Level. Another important part of social work practice is directed at families (Hartman & Laird, 1983; Janzen & Harris, 1997; Satir, Stachowiak & Taschman, 1975). Mirroring the diversity of social problems which families face, family social work is very diverse in its scope, dealing with issues which range from economic limitations, to conflict situations, to difficulties in performing family roles (marital, parental, sibling), and to numerous other matters of a more isolated character.

4. The Community Level. Social work is also concerned with the life of the community. The goal of social work in this respect is to assist the local community in meeting specific needs, such as welfare, health, education, recreation, etc. Consequently, the social worker will play a variety of roles on behalf of the community (Ross, 1967; Zastrow, 1981, pp.423-430):

(i) as an *enabler*, the social worker will assist the members of the community in identifying their problems and will seek to "help people help themselves";

(ii) as a *broker*, the social worker will link individuals and groups who are in need of help with the appropriate services available in the community;

(iii) as an *expert*, the social worker will provide information and offer specialised advice on specific issues, thus leading to a better organisation of the community;

(iv) as a *social planner*, the social worker will gather and analyse the facts related to a certain social problem, will decide the most appropriate course of action for overcoming that problem, and will seek to facilitate the implementation of that action;

(v) as an *advocate*, the social worker will identify social problems towards which existing services are indifferent or hostile, will argue the legitimacy of the problem and will challenge the refusal of the existing institutions to provide appropriate services;

(vi) as an *activist*, the social worker will deal with issues of social injustice and deprivation by trying to shift the balance of power and resources in favour of a disadvantaged or oppressed group.

Like social work, Christian diaconia is concerned with serving people at several levels. The famous parable of the "good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37) is offered as an example of genuine philanthropy (love for one's fellow human being) and provides an excellent model of service offered to an *individual* in need, regardless of any ethnic, religious or social barriers. The appointment of the seven "deacons" in the early Jerusalem church, following the emergence of a social problem related to a group of widows belonging to the Hellenistic segment of the church (Acts 6:1-3), sets an important paradigm for later diaconal service on behalf of specific *groups*. One could also think of the numerous apostolic instructions related to family matters (Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9; Colossians 3:18 – 4:1; 1 Peter 3:1-7) as models of Christian concern for preventing and solving *family* difficulties. Finally, the early Christian practice of raising and sending material support for poorer Christian communities (Romans 15:25-26; 1 Corinthians 16:1-3; 2 Corinthians 8:1-15) sets an important example of Christian social care at the *community* level. Throughout the history of the church, Christians have found precedents and inspiration in such examples for countless other instances of social service offered to those in need – at individual, group, family, and community level.

One remark which may be added at this point regards the identity of those who benefit from Christian diaconia. According to one line of biblical evidence, the social concern of the Christian service should be directed primarily towards the members of the Christian community. Such passages seem to stress primarily or exclusively the social responsibility of Christians towards their fellow believers (James 1:15-16; 1 John 3:17). Passages like these must not, however, be allowed to downplay the equally solid grounds for stating that authentic Christian service cannot be limited to Christians.[2] Of special relevance in this

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[2] Note especially Jesus' acts of mercy towards those outside the people of God (Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30) and even towards demon-possessed individuals (Mark 1:23-26; 5:1-20; 9:17-27), as well as his teaching on

respect are Jesus' acts of mercy towards those outside the people of God (Matthew 8:5-13; Mark 7:24-30) and even towards people who were regarded as demon-possessed (Mark 1:23-26; 5:1-20; 9:17-27), as well as his teaching on expressing God's love irrespectively of any social or religious barriers (Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 4:25-27; 10:25-37).

5.2.2. Needs

One of the most widely known representations of human needs in the field of social sciences is Abraham Maslow's pyramid, (Maslow, 1943) according to which all human needs can be placed in a hierarchical order of priority (with the first priority at the bottom), as follows:

(i) *physiological* needs (air, water, food, warmth, sleep);

(ii) *safety* needs (safe circumstances, stability, protection, structure);

(iii) *relational* needs (loving, belonging, socializing);

(iv) *esteem* needs (the respect of others, self-respect);

(v) *self-actualisation* needs (the need to actualise one's full potential).

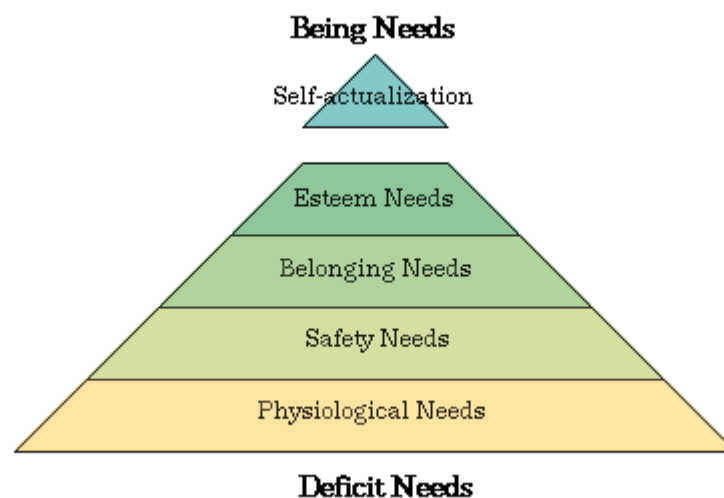Figure1. Abraham Maslow's pyramid (Source: http://www.age-of-the-sage.org/psychology/maslow_pyramid.html)

According to Maslow, the first four levels of needs can be regarded together as D-needs ("deficit needs"), in the sense that if one does not have enough of something - i.e. there is a

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expressing God's love irrespectively of any social or religious barriers (Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 4:25-27; 10:25-37).

deficit - one feels the need. The top level of needs can be described as B-needs ("being needs"), because they refer to the self-actualisation of one's being.

Moving to the diaconal representation of human needs, it must be stated that it is beyond the scope of the canonical New Testament documents to offer a systematic description or classification in this respect. Still, enough is said to enable the attentive reader to draw some important conclusions regarding the human needs which the ministry of Jesus and the apostles sought to address. Perhaps the most significant feature of Jesus and the apostles' ministry was its holistic character: it addressed the needs of the human being in its entirety. Throughout the Gospel narratives and the Acts of the Apostles, the ministry of Jesus and of the early church demonstrates an interest both in the area of basic needs and in the area of higher personal fulfilment. One would not need much effort to identify many elements of Maslow's pyramid among the human needs addressed by Jesus and the early church. The numerous instances of physical healing, as well as the miraculous feeding(s) of the hungry multitudes are clear indications of the importance of the *physiological* needs (Matthew 4:24; 14:13-21). Jesus' repeated identification with and care for the powerless (children, women, marginalised groups) (Luke 4:18; etc.), his teaching about God's provision (see Matthew 6:25-34), the establishment of the church as an organic entity where the various members learn to care for each other (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) could be seen as a response to the human need for *safety and protection*. The gospel's emphasis on God's love for people and people's love for God and each other (John 3:16; Mark 12:28-31), is a poignant indicator of the importance of the human need for good quality *relationships*. The foundation of the Christian faith on the conviction that human beings are created after God's "likeness" (and therefore with special dignity), as well as Jesus' respect towards outcast individuals and groups (Genesis 1:26; Luke 5:29-32; 7:34, 36-50), emphasise the importance of people's need for *esteem*. Finally, Jesus' memorable statement that the human being "does not live on bread alone" (Luke 4:4) (i.e. cannot be satisfied only in physiological terms), together with his constant efforts to draw people's attention to the realities and values of "God's kingdom", a kingdom which is "not of this world" (i.e. not of a material nature), point to an altogether different level of human "*self-actualisation*", a dimension which transcends the immediate ("deficit") needs.

To be sure, these observations on human needs in the New Testament are not specifically related to diaconia. However, insofar as they are a general description of the service which Jesus and the apostolic church offered to people in need, they can be regarded as relevant for all diaconal work.

Another important remark which needs to be made here is that although it is possible to state, on the basis of the evidence surveyed above that social work and diaconia speak broadly about the same human needs, there are also some significant differences. Firstly, there is no evidence in the New Testament for a hierarchy of human needs as in Maslow's pyramid. If anything, one could state that according to the New Testament evidence the "spiritual" needs (belonging to the level of "self-actualisation") must not be regarded as secondary to other types of human needs. Secondly, differences can be noted not only in the way human needs are prioritised, but also in the way they are described. Perhaps the most significant difference relates to the way human "self-actualisation" is understood. In biblical (and diaconal) terms, this can never be reached without reference to a transcendent dimension – people's relationship to God.[3]

5.2.3. Skills and methods

There are countless lists and classifications of the basic methods and skills necessary for the social work profession (Zastrow, 1981, pp.15-20). This wide diversity results from the nature of the profession itself, a profession which requires familiarity with certain elements of sociology, psychology, anthropology, medicine, law, and the list could continue. Here is what Charles Zastrow (1981, p.4) writes:

> While most professions are increasingly becoming more specialized..., social work continues to emphasize a generic (broad-based) approach. The practice of social work is analogous to the old, now fading general practice of medicine; a general practitioner in medicine was trained to handle a wide range of common medical problems faced by people; a social worker is trained to handle a wide range of common social and personal problems faced by people.

Given this generalist character of the social work profession, we cannot attempt here to do justice to the range of methods and skills associated with social work. Here is, however, a brief outline of the core skills, organised around some of the main roles and activities of the social worker:

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[3] On this last point, see George Norwood's comments on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, at http://www.deepermind.com/20maslow.htm.

1. *Outreach worker* – reaching out into the community to identify need and follow up referrals to service contexts.

2. *Broker* – knowing services available and making sure those in need reach the appropriate services.

3. *Advocate* – helping specific clients obtain services when they might otherwise be rejected, and helping to expand services to cover more needy persons.

4. *Evaluator* – evaluating needs and resources, generating alternatives for meeting needs, and making decisions between alternatives.

5. *Teacher* – teaching facts and skills.

6. *Mobilizer* – helping to develop new services.

7. *Behaviour changer* – changing specific parts of a client's behaviour.

8. *Consultant* – working with other professionals to help them be more effective in providing services.

9. *Community planner* – helping community groups plan effectively for the community's social welfare needs.

10. *Care giver* – providing supportive services to those who cannot fully solve their problems and meet their own needs.

11. *Data manager* – collecting and analyzing data for decision-making purposes.

12. *Administrator* – performing the activities necessary to plan and implement a program of services. (R. Federico, *apud* Zastrow, 1981, 16-17)

There is no need to explore here in detail the relevance and applicability of these social work skills in the diaconal work. Suffice it to say that the diaconal worker should have no inherent reason to refrain from identifying himself/herself with such roles or making use of such skills, whenever the context requires it. What distinguishes perhaps most significantly the diaconal work from the social work in terms of skills and methods are two things: (a) the priority which the various roles and skills will receive in the diaconal work (a priority which will typically reflect the church values and the church setting), and (b) the use of some additional methods, which again will be specific to the church context (prayer, catechism, eucharistic participation, etc.)

5.2.4. Values

As indicated earlier, it is not hard to see the natural correspondence between social work values and some of the key ethical standards of the Christian tradition. Presenting them in a table format may facilitate the comparison:

Table 1. The comparison between Social Work Values and Ethical Standards of Christianity

Social work values	Ethical standards of Christianity
Offering services in the clients' prior interest	Jesus' teaching on servanthood (Mat. 20:26-28; etc.)
Social justice: offering equal chances; fighting discrimination and social exclusion	The biblical emphasis on social justice (Micah 6:8); Jesus' acceptance of socially-excluded groups (Mark 2:15-17)
Respect for the dignity and uniqueness of the human person	The creation of human beings "after God's image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26); God's self-sacrifice for humans (John 3:16); the divine incarnation
The client's right to self-determination	People's freedom to choose, even against God's will (Genesis 3:11; John 1:11; Romans 1:24)
The value of human relationships	Jesus' summary of the whole Law as love for God and for one's fellow human beings (Mark 12:28-31)
Integrity: acting with honesty and responsibility	The holiness imperative (1 Peter 1:15-17)
Competence: acting within (and seeking to improve) one's professional expertise	Serving God and people within the limit of the received "talents" and with the challenge to multiply them (Matthew 25:14-30, 1 Corinthians 12)

Despite such striking similarities, we have also seen significant areas of tension between social work values and commonly recognised aspects of the Christian ethics. We have already referred to such areas and do not read to rehearse them again. Suffice it to say at

this stage that one has to be particularly careful to distinguish between tensions which spring from authentic Christian principles and conflicts which originate from doubtful principles, thus leading to unnecessary and artificial clashes with social work values.

5.2.5. The identity of the service providers

It is common knowledge that for many years social work has been enjoying the status of a fully-fledged profession. By contrast, if diaconia is to be understood as referring to church social services, one has to regard it primarily not as a profession, but as a church ministry. This is not to deny the fact that it is and it should be done by professional people (qualified as social workers, pastors, psychologists, medical doctors, etc.), whenever the nature of the work requires certain specialised skills (indeed, more professionalism may be one of the most important needs of diaconia in many specific situations). The point is that those who provide church social services are commonly expected to have a transcendent sense of call which should cause them to see their work somewhat differently from the way other social workers see their profession. To put it briefly, social work, whether done by professionals or volunteers, remains a profession, while diaconia, also done by professionals or not, remains primarily a church ministry.

Another issue which needs to be addressed here is to what extent diaconia can be distinguished from social work by virtue of the church membership of its agents. Our suggestion is that church membership of the individual workers need not be regarded as a distinguishing feature of diaconia. One's religious identity does not necessarily define one's profession. Social workers employed in secular agencies do not automatically turn into diaconal workers if they become church members.

Instead, our contention has been that it is the affiliation of the *work itself* to the church that establishes its diaconal character, not the apartenence of the worker. That is to say that a certain social project may be referred to as diaconia when that project is a church project, not when it is implemented by church members. However, this needs some further clarification. What exactly defines a certain project as a church project? The simplest answer is that a project is a church project when it is run by the church institution, through the church members and with the church resources. However, things are not always so straight-forward. One important example is that of private agencies (NGO's, etc.) which offer social services. For legal, administrative and other reasons, Christian communities often prefer to offer

certain social services not directly through the church institution but through private agencies. Under what circumstances can it be said that such services are diaconia?

At least insofar as the material property (building, equipment, etc.) is concerned, the agency cannot legally belong to the church. In what ways can it then be regarded as a church ministry? One possibility would be to regard its ministry as a diaconia if all its employees, or at least its leadership, are members of that particular church or of any Christian church. Again, in our opinion this criterion may be a necessary, but not a sufficient condition (although it is arguable whether it should even be regarded as a necessary condition, at least for the employees who are not in a leadership position). It is entirely plausible for a social work agency that all its employees be members of a certain church (Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant), without thereby regarding the agency as a diaconal organisation.

Instead, our suggestion is that an agency's work should be regarded as diaconia only if its charter or some other legal document, stipulates that the agency performs church tasks, it bases its activity on Christian values, and it is in some way accountable to the church institution (in the running of its activities, in the election of its employees or voluntary workers – who may or may not have to be church members).

In conclusion, the relationship between Christian diaconia and social work has been analysed in a number of key areas. In doing so, we have been able to identify and systematise numerous important connections between the two types of service. At every point of the study we have found important common ground between them. Still, it has gradually become equally clear that the two cannot be equated with each other – *they may be twins, but they are not clones*.

In terms of levels of service which they offer, both diaconia and social work are concerned with the welfare of individuals, groups, families and communities, even if diaconia may inevitably have a special (but not exclusive) interest in the members of the Christian community. Also, both diaconia and social work seek to satisfy a wide range of human needs, although they may define and prioritise those needs somewhat differently. In terms of skills and methods, there are once again a lot of common elements, with the difference that the diaconal skills will inevitably reflect to some degree the church context. A particularly important (and sometimes sensitive) area has been found to be that of values. There can be no doubt that the core values on which both the diaconal and the social work base their practice are fundamentally the same. Still, it is equally evident that when these values are spelt out in detail, differences occur. In such cases, it is our contention that much care needs to be exercised in order (a) to distinguish between real and artificial tensions, and (b) to deal with

any existing differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance. Last but not least, we have indicated that although both diaconal and social work tasks can (to different degrees) be performed by professionals or volunteers, social work needs to be understood as a profession, while diaconal work as a church ministry. Moreover, the diaconal character of a particular service is not established by the Christian identity of the service providers, but by the formal designation of the service itself as a church project.

5.3. Helping the reluctant counselee in a church context

Given the fact that counselling is one of the most common types of support which is offered both within social work settings and in a church context, I have addressed it from a number of different angles and I will return to this subject also in the following sections. In this section I will only refer to one aspect of my contributions related to the subject of counselling, namely the challenge of working with a reluctant (or resistant) counselee in a church context (Neagoe, 2012b). For professional counsellors who work in a secular setting this is rarely a problem. They typically see clients who have voluntarily come for help, thus suggesting an initial degree of willingness to accept the role of a counselee. Yet for the pastoral workers and church counsellors the situation is rather different. They often notice a problem which indicates a clear need for counselling but those concerned show no intention of asking for help. What should be done in such situations? Ignoring the situation might cause damage to the individual, the family, or the Christian community. Even if some counselling is initiated, what if the person is not willing to self-disclose, or if the support is repeatedly resisted? These are some of the questions which we have set out to address (Neagoe, 2012b).

5.4. Typical causes of reluctance

In the words of Eugen Kennedy (1997, p.84), "reluctance is as common for a counsellor as low back pain is for a general physician". Often reluctance is manifested by the person refusing counselling in the first place. Other times, after a person has, at least informally, accepted a counselee role, (s)he suddenly stops (permanently or only occasionally) the self-disclosure process.

It is important, however, that the counsellor does not mistake reluctance for the occasional inability of the counselee to tell his or her story – which requires an altogether different approach (Gerard, 1986, p.121-125).

When reluctance is the real issue, it is important that the counsellor understands what the reason(s) for it may be. We have listed what probably are some of the most common causes:

a) The degree of vulnerability which is typically associated with the role of counselee. In the words of L. K. Hillard (1991, p.11), "vulnerability is repulsive".

b) Past experiences may lead people to be afraid of intimacy (Hillard, 1991, p.11).

c) Fear of possible consequences which people are inclined to associate with the counselling process (such as criticism, rejection, loss of confidentiality).

d) Lack of trust in the counsellor. This is especially the case in smaller Christian communities, where those who provide the pastoral care have not had an adequate or formal training. Not surprisingly, church members in such communities often prefer to seek help from secular professionals (Collins, 1988, pp.44-45).

e) Shame related to certain facts which may get exposed through the counselling process: "Shame is not just being painfully exposed to another; it is primarily an exposure of self to oneself." (Egan, 1986, p.141)

f) Discouragement and resignation, perhaps as a result of previous efforts and failures to change. (Collins, 1976, p. 35)

g) Last but not least, reluctance may be possible simply as a result of failing (or refusing) to see the (gravity of) the problem, resulting in no real desire to change. (Collins, 1976, p.35)

5.5. Faces of resistance

It is important that a distinction is made between "reasonable" and "unreasonable" resistance (Hughes, 1981, p.13). Reasonable resistance is the counselee's genuine failure to understand the counsellor's argument. This difficulty can be usually overcome simply by presenting the argument in more accessible ways. Unreasonable resistance is a conscious or unconscious opposition to the advice or to the idea of change. It is for the understanding of such unreasonable resistance that E. Kennedy's classification (1977, 77-81) of the "faces of resistance" is very helpful:

a) *Silence* – the refusal of the counselee to verbalise thoughts or feelings. In such cases, Kennedy encourages the counsellor to "hear the person in the silence itself. Many tones are communicated even when there are no sounds…"

b) *The Laughing Boy* – has the tendency to treat everything lightly and superficially in order to avoid the real issue(s).

c) *The Talking Boy* – is keen to talk constantly, often around the subject, with the same purpose as in the previous point.

d) *The Intellectualiser*– for whom everything is abstract and sophisticated, so that nothing practical can be truly addressed.

e) *The Generaliser* – is willing to dialogue only in general terms, in order to avoid specific issues.

f) *The Scene Maker* – uses excessive emotion to stop the counsellor's effort of making progress in a particular direction.

g) *The Happy Talker* – puts on a happy face in order to avoid painful issues.

5.6. Responding to uncooperative attitudes

There are no magic solutions which would easily and efficiently apply to all situations, but we have presented a number of potentially helpful strategies:[4]

a) Address the issue as early as possible. The point to be made is that, ideally, the problem should be detected and addressed as early as possible. In most situations, the more advanced the problem is, the harder it is for the person to co-operate and change.

b) Be straightforward. Once there is reasonable evidence for a problem, the person should be approached. Jay Adams rightly points out the importance of straightforwardness at this point. Three things, he says, should be made clear: (i) a statement of the facts (i.e. the evidence which the pastor has); (ii) their apparent meaning; (iii) evident concern for the person and for all those involved (Adams, 1975, pp.69-70).

c) Establish and maintain a good working relationship. Establishing a working relationship is "the heart of helping people" (Egan, 1986, p.136). In a pastoral context, this may even include (where appropriate) inviting the counselee for a meal, planning informal activities together etc. Even when a good relationship has been achieved and the real issues

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[4] See, for comparison, Joshua C. Watson, (n.d.), "Addressing Client Resistance: Recognizing and Processing In-Session Occurrences", http://counselingoutfitters.com/Watson.htm.

start to be tackled, this aim should be kept in mind: "Good listening in an open, non-defensive manner, careful attention and tracking of client concerns, direct, honest feedback, and the like are not only important for assessment, but also create the context in which further exploration and cognitive-behavioural strategies may be implemented" (Deffenbacher *apud* Egan, 1986, 137).

d) Understand and address the person behind the mask. Given the variety of "faces" which resistance (or even reluctance) can take, it is important that the counsellor seeks to understand the person behind the "mask", and that the person, not the mask, is addressed.

e) Don't take negative reactions personally. The negative reactions of the counselees may have a score of causes which are totally outside of the counselling setting. Nevertheless, as Egan points out, "clients can react to helpers as if they were people from their past lives" (Egan, 1986, p.137).

f) Examine your own reactions and emotions. There is no question that the counsellor is not immune to the reactions and emotions of the counselee. This is especially true in the case of a pastor seeking to help a member or a family from the Christian community.

g) Show respect for the person. It is crucial to show the counselees that they are being treated as persons, not as cases. In order to achieve this, the counsellor will make a deliberate and constant effort to ask opinions, show empathy, underline the counselees' responsibility to decide for themselves, etc.

h) End on a positive note. If, despite the efforts, resistance persists, the counsellor must consider closing the session. Yet the way you close the session is crucial (Hughes, 1981, p. 14): Show that you are not angry with the counselee for "frustrating your case" but are deeply sorry for what this might mean for him or her. The way you part might have as much value as the whole session. However, don't necessarily blame yourself for being incompetent: be ready to accept the limitations of what any counsellor or any pastor can do!

6. A systemic approach to family care

One specific area of research and teaching in which I have taken a very special interest is that of family care, from a systemic perspective (Neagoe, 2006a; 2007a, 2007b, 2009b, 2011a, 2012a, 2013b). Such a systemic approach to family care (whether expressed in terms of family social work or family counselling) has, very naturally, called attention to the issue of spirituality, whether it be in the lives of individual family members, the family value-system,

the faith community to which the family or some of its members may belong, etc. More specifically, the question has also been asked as to the specific ways in which spirituality in general, or Christian spirituality in particular, is relevant to the helping process.

The systemic approach to family care has been very dominant in recent decades across the whole range of helping professions (Hartman & Laird, 1983; Imber-Black, 1988; Janzen & Harris, 1997; Zastrow, 1981; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1994). According to this model,

> People are thought of as being involved in constant interaction with various systems in the environment. These include family, friends, work, social service, political, employment, religious, goods and services, and educational systems. Systems theory portrays people as being dynamically involved with each system (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1994, p.5).

In applying this model to family counselling (of family social work), we have paid specific attention to viewing the family system from three different perspectives (Hartman & Laird, 1983, 155-325):

a) the family in space (an ecological perspective);

b) the family in time (a trans-generational perspective);

c) the family in relationship (an inner-system approach).

6.1. The Family in Space: an ecological perspective

Individuals and families alike depend on a wide variety of resources for their survival and for their quality of life. An implication of this fact is that one of the main objectives of family counselling is to address the family in its "ecological environment", namely, to collect information concerning the relationship between the family system and its social environment and then to act accordingly.

In doing this, one of the major challenges is that of structuring what often tends to be an overwhelming volume of information. The ecomap is a particularly useful instrument in this respect. As its names suggests, the ecomap is a "map" which represents in a dynamic way the ecological system surrounding one person or one family – hence the notion of family "in space". This ecological system consists of all the systems and all the relationships which influence and/or are influenced by the life of the subject (school, job, friends, extended family, recreation, religion, hobbies, medical and social services, etc.). Thus, the family

ecomap represents in a graphic way the connections (whether constructive or conflictual) and the flow of resources and energy between the family and the surrounding world, thereby highlighting those deficiencies or difficulties which generate problems in the family life. Such information can then be taken as a starting point for identifying the necessary resources, for addressing existing conflicts, for overcoming potential obstacles, etc.

The construction of the ecomap begins by drawing a large circle in the centre of a large sheet of paper. Inside the circle are represented the members of the family system. The standard practice is to represent male members of the family by small squares and female members by small circles. Within these circles and squares are written the names and sometimes also the age of those represented. The next step is to represent the external systems which impinge on the family life. These systems are usually also represented by circles, containing the name of the system (school, friends, etc.) and a few key words which describe the relationship of that system to the family. The external systems are then linked with the family in a way which will indicate the nature of the relationship. Thus, typically:

- a thick line (━━━━━━) or several lines (≡≡≡≡≡≡≡) indicate a strong, important relationship;
- a broken (or thin) line (--------------) symbolises a weak or insufficient connection;
- a hatched line (+++++++++) shows a conflictual or stressful relationship;
- an arrow or a number of arrows alongside the line (__→ → → __) represent the direction of the flow of resources, energy, or interest.

The line can link an external system to the whole family circle (indicating that the external system has more or less the same kind of relationship to all the members of the family) or to one of the family members (suggesting that only this member of the family has that particular relationship with the external system).

HOUSING

WORK
Foreman
Union Rep.

HEALTH CARE
FACILITIES
Sees M.D. weekly
for nerves

CHURCH

EXTENDED
FAMILY
Grandmother
Susan visits family
home every day
11AM – 10PM

Drinking
buddies

FAMILY OR
HOUSEHOLD

Mike

Karen

CHN visits
once a week

Jr. High
School
Average
Grade = D

Ashley

Jack

RECREATION

RECREATION
With boyfriend
6 hrs/day

SCHOOL
Special class
Enjoys

FRIENDS
Fire setters

Figure 2. A (fictional) family ecomap (Source:
http://www.uic.edu/nursing/genetics/Lecture/Family/ecomap.html)

It is important that in drawing and using the ecomap, the drawing is not regarded as a work of art. Usually it looks crowded and messy (which of itself may be a significant aspect). To be sure, no relevant information should be sacrificed in the name of tidiness.

As already indicated, the main value of the ecomap is its visual impact and its capacity to organise a large amount of factual information. For this reason, it can be very useful when interviewing a family, especially as the ecomap is always a joint effort of the counsellor and the family. The individual contribution of the various family members, their physical position while the ecomap is being drawn, their attitudes (whether verbalised or not), are all important in understanding the family dynamics. Moreover, to the extent to which it is an effort of the whole family, the ecomap can show each member of the family in a non-threatening (and graphic) way facts or attitudes which may call for a particular type of action.

It must be remembered, however, that any ecomap is a representation of the family *at a given time* and that the present image may change very quickly.

6.2. The family in time

According to many specialists in family care, many of the difficulties which members of the present family are encountering (in the family, at work, in social life) have to do with unresolved problems in their original family – losses, conflicts, myths, prescriptions, etc. Consequently, for real change and progress to occur in the present family, it is important that such problems are properly dealt with. Change, in this case, implies a gradual process of personal differentiation and distancing from the projections, prescriptions, interdictions, and conflicts which have been passed on from other generations and which are redundant or even harmful in the present context.

A decisive step in this process of differentiation is the effort of stepping outside one's family system far enough to be able to "objectivise" the emotional system of the family, to identify those elements which have to do with the "family culture" and to locate one's role in the functioning of the family system.

A particularly useful tool in dealing with the intergenerational aspects which impinge on the present family life is the genogram. Its main function is that of helping objectivise the intergenerational family system, with its projections, expectations, identifications, exclusions, etc. Basically, the genogram is an intergenerational family map, similar to a genealogical tree, crossing over three, four or even more generations. Unlike the genealogical tree, however, the genogram does not record merely the genealogical relationships but many other facts, such as major events in the family's life, jobs, ethnic or religious backgrounds, important losses, migrations, and even observations regarding coalitions, exclusions, communication and behaviour patterns, etc.
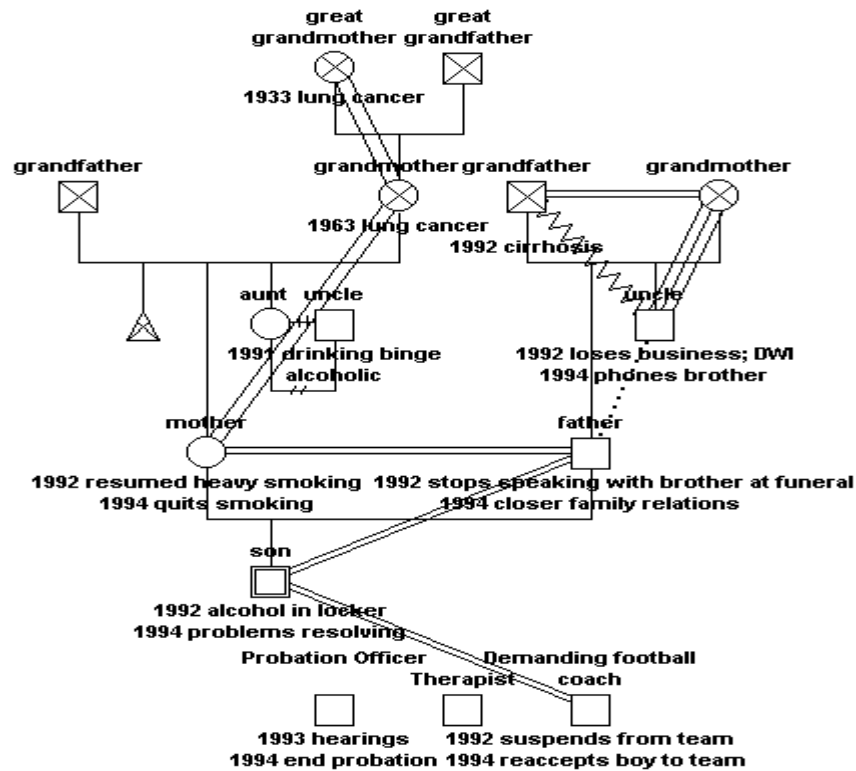
Figure 3. A (fictional) family genogram (Source: http://www.interpersonaluniverse.net/genogram.html)

Like the ecomap, the genogram represents males by squares, females by circles and those whose gender is unknown by triangles. Contemporary generations (siblings, spouses, cousins) are depicted horizontally and different generations vertically. Above the line which unites two spouses may be written the year (or date) when they got married. If a divorce has taken place, this is typically indicated by two short lines across the line which links the spouses (the year/date of divorce being sometimes written under the line). Children are represented in age order, with the youngest to the right. An adopted child may be indicated by writing a small "a" beside the personal symbol. Those who have died are crossed over with an "X", the year (and sometimes the cause) of death being written under the square or circle.

The elements of information which are typically recorded in the genogram are:

a) *Names.* Apart from identifying the various individuals, names can indicate ethnic origin, possible identifications and expectations (between people sharing the same name).

b) *Dates of birth and death.* They show when someone "enters" and "exits" the arena of the family history.

c) *Places of birth and/or residence* – indicating the geographic dynamics of the family.

d) *Health issues* – suggestive for the way illness is regarded, treated, or even "ritualised" in the family history, as well as possible expectations and anxieties regarding severe illnesses or premature deaths.

e) *Major losses* suffered by the transgenerational family can have a big impact on the way family members behave.

f) *Jobs* – speak about talents, concerns, aspirations, social status, all of which have shaped the intergenerational family system and which can easily influence the aspirations, disappointments, and relationships of the present family.

g) *Heroes and villains* in the family history have a big impact on the definition of the family's values, on the basis of which present family members may (consciously or not) be judged.

h) *Coalitions and breaches* in the family history may suggest patterns of alliances or divisions which can influence the present relationships.

6.3. The family in relationship

The study of the inner family system (or the family in relationship) implies the analysis of the interpersonal relationships, behavioural patterns, rules and coalitions existing *within the family*. To be sure, this study is closely related to the study of family in space and time. For instance, the analysis of the relationship between family members and their environment will inevitably highlight certain issues in the inner family system. Similarly, the study of the intergenerational family system will lead to a better understanding of the roles, regulations and patterns within the family.

The family sculpture is an increasingly appreciated method in the study of the inner family system, a method used by a wide range of family therapists and counsellors and with great potential for diaconal workers. One family member, playing the role of "sculptor" and using as "building material" the other family members (or other available individuals) creates a living picture of the family at a given moment in time. The following steps are generally followed:

a) The counsellor offers an explanation regarding the role of the family sculpture, as a means by which the family members will be able to experience the structure and relationships in their own family.

b) A family member is invited to be the sculptor. It is possible to ask for a volunteer, or the family can be asked to suggest who would feel most comfortable in this role. Children are often particularly good (and honest) "sculptors".

c) The counsellor offers the necessary instructions, stressing that it is a non-verbal process. The primary purpose is that of building a family picture by placing each member in a characteristic position. Items of furniture or any other relevant objects may be used for this purpose. The sculptor can imagine a typical evening at home. Where would the various family members be and what would they be doing? How would they be placed in relation to each other? What facial expression would each of them have? Where would they look?

d) The counsellor/worker may ask the sculptor questions in order to make sure that the position, body and facial expression of each family member is exactly what the sculptor intended.

e) While the sculpture is being built, no one is allowed to object to the position in which (s)he was placed.

f) After the sculpture is completed, the sculptor takes his/her own position in it. The counsellor invites each family member to express how (s)he feels in the assigned position. A discussion should then take place regarding the sculpture, leading to conclusions and practical steps of action.

Figure 4. A family sculpture (Source: http://www.sculpturegallery.com/sculpture/family_values.html.)[5]

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[5] The picture represents a sculpture entitled "Family values", by Alexsander Danel.

There are a number of issues which play a particularly important role in family relationships. From the point of view of the family counsellor or the diaconal worker, these issues are likely to represent key areas of evaluation and targets for change for many families which are experiencing relational difficulties. We will outline them without attempting to deal with them at any length.

a) Family roles

There are two types of roles which family members can play within the family system. First, there are *formal* roles, built in the biological and traditional structure of the family – the roles of mother, father, husband, wife, daughter, son, aunt, uncle, grandmother, grandson, etc. Secondly, there are *informal* roles, assigned to the members of the family system and playing an important part in the functioning of the family – the roles of mediator, encourager, educator, historian, caregiver, etc.

For the evaluation of the various roles (both formal and informal) within the family system, attention needs to be paid on the one hand to the perception of each family member of his or her own role, and on the other hand to the way other family members understand that role. Any clashes between these two perspectives need to be carefully dealt with.

b) Family rules

The stability and coherence of the family are maintained to a large degree by means of a system of regulations which govern family life. To be sure, not all such rules have a precise function in the stability and functioning of the family, some of them being rather matters of style (e.g., whether or not children are allowed access to the parents' bedroom). Moreover, it is very possible that there is no single rule on which the whole family structure depends. Still, a certain number of shared rules and rituals is crucial for the cohesion of the family system.

The objective of the counsellor in this respect is to help the family elucidate its rules and rituals. What are they? What purpose do they have? Are they too many, thus leading to rigidity and repetition, or are they too few, thus encouraging confusion and uncertainty?

Even more important than the family rules are the "metarules" (rules about rules), which establish, for instance, which of the family rules may or may not be discussed, evaluated, or modified. In rigid families, one major metarule is that rules are not discussed. An important step in helping such a family may therefore be precisely to invite the evaluation of a certain family rule, thus bringing into discussion the metarule itself.

c) Power

Power in families is a very complex and sensitive subject. It must not be regarded as being located in a single point, person, or space. Usually, power is distributed simultaneously in several places: in the family value system, in various family members, in family rules, etc.

The challenge may be, therefore, to explore the way power is distributed in the family. Which family members have a bigger share of power? What causes the lack of power in the case of other members? What impact does this distribution of power have on the family dynamics? What changes may be necessary and how could they be implemented?

d) Communication

Communication has a double significance in family counselling. On the one hand it is the means through which the family is evaluated and helped, and on the other hand it often is one of the targets for evaluation and change in the family.

Evidently, most families communicate verbally, and the counsellor will pay close attention to the content and tone of their verbal communication. The harder part of the evaluation, however, is to "read" beyond the verbal content of the communication. Facial expressions, gestures, and body language are all important means of communication and sometimes can "speak" more than the words themselves. The realisation of the importance of non-verbal communication has led to the practice of videorecording family sessions as a tool for family evaluation (the recorded session being even watched sometimes without sound???, in order to better appreciate the non-verbal communication).

There are at least two important objectives in the counselling process insofar as communication is concerned. The first objective is that of evaluating the *nature* of communication in the family. What rules govern communication in the family? What subjects may or may not be explored? What feelings may or may not be expressed? The second objective is that of evaluating the *quality* of the communication. How clear is the communication? How compatible are the verbal and the non-verbal dimensions of the communication? To what extent do family members pay attention to or interrupt each other?

6.4. The spiritual dimension of family care

A question which may be asked at this stage is whether there can be anything "spiritual" or "Christian" about the approach to family counselling which has been outlined. In a sense the answer is "No". Seen from a professional angle, there is nothing that makes them distinctively spiritual or religious. Indeed, such methods are common practice in various professions such as family therapy, social work, etc. Nevertheless, it is our contention that these standard practices can be easily adapted to incorporate a spiritual dimension, when the context for this is appropriate (i.e. the counselling is done in a Christian setting, the service users invite a spiritual input, the counsellor or social worker is adequately equipped to offer it, etc.). What exactly this spiritual input should or should not include varies from case to case, but a few general remarks should be of some help:

a) Spiritual resources. Given the specifically Christian context of counselling, resources such as prayer, meditation, reading of sacred texts can be used as important aids in the helping process, alongside the counselling itself.

b) The model of divine communion. The methods of diaconal work in general and counselling in particular are distinctive not only because of the specifically Christian resources, but also because of the unique relational model which Christians derive from the relationality of the triune God of Christianity. It is in this model that families will be encouraged to discover the supreme meaning of love, mutual care, and healthy relationships.

c) The faith community. Last but not least, the spiritual dimension in family counselling is also given by the fact that the family may be assisted to experience what it means to be "a family within a family", i.e. within the church family. This is much more than a metaphoric way of speaking. Within the Christian community the family may discover, apart from the spiritual benefits, social fulfilment and resources which will make family difficulties considerably easier to overcome.

As a summary, the role of spirituality within the helping process (where appropriate and necessary) may be describes as follows: (i) the church community can help restore the *ecological* balance of a dysfunctional family; (ii) the spiritual resources such as prayer, meditation, reading of sacred texts can offer comfort and healing (even for *inter-generational* wounds); (iii) the divine model of communion is a helpful blueprint for functional *relationships within the family system.*

7. The family as a resource and target for change in gerontological social work

One of the specific areas in which I have applied the concept of systemic family care has been that of gerontological social work (Neagoe, 2009b). To be sure, there are a wide range of factors which impend on the life quality of the elderly. Charles Zastrow and Karen K. Kirst-Ashman conveniently divide these factors into three major categories: biological, psychological and social (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1994, p. 563-640). I have chosen to focus specifically on those aspects of the gerontological social work which relate to the family of the elderly. My work in this area has started from the observation that in many cases the difficulties which the elderly encounter are aggravated by the disfunctionalities in their families. In this respect, the whole family system needs to be regarded as a target for the social worker's intervention. On the other hand, it is equally important to understand that the family can often represent a valuable resource in the effort of increasing the quality of life for the elderly. The implication of this is that the social worker needs constantly to identify and implement intervention methods and skills which are appropriate to this category of clients.

7.1. The relevance of the family for the wellbeing of the elderly

One of the most widespread myths regarding the elderly, especially among urban and Western societies, is that families are widely abandoning their aging members, that filial responsibilities are beginning to be forgotten and that the elderly are condemned to live in isolation and solitude (Hartman & Laird, 1983, p. 354-355). In other words, the notion of extended family (or even the notion of family as such) is an endangered species and the blame for this situation is to be attributed to economic development, industrialisation, urbanisation, globalisation, etc.

Despite the widespread acceptance of such ideas, the research which has been carried out over the last three or four decades in social sciences seems to contradict them fairly clearly. Thus, various studies which have been conducted in Western and urban societies have indicated that the majority of the elderly have strong ties with their relatives. Many families are making great efforts in order to "juggle" work, family responsibilities in their immediate families, and care-giving for aging parents (Merrill, 1997). In the United States, for instance, 75% of elderly people are living with other members of the extended family or at a distance of less than 30-minutes drive from them and are benefiting, if necessary, of

various kinds of support from their family members (Punner, 1974). Moreover, the research has widely contradicted the assumption that families where more than two generations are living together are necessarily problematic. On the contrary, over half of the younger family members have stated that the integration of an aging person in their home has caused no major inconvenience for the life of the family and even of those who have indicated that the integration of an elderly person in their nuclear family has represented a challenge, the majority have stated that eventually they were able to find satisfactory solutions for living together (Newman, 1976).

Another important finding which has emerged from the research is that the great majority of personal services which the elderly need are being covered by other family members, who in many cased become the "parents of their own parents" (Fetterman, 2008). Even insofar as the institutionalised elderly are concerned, the results show that most of them have systematic contact with their family members, well over 60% of them receiving weekly visits (Zappolo, 1977).

The evident significance of these observations is that families continue to play an important role in the life's of most of the elderly and that in the majority of cases the elderly are themselves part of their family life.

Undoubtedly, this statement is all the more valid in the case of the considerably less urbanised population of Romania, where, traditionally, inter-generational relationships are usually stronger than in the more westernised societies, while the sharing of one roof by three or even four generations is much more common.

It needs to be stated, therefore, that any strategy of increasing the quality of life of the elderly must pay particular attention to their families. In other words, a systemic approach of the social situation of the elderly must take as its starting point their family system and the social work intervention must be directed as much as possible towards the family system.

7.2. Competing views of social work professionals regarding the role of families in the lives of the elderly

In a study focusing on the relationship between family and state institutions in social work with people with special needs, including aging clients who belong to this category, Robert Moroney has identified four major descriptions offered by professionals regarding the role of the family in the social care of this category of people (Moroney, 1980).

According to the first point of view, the family represents *part of the problem*, constituting often an obstacle for the services which state institutions seek to offer to their clients. Thus, for instance, it is believed that the visits which family members pay to institutionalised elderly end up disturbing them. Indirectly and subtly, such professionals communicate to families that since they are, for various reasons, unable to look after their elderly member, it might be better for them to diminish or even to quit their ties and let the professionals make the decisions and offer the necessary care.

A second view portrays the family *strictly as a resource.* Professionals in this category stay in charge of the decisions which are to be made but invite the support of the families whenever it is needed. This approach creates its own set of problems. Because it is expected that the family should offer support without being involved in the decision making, the family members may end up feeling manipulated and exploited. Moreover, since the family members are faced with certain requests without an adequate prior evaluation of their family situation and/or without receiving, if need be, certain forms of support, such family members are running the risk of becoming over-burdened or may blame themselves for illegitimate reasons.

In a third case, the family is regarded as *part of the team.* The family is invited to take part in the decision making processes and thus becomes a partner in the process of caring for the elderly member. The success of this approach, according to Moroney, depends on the specific way in which this partnership is being operated and on the measure in which the family contribution is a systematic or an incidental one (like in the second case).

A fourth model, and the only one which Moroney finds to be feasible, is the one according to which the professional understands that *the object of the intervention is not just the elderly person but the whole family system.*

In addition to the balanced critical evaluation of the various understandings of the various professional paradigms described above, Moroney's study has the merit of emphasising that *the family cannot be regarded as irrelevant* in the helping equation, while the specific way in which the professional views the role of the family is crucial for the quality of life of the elderly. More precisely, *gerontological social workers must not view the family of the elderly person simply as a resource, without regarding it at the same time as a specific target for their intervention*.

7.3. Evaluation and intervention: specific issues in working with aging clients and their families

7.3.1. Defining the problem

The way in which family members formulate the presentation problem regarding the elderly person is often similar to the situation in which parents come to ask for the social worker's support in relation to a child or a teenager. In both cases the presentation problem may not necessarily be the most important one for the social work process (Janzen & Harris, 1997, p. 126-127). This should not mean that the social worker can afford to ignore the problem which is presented by the family. To be sure, whatever the family describes as being the problem it is something which is important for them and, consequently, the social worker must make sure that that problem is dealt with in a way which is acceptable to the family. However, the point is that when the presentation problem has to do with an elderly person, the social worker must consider the possibility that other aspects of the problem may exist and these may be more important for the family functioning than the presentation problem. Thus, for instance, the problems which are associated with the elderly person may be rooted in the fears, anxieties, or self-guilt of other family members, related to the level at which they may feel unable to deal with the elderly's role change.

7.3.2. Evaluating the relation of the elderly with their children and descendants

One important aspect which the social worker needs to bear in mind when working with an elderly person and his or her family is the quality of the relationship between the elderly and their adult children (or other adult descendants in the family) (Janzen & Harris, 1997, p. 127-130). For this purpose, the social worker will seek to acquire a minimum of information regarding the elderly and their children during various stages of their family life. The probability is that if the son or daughter enjoyed a constructive relationship with the parents during childhood and youth, the relationship is sufficiently strong in the present to allow for a satisfactory solution to the existing problems. Otherwise, if the relationship has been conflictual or inadequate in the past, the current problems may be considerably harder to solve.

If the history of the relationship between the elderly and their children has been characterised by conflict and unsolved issues, the social worker will seek to make sure that the current meetings with family members will not degenerate into situations where some family members will try to take revenge against others or in which family members will simply end up blaming themselves. The goal will be, instead, to reach a degree a mutual openness to allow for adequate planning and decision making. More specifically, in the case of unsolved conflicts, special efforts should be made in order to avoid moving the elderly parents with their children, at least until a certain progress in the development of the relationship can be noted.

7.3.3. The family and its "ecological" system

The aging process inevitably leads to the increased isolation of the elderly in relation to their ecological system, depriving them gradually of its valuable resources. The death of more and more close relations, the gradual decrease in mobility, the increasing number of health issues all tend to feed feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and uselessness. Although in many cases the social structures comprise sufficient resources for improving the life quality of the elderly, the level of beaurocracy which is inevitably present in such structures can easily lead to the impossibility of the elderly to access those resources. The "border" between the elderly and their ecological environment is dysfunctional. It is precisely here, however, that the family of the elderly can play an essential role by facilitating the communication and transfer of resources between the elderly and their ecological system (Sussman, 1977, p. 2-20).

The ecomap can be, in such cases, a particularly useful instrument in the social worker's intervention. Through the use of the ecomap the social worker will be more easily able to identify, with the help of the family (including the elderly, as much as possible) not only the functional transactions between the elderly and their environment but also the latent but unexploited resources, on which the subsequent intervention should focus. During the intervention, the social worker will make sure that the roles which the various family members have agreed to play will be clearly specified in a contract or intervention plan.

7.3.4. The intergenerational family system

Reviewing the family history can also be a helpful technique in the gerontological social work (Hartman & Laird, 1983, p. 360-363). The genogram is the instrument through which this family history can become visible. Most times, the elderly will be able to find themselves close to the centre of this family map, with two or three generations above and two or three other generations below. Their role in the continuity of the family is thus graphically expressed.

The process of drawing the genogram, with the active contribution of the elderly, will give them the chance to rehearse major events and themes in their intergenerational family history. With the help of the social worker, the elderly person may come to see certain individuals, events or conflicts in a new light, or may even be able "to close some chapters" which had un-necessarily stayed open for a long time. Moreover, the information which the social worker has been able to acquire regarding the parents or the grandparents of the elderly, regarding the way they had lived or died, may throw new light on the expectations or fears which are influencing the lives of the elderly in the present.

Another important value of the genogram in such a context is that it may provide the means through which aging clients may be able to hand over a valuable piece of family "inheritance" (in the form of graphic history) to subsequent generations. Much of this wealth of information may be otherwise doomed to be lost. Last but not least, members of the younger generation who have been involved in the drawing of the genogram alongside the aging family member have discovered most times that such an experience had enriched them in a very unique way.

8. Delinquency and its relation to family environment and spiritual support

Another area of social work in which I have applied the systemic model is that of delinquency, especially in its relation to the family environment and the role of spirituality.

8.1. The ecological approach to family social work, as a means of preventing delinquency among vulnerable groups

The importance of the connection between people's delinquent behaviour and their family environment can hardly be overstated (McCord, 1991; Wright & Wright, 1994). In view of this fact, one of the most important strategies for preventing delinquency is, inevitably, that of seeking to ensure that the family environment is not conducive to such behaviour.

The question, however, is how such prevention should be done, particularly in the case of socially vulnerable groups, since individuals and families alike depend on a wide variety of resources for their quality of life and for their socially-adequate conduct. Responding to such realities, we have explored the practical value of the family ecomap, as a means of diagnosing possible dysfunctions in the relationship between a family and its ecologic environment. Such a tool, we have argued, can be not only a tool for evaluation but can at the same time offer an important starting point for an intervention which may decrease the risk of delinquency among family members (Neagoe, 2011a). Given the wide applicability of the ecological approach and of the family ecomap, it isfor the social worker to decide when and how exactly such resources should be used and in what way they may be combined, with other prevention methods, as necessary.

8.2. Rehabilitation Programs for Penitentiary Inmates

Since 2008, The Regional Centre for Social and Human Development Areopagus in Timişoara has been offering a series of educational services for health and practical exercises of self-discovery and personal development, to groups of inmates of the Penitentiary of Timişoara. The project was developed and implemented with the contribution of several students of the Areopagus Institute of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice. Building on practical experience offered by this project, we have tried to highlight some theoretical foundations, the specific mission, vision and values which have underlined the development and implementation of this program, but also to present some of the activities and exercises that were successfully used. The obtained results as well as those that were not obtained, reveal the many ecological issues that any interdisciplinary action should take into account in order to ensure its effectiveness: biological, social, psychological, cultural, economic, institutional and contextual variables – all of which co-determine the nature of the

relationship between the professionals and the target group, as well as the real effect of the planned interventions (Tiurean & Neagoe, 2011).

Based on existing literature in the field, as well as on the findings of the Areopagus project, we have tried to present some of the most frequent challenges the inmates are facing, as well as some key resources which help overcome such challenges (Tiurean & Neagoe, 2011).

Starting on the bibliographical level, we may refer to the work of P. Gendreau (1996), who that the main obstacles to future progress in this field are: (1) theoreticism – a tendency to focus on abstract knowledge based research and too little focus on concrete action, working methods and practical effective techniques, (2) failure to effect technology transfer – which means that although inmates were trained to develop certain skills they still did not transfer them to contexts, outside programs; it also means that professionals who worked in implementation of such programs have been short of skill training, supervision and collaboration with other institutions for sharing "good practices" and learning about overcoming practical difficulties; (3) dearth of suitable training programs – too many prisons accept rehabilitation programs that are not professional in nature, as it is cheaper or free to work with projects that were designed by volunteers, who are often students or trainees looking for opportunities of practical work or by religious believers who hope to convince the inmates to function exclusively by moral laws and religious commands, so that they never break the law again.

8.2.1. The side effects of imprisonment

The existence of and the need for rehabilitation programs for inmates is based on research that demonstrates the negative impact of imprisoning on the persons who are given such penal punishment. Hagan & Dinovitzer (1999) have pointed out that public safety and crime reduction support the necessity of such measures against criminal offenders, yet collateral consequences of imprisonment include dwindling of employment rates and incomes of those who have a criminal record, the negative impact of parent imprisoning on children's development, shattering of marital relationships and so on.

According to an important assessment of inmates' needs of rehabilitation in multiple correctional facilities in the U.S.A. (Kazura, 2000), male and female inmates have different concerns, yet both incarcerated women and men assign a great value to their parental identity

and family commitments. Most of the assessed inmates have requested information about child rearing, increases of visitation opportunities and help with issues of trust and communication within their families. Participants in our pilot program have also expressed concerns, worries and disappointment with respect to the quality of their family relationships – seeing them as deteriorating due to distance and absence of regular frequent contact, or due to reciprocal blame and lack of understanding. Although they are allowed to receive visits, their choice is restricted, not only by the strict regulations of the penitentiary regarding such visits, but also by the fact that families of the inmates often get on with their lives, trying to survive without the help and commitment of the imprisoned member and often seeing him/her as a burden. When visits do occur, time pressure and institutional restraints are perceived as not suitable for deeper discussions or longer, more meaningful interactions.

Hairston (1988) argues that maintaining family ties during imprisonment represents a means of reducing recidivism and that the absence of such ties increases the likelihood of recidivism. Hence, they state the importance of changes being made in communication policies of correctional facilities and the imperative need for evaluating and perfecting programs designed to strengthen family ties. Our pilot program had taken into consideration the possibility to perform family therapy during visiting hours, for the preservation of marital units and parent-child bonds, as research indicates that the individual well-being of prisoners, children, and other family members leads to higher prisoner's post-release success (Hairston, 1988). Although such an approach would have probably been more productive than group psychotherapy with inmates in the absence of their families, such an approach would have definitely narrowed down the number of beneficiaries we would have been able to work with during the two year period of the project. Hence, we decided to design a group intervention and improve it, to reach family-related goals in a more time-cost-effective way.

A strategic approach will focus both on the assessment of individual, group members interests but also on the assessment of other interests, such as those of the institution's staff and leadership representatives, in order to determine how they will affect the program outcomes, who are the so-called stakeholders in such a program and how are they as well as the institutional setting that is able to function as resource or as a collection of more or less controlled tertiary factors influencing the process. A schema of problem analysis will lead the project coordinator to decide where and how it is strategic to intervene or how to minimize the negative impact of contextual variables on the implementation of the project. Prior to the implementation of our therapy project, we had been given access to the correctional facility for several months in a row, on a weekly basis, a period in which we were introduced to

prison requirements, conditions and obligations and our area of involvement was clearly delineated. During these visits, we had an active role – we offered several groups of inmates didactic presentations on the multiple definitions and correlates of holistic health, using this opportunity and topic as an interactive problem focused and solution focused dialogue that revealed important diagnostic information about the inmates and how they are adapting to institutionalized life and to each other, helping us and them in formulating some initial goals of our future interventions.

8.2.2. Family life education programs and group therapy: key challenges

Apart from the daily stressors of life's transition periods that every person deals with along her development as member of a family and as member of a community, inmates also have to cope with the specific issue of being deprived not just of their freedom but also of their families and friends. For some of them this represents a rather extreme punishment that arouses anxiety around their emotional concerns with abandonment or attachment issues. As a result, they can bond with other inmates for compensation or adopt symptomatic behaviours by which they screen out emotions of fear or bereavement, or they can become isolated and avoid contact with other inmates.

Discovering their needs with respect to family relations and issues was not an easy process, as the group members tended to be reluctant to speaking openly and preferred attitudes of passivity and withdrawal. Facing this major challenge of waiting for them to respond positively to our invitation to join the therapeutic process, we went back to the reference literature, only to find out that we were not the only ones who dealt with this issue. Woodall *et al*. (2009) acknowledge the tension between "punishment" and "rehabilitation" and describe prisons as being places of correction and punishment, in which attendants are literally a "captive audience". Morris (1874) argues about the ineffective and unjust nature of "coerced treatment", as it pressures the offenders into programs of change, by rewarding them with the reduction of time spent in prison. He recommends that in order to build on the self-motivation of the inmates, rehabilitation programs have to be non-coercive (i.e. having nothing to do with the length of the sentence and with the probation eligibility) and to be made available mainly to inmates who seek them. This represents for us, the practitioners, a challenge in terms of working towards institutional policy change.

In addition, we looked for supervision from psychotherapy experts to help us become more aware of what we were doing, as practitioners, that maintained or changed this pattern of passivity, and we realized the unsolved debate about what we were doing in prison: Was it therapy? Was it teaching? The lack of clarification in this respect, made us switch unconsciously from a role to another, which probably resulted in the confusion of the participants regarding the role they were expected to have. The role of correctional education according to Duguid (1998) depends on the theoretical view of criminal behaviour, hence a clear decision needs to be made about the nature of the intervention and the specific roles of all participants and practitioners on site:

(1) The medical model perceived the criminal behaviour as an illness that required a cure (Duguid, 1998); when inmates implicitly adopt this model in defining the group sessions with psychotherapy practitioners, the inmates are likely to expect therapists to attempt changing them and manipulating them into adopting patterns of behaviour that are socially acceptable but are experienced as useless. Therefore, defenses may arise against the therapist. When the practitioner adopts this model, the practitioner will only confirm the inmate's pressuposition, and the relationship will be stuck in a form of power-play or complementarity in rigid division of responsibility.

(2) The opportunities model offered prisoners choice about their education (Duguid, 1998); many types of educational programs, professional qualifications and completion of studies make use of a teacher to student relationship. Inmates may therefore attend psychotherapy groups expecting to be taught something, like in a usual class. They tend to be passive, concerned about "the correct answer" to the psychologist's questions and their declared objectives revolve around "learning something new about anything" – very unspecific and very inviting to the therapist to take charge of a school-like educational act.

(3) The cognitive model relies on the development of inmates' cognitive behavioural skills (Duguid, 1998); research has shown that this is one of the most important and effective approaches as it helps inmates in developing realistic thoughts or beliefs, but mainly because such approaches are more likely to lead to structured treatment protocols and research purposes (Gendreau, 1996), that will insure the increasing effectiveness of such program, enabling technology and knowledge transfer.

(4) The constructivist model focuses on the experience of contact and direct relation and experimentation, in which the feedback teaches the person about the environment and about himself and becomes able to reflect creatively on the opportunities of his environment, reviewing his past and present emotional investments (Nascimento & Coimbra, 2005).

According to this approach inmates are supposed to be offered the chance to play an active role in constructing meanings, they are offered new experiences in which they increase their abilities to do something to their environment as well as they increase their freedom of choice in reconstructing their existential projects that integrate their various social roles.

Ultimately, if rehabilitation defines a process that allows an inmate to return to society and become productive, while being law abiding and self-sufficient (Rapparport, 1982), educational programs, therapeutic programs, social help programs, qualification programs, institutional policy change attempts and so on, are all useful towards the same overall objective. One project alone is not likely to have the desired global effect, yet several projects addressing several issues and continuously developing and improving strategies and protocols of intervention will help the global objective of reducing recidivism and increasing the likelihood of inmates rehabilitation.

In order to choose the specific purpose of our intervention, we looked at the benefits of family educational programs implemented before, we scanned the reference literature for knowledge about good practices in group psychotherapy within correctional facilities and we looked at our own professional background and career motivation and we chose to conduct group psychotherapy under supervision, based on systemic practice and an interdisciplinary approach to the scientific study of human behaviour.

Reading through the reference literature we noticed that some educational and some therapy programs have been mostly focused on individual change in group settings, while others have focused on changes of interpersonal relationships. For instance, Bayse *et al.* (1991) conducted a study examining how their family life education program contributed to the significant lowering of inmates narcissism and the change of their perception of present and ideal family towards a healthier family functioning. According to Rappaport (1981) the group members and criminals in general tend to regard themselves as outcasts, abandoned and prejudged by the normative society, therefore, group processes may aim at helping offenders develop a self-esteem that will enable them to successfully participate in a functional, accepted role of the normative society. Klein & Bahr (1996) presented some of the outcomes of a cognitive skills development program, in which inmates were instructed on identifying problems, recognizing resources for solving problems, and thinking of alternative ways to respond as they apply principles of practical reasoning to everyday problems and to families experiences.

Reference literature reveals that the most common goals of therapy in prison are related to the general mental health of inmates (emotional distress, adjustment difficulties,

adaptive coping skills, symptom reduction), to the psychological and medical cure of addictions and to the modification of attitudes and behaviours, so that "internal and external conflicts are resolved in constructive rather than antisocial ways" (Mathias & Sindberg, 1985, p. 265). Other more specific aims are to teach inmates how to offer and receive advice and suggestions to and from each-other, how to give and receive feedback, to facilitate insight and personal growth; teaching them stress management skills, impulse and anger control, conflict resolution skills and strategies to avoid the reoffense cycle and systematically contracting for personal achievement goals will equip inmates with key competencies for social integration that will be useful for them both in the correctional facility and outside it.

Unfortunately, not much is written about more practical issues such as which group goals are more important to address first in correctional settings, what topics are more important and productive for discussion, what types of techniques have been proved to work better in reaching these goals, or which areas of such interventions have noted progress.

8.2.3. Group psychotherapy guidelines in correctional institutions

According to Irwin Yalom (1995), the major advantage of group psychotherapy over individual psychotherapy is that a group may facilitate therapeutic factors such as group cohesion, altruism and socializing skills. These are key resources that can be fruitfully used for the development of functional peer-relationships (Yong, 1971). Short term results of these relationships are that within the correctional institution, inmates become able to support each-other in coping with problems that are specific to the penitentiary environment (Mathias & Sindberg, 1986). Longer term results are that such interpersonal skills prepare inmates for relating effectively with others in society, by learning about relations and shared world-views, developing understanding and appreciation for diversity and multiculturality, learning to negotiate benefits and meanings, learning to make effective use of "storming" and "norming" processes (Tuckman, 1984) and so on.

Before starting to facilitate a psychotherapy group, practitioners are advised to conduct preliminary interviews with potential group members (Morgan *et al*., 1999), individually, rather than in a group setting. Some arguments that support this statement stem from various related issues: (a) a preliminary interview helps assess and choose participants with similar developmental stages and exclude inmates such as those with psychopathy, who would be detrimental to other group members or to the therapeutic process (Meloy, 1988); (b)

preliminary interviews are according to Yalom (1995) particularly useful when working with resistant, defensive and manipulative clients, which is typical of inmates – in order to assess their willingness to participate and to help them establish some personal goals prior to the group process, identifying some maladaptive patterns of behaviour they may be making use of in their adaptation process.

The practitioners will then have to develop more realistic thoughts and beliefs about inmates' experiences of the correctional institution setting and recognize the similarity of inmate's problems, in order to gain a more "universal" view of what they are usually facing in their every-day life within the prison and in relation with their distant families, their room-mates and guards. This objective can be achieved if the participants agree to self-disclosure and active involvement in a series of exploratory activities proposed by the practitioners – a process that involves multiple challenges as those presented in the previous chapter. Practitioners also need constant supervision in order to overcome counter-transference issues and become more aware of their share of responsibility in maintaining the status-quo of a group process and setting.

In spite all preparation of each session, a great amount of flexibility and spontaneity is required from the practitioners, who need to become attuned to their clients in order to establish therapeutic alliance. Part of this process involves explicit and implicit clarifications about our non-coercive role in their lives, our openness and non-judgemental attitude towards them, our availability and ability to support them in their not yet so clear personal objectives and so on. As Morgan *et al*. (1999) points out, it is important to make confidentiality contracts at this time, but confidentiality will not be guaranteed; this is a statement of acceptance of their self-defensive attitudes with respect to issues that are sensitive for them personally and they are encouraged to take responsibility for how much they will reveal about themselves in this group. Limits of confidentiality, that have to be discussed with them at the beginning of the program, will refer to the practitioners' legal obligations in the case of hearing about escape plans, intentions to commit crime in prison, the introduction of illegal items in prison, suicidal or homicidal ideation or intention, court subpoenas and reports of any type of on-going abuse.

The notion of contract is critical to psychotherapeutic work, as they represent agreements between two or more people about their mutual behaviour. All human activities are somehow governed by either overt or hidden contracts, so therapists cannot avoid making them. Explicitation of such contracts enables negotiation of roles and responsibilities. Rules and conditions are not contracts, as they are not negotiable. Contracts can regard

administrative issues, limits and extents of roles, authority levels of decision making and interpersonal boundaries. Sills (2006) has put together a very useful resource publication about the characteristics of useful and effective contracts in a variety of settings, including clarifications and guidelines for third party agreements, as the work with inmates involves at least a triangular contract between practitioners, the correctional institution and the participations involved.

The therapeutic role of contract making is that it represents a concrete action of drawing structure and boundaries, which is a proof for inmates about the protective importance of norms, while the flexibility and constant clarification and negotiation of such boundaries not only prevent rigidity and confusion or diffusion of responsibility, but also provides inmates a sample of benefits that can result from active participation in the creation of norms and regulations, having hopefully a glimpse of a world where laws do not favor or discriminate people, instead people experience the power to use laws to their favor and simultaneously to the favor of the other people they can negotiate with.

And finally, ethical issues have to be taken into account when working with inmates, not just because of the legal regulations regarding this issue, but also because dual relationships, unexpected leaks in confidentiality contracts and the attitude with which practitioners meet inmates are powerful factors that can either undermine effective work with inmates and correctional institutions, ultimately affecting the very image and career of the practitioner and the future emotional availability of inmates to participate in similar programs.

8.2.4. Concluding thoughts

It is said that failing to plan is like planning to fail. In the case of projects of therapeutic interventions, planning might encounter difficulties, due to the nature of the therapeutic process, that requires a great deal of spontaneity in action, although relying on a rigorous "grammar", continuously developed and improved thorough scientific research and empirical findings, that are critically reviewable and transferable, testable and relevant for the creation of standardized protocols that aid further development.

Our project has undergone various changes since its first implementation (Tiurean & Neagoe, 2011). At the beginning it looked more like a formal specification of responsibilities we were willing to assume in the therapeutic work with the inmates. We relied much on supervision for therapy, but too little on the reference resources, as we had a hard time

finding them. We also relied on our creativity to create group games and activities that were aiming at strengthening group cohesiveness and stimulating participants' insights about their personal contribution to the interpersonal group experience, but we had no coherent strategy to determine the order of such activities, nor did we have effective indicators of performance, as we hadn't been able to identify clear standards and examples in the reference literature to import into our project. I think it is fair to say that we "played by ear" and expected to improve our performance by an optimum valorification of feedback both from participants and from therapy supervisors. The further study of reference literature in the field, has helped us understand the importance of these details that characterize effective project making and implementation as well as the importance of encouraging teachers, social workers, religious representatives, psychologists, qualified trainers for various professions and policy makers to become involved in creating sectorial projects aiming ultimately the psycho-social rehabilitation of inmates, while supporting them in dealing with the side effects of imprisoning until rehabilitation will become an alternative to it, as Morris argues in "Future of Imprisonment" (1974).

A general objective such as the rehabilitation of inmates from correctional facilities is achievable through effective implementation of several projects that choose a specific purpose as focus of the intervention – therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is desirable for a strategic purpose: various types of professionals can work with the various stakeholders involved in the management of criminal offenders, in order to make rehabilitation possible, and easier to achieve on its various levels. Sustainable benefits of each particular program are expressed in terms of results that are assumed (based on strong theoretical foundations) to lead to further benefits for the target group (e.g. by transferring acquired skills to other life contexts, or by chain reactions from newly acquired skills leading to the natural development of other related ones) and ultimately contribute to the achievement of what we generally call rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism. A single project may end after a few months, but if it is sustainable, its results will be visible at follow-ups, as "the product" of the project is visibly used by the target group after the completion of the program.

And finally it should be noted that all projects rely on presuppositions and hypotheses drawn from the reference literature as well as from the values and the mission according to which practitioners work. Considering that objective interventions are hard to separate from subjective (often hidden) agendas of practitioners, especially if they unprofessional but generous volunteers from the community, we acknowledged and stressed the importance of further objective research, of professional skills development and of continuous supervision

of everyone who decides to confront the challenges of group work with inmates of correctional facilities.

8.3. Religious communities as a resource in delinquency-related social work: case studies from Baptist communities in Timişoara

For several years, Baptist communities from the city of Timisoara have been playing a significant role in the socio-spiritual support of young offenders. This support has taken a wide variety of forms. Church members have been involved in systematic visits to the Timişoara and Arad prisons, where educational, emotional, spiritual, and material support has been offered to a large number of inmates. Similar support (albeit with several distinctives) has been offered by church communities and Christian NGO's to young offenders from the Buzias Re-Education Centre. Also, NGO's connected to the Baptist community have been involved in offering computer training and specialised therapy to former offenders as a means of psychological support and social re-integration. I have tried not only to identify and describe a number of such contributions (in an illustrative, rather than exhaustive way), but also to place and analyse them in a wider national and international context (Neagoe, 2013c).

8.3.1. Religion and delinquency: research findings

The relevance of religion and spirituality to social care seems to be particularly visible in the area of delinquency-related social work. Numerous studies have indicated that there is a significant connection between religion and delinquency. Thus, in a research paper dealing with the role of religiosity and spirituality in juvenile delinquency, Robyn Mapp (2009, p.12) concludes:

> Using probit models for the dichotomous dependent variables, I found an inverse relationship between various measures of religion and spirituality and measures of delinquency and illegal substance use. Results show that attendance of religious services is negatively and significantly associated with arrest, "light and "heavy" crime, and marijuana use. In addition, religious affiliation, importance of religion, and importance of spirituality were all negatively and significantly affiliated with marijuana use.

Similarly, Johnson *et al*. (2000) undertake a review of existing literature on the relationship between religiosity and delinquency and discover that, despite a seeming lack of consensus, it

is possible to state that studies, especially the most rigorous ones, indicate that religious measures are generally inversely related to deviance.

Again, Lisa J. Bridges & Kristin Anderson Moore (2002, p. 5) state: "Overall, research on religiosity and well-being in childhood and adolescence indicates small to moderate but generally consistent associations between religious upbringing and risk-taking and with positive social and emotional functioning."

A similar connection seems to exist between religion and the social rehabilitation of offenders. Thus, Thomas P. O'Connor (2003) offers an analysis of relevant research, indicating a significant connection between faith-based programs, religion, and offender rehabilitation. Likewise, Stanley Tang concludes:

> Religion is recognized as a strong intrinsic motivator of change. Hence, the Singapore Prison Service relies heavily on volunteers from our communities to provide religious counselling programmes to help in offender management and augment our rehabilitation programmes. As a multi-racial and multi-faith country, religious services and programmes are catered to the six main denominations, namely, Buddhism, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism (2012, p.42).

8.3.2. Baptists, social involvement and criminal justice

Baptist communities have a long history of active involvement in social welfare and social justice. Best known, perhaps, is their contribution to the struggle for the freedom of conscience:

> Baptists, beginning in the early seventeenth century, were the first religious group to adopt church-state separation as a fundamental article of faith. The American tradition of religious liberty, ensconced in the Constitution of 1787 and more fully developed in the Constitution's First Amendment, owes much to Baptist belief and practice (Davis, 2006, p.41).

> The vigorous promotion of religious liberty has been a central tenet of Baptist faith and practice for centuries. Baptists have been on the frontlines of combating religious oppression everywhere it occurs (Davis, 2006, p.42).

The range of social projects which were developed by Baptist communities broadened with time, as indicated by Patricia Lawson Bailey, with reference to the social work programs running under the umbrella of the Southern Baptist Convention (USA), towards the end of the twentieth century:

The Southern Baptist family serves through many different programs within the local churches, associations, state conventions, and national agencies… The church social worker is usually requested when ministry is needed in a nontraditional setting such as jails, inner cities, shelters, and residential care facilities which require staff with special skills and expertise in social work and theological studies. The church social worker has such expertise and is especially trained to serve with marginal groups: the poor, single-parent families, minorities, senior adults, and abused persons (1988, p. 285).

One specific area of social care where members of the Baptist faith have had a particularly significant contribution is that which is often referred to as "prison ministry". Thus, the well-known organisation Prison Fellowship was founded by Charles W. Colson, a member of the Baptist community, in 1976. During his own imprisonment, Colson had experienced the difference which one's faith can make in people's lives. Consequently, the primary goal of Prison Fellowship became that of encouraging believers of various Christian denominations to offer systematic support to current or former prisoners and their families. In 1979, three years after the foundation of Prison Fellowship in the United States, representatives from similar organisations in other countries came together to form Prison Fellowship International, an association of national Prison Fellowship organisations which was intended to help further develop and support national Prison Fellowship organisations. To date, 166 Baptist organisations from over 115 countries have registered as members of Prison Fellowship International (*International Network of Prison Ministries*) making it "the world's largest and most extensive association of national Christian ministries working within the criminal justice field" (*Prison Fellowship International*).

8.3.3. Brief overview of the Romanian situation

Spiritual care for prisoners in Romania has a long, albeit variable, history. Thus, prior to 1949, prison regulations made explicit reference to the right of prisoners to spiritual support (Bors *et al.,* 2005, p. 266). This situation changed under communist rule, throughout most of the latter half of the twentieth century, a period during which such a service was completely forbidden. However, the political changes in Romania at the end of 1989 once again opened the door for representatives of religious denominations and of civil society to become actively involved in social and spiritual support for prisoners and their families. One significant element of this new opening was the establishment in 1993 of Prison Fellowship Romania, by Constantin Asavoaie, following a meeting with Charles W. Colson. The

declared purpose of the organisation was that of "mobilising and assisting the Christian community in its ministry to prisoners, ex-prisoners and their families, and also of promoting and sustaining the improvement of the correctional system in Romania" (*Prison Fellowship Romania*).

One specific community where the efforts of Prison Fellowship Romania have borne fruit is that of the Baptist believers in the city of Timisoara, although, as we shall see, their involvement in this type of work has been by no means limited to Prison Fellowship initiatives. The case studies below will hopefully illustrate the types of contributions which Baptist believers in Timisoara have made in this area. It must be stated, however, that they are mere *illustrations* of such contributions and are by no means intended to offer a comprehensive or systematic description of the subject. Also, it needs to be specified that the information offered through these case studies is based on a semi-structured interview of Baptist individuals who have been directly involved in this work.

8.3.4. Case studies

Case 1. The Timisoara Penitentiary

G.M., a female member of Bethel Baptist Church in Timişoara, has been involved in direct work with male prisoners from the Timişoara Penitentiary since 1992. Just over two years after the dramatic political changes in Romania, she started working in this context together with a number of other ladies from different churches and denominations. For the first four years the work focused on female prisoners, but later the focus of her work shifted towards young male prisoners. Her work is a combination of educational, emotional, material and spiritual support. This support is made possible through the direct involvement of a large number of members from various churches who work under her coordination – a particularly significant role being played by young people from her church. Moreover, Betel Church offers regular financial support to enable her to purchase and distribute food, clothing, and medication (that which may be legally introduced in the penitentiary). The role of G.M. in the support of the prisoners does not end when they finish their sentence. She is one of their primary social contacts and sources of support after they come out of the prison and seek social reintegration. As a matter of fact, several former prisoners are now her closest partners in her ongoing work in the penitentiary. When asked about her motivation in doing this

voluntary work, G.M. stresses her desire "to help these people return to society as changed individuals".

Case 2. From Timisoara to Arad

D.B. is also a female member of Bethel Baptist Church. She started working initially in the Timisoara Penitentiary in 1994, joining a group six other ladies (including G.M. above), in connection with Prison Fellowship Romania. They worked exclusively with female inmates. A few years ago, all the female prisoners were moved to another prison in the city of Arad, and together with part of the team, she chose to relocate her work to that penitentiary in Arad, even if it involved travelling approximately 40 miles one way. As in the first case study, the work involves a combination of educational, emotional, spiritual and material support (although D.B. admits that the material contributions they can offer are very minor, given the large number of inmates they see and the limited resources they have).On average, the 4 to 5 ladies who travel to the Arad prison have the chance to interact during each visit with a total of over 100 inmates. As in the first case study, D.B. receives some financial support from Betel Baptist Church. As an illustration of positive impact, D.B. mentions one young lady to whom she had been offering social and spiritual support during her years in prison and who, after her release, has been enjoying a stable job, a fully reintegrated social life, and has joined the team of volunteers who are presently working in the Arad prison. D.B.'s motivation for her work is clear and straightforward: "my love for God and for people in need".

Case 3. The Re-education Centre in Buzias

D.R. is a male member of Bethel Baptist Church. In 1990, together with his wife, R.R., he was invited to develop a project of religious and musical education in several institutions for child care. One of the children's choirs he created was then invited to sing carols in the Timisoara Penitentiary. This led to an invitation for him to develop yet another educational project in the Reeducation Centre in Buzias, which was founded in 2004 and which hosts typically around 65-70 children between the ages of 14 and 18. In additional to musical training, the project includes substantial elements of religious, moral and civil education. During the time of this educational program the children can choose instead to play various sports. Nevertheless, an average of 40-45 of them attend the class. The main support for this project comes from a faith-based NGO headed by a Baptist pastor in Timisoara, but also from

Betel Church and (to a slightly lesser extent) from numerous other churches in and around Timisoara. Reflecting on his motivation, D.R. refers to "my strong desire and passion to be a source of support, help, and comfort to those who have not had any of these."

Case 4. CRISDU Areopagus

The Areopagus Regional Centre for Social Integration and Human Development (CRISDU Areopagus) is an NGO which was founded in 1997 by a group of young Baptist theologians (although the centre has no denominational affiliation). Two of its social projects are relevant to the present study. One of them, which we have already presented in the first section of this chapter, consists of a partnership between the Areopagus Institute of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (which functions under the umbrella of CRISDU Areopagus) and the Timisoara Penitentiary. As a part of this partnership, a number of qualified professionals who were also registered as students of the Institute have offered, for several years, qualified therapy to penitentiary inmates. The second project consists of free computer training, offered to socially disadvantaged categories of population. Among these categories is that of former penitentiary inmates. Their participation in the computer training program was aimed to function as a means of facilitating their social integration and rehabilitation. Moreover, their computer training has been offered in connection with a program of individual and group therapy program, also aimed at helping them deal with personal and social issues following their detention experience.

Needless to say, our limited research illustrated by these case studies has not afforded and conclusions about the type or measure of impact which such initiatives may have had. Nevertheless, the study seems to allow, first of all, for the conclusion that a certain segment of the Romanian civil society, i.e. Baptist communities in Timisoara, has started to identify its role and responsibility as a positive player in the great dramas of society. Secondly, we have noticed that the efforts in Timisoara are a natural extension of similar efforts of other faith communities in the world, including Baptist communities. Finally, we may venture to indicate, on the basis of our limited observations, the need for further research regarding the ways in which religious groups (or other segments of civil society) may increase their positive impact in the area of criminal justice – especially in those parts of the world where their contributions have not been possible or welcomed in the past.

9. Family and migration: a socio-spiritual analysis

Beginning with the Romanian Revolution of December 1989, which led to the overthrow of the communist regime in the country, Romania has been undergoing a complex process of "transition". We were very clear what the departure point of this transition was (since the virtually unanimous desire of the Romanian population was to break away from the communist mentalities and social structures) but it has been taking us significantly longer than expected to discover where this transition was supposed to take us. Eventually, as the opportunities to join important European and Euro-Atlantic structures became a reality, we began to understand that perhaps our transition was not necessarily going to have an arrival point at all but, at most, a direction, or more accurately, a plurality of directions. Moreover, we gradually understood that these new directions were not going to be established by ourselves as much as they were being decided by the structures we had joined.

Needless to say, not all these new directions were anticipated (and certainly not embraced) by all Romanians. We soon discovered that together with the many exciting opportunities which were knocking on our door, many new challenges were letting themselves in. Among these many challenges, some of the most important ones were those which had to do with family life. Thus, the traditional model of family stopped presenting itself as the model, as the European Union gradually started to invite us to consider other alternative models. As a country whose population would, by a very large majority, identify itself as Christian (at least nominally), Romania began to be faced with significant dilemmas concerning the relationship between Christian values and other sets of values (pertaining to democracy, human rights, etc.). Should abortion laws, for instance, take into account the pro-life stance, shared by virtually all Christian groups, or should they follow the more liberal pro-choice approach? Should all forms of physical disciplining of children be regarded automatically as physical abuse (as argued by most secular social sciences) or could Christian parents still find some legitimacy for "not sparing the rod" (Proverbs 13:24)?

Among the many different issues and dilemmas related to family life which Romania has been encountering in recent years, one issue seems to stand out as particularly significant – the issue of what people are prepared to "pay" for something which, in their view, would be "a better life". Its significance lies both in the positive opportunities it has offered and in its potentially damaging impact. It is on this issue that we have chosen to focus (Neagoe, 2011a).

9.1. The political context

The aspiration of Romanians for a better life was beginning to look more realistic than ever, and its renewed incentive, as well as its chances of becoming reality, seemed to be closely connected to Romania's political integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic structures. Thus, in March 2004 Romania succeeded in formally joining NATO, after which, a couple of years later (in January 2007) it accomplished yet another major political objective: joining the European Union.

As a result of these two political events, Romanians found themselves able to travel and even to work abroad. Travelling abroad meant that they were now able to actually see the standards of living of people in other European (and non-European) countries and (to their despair, sometimes) make comparisons to what they had at home. This soon wetted their appetite to find ways of catching up with their Western peers as quickly as possible. Moreover, the possibility to work abroad and be paid five to fifteen times more than what they might have been paid in Romania meant that their hope for a better life was now closer than ever to becoming reality. Soon and without much reflection, they were busy packing in order to go and look for work abroad. A mass exodus was underway – and it had one major goal: "a better life"!

Of course, not everybody left. Some did not find the right (or wrong!) contacts. Others were too old, or too young. Others, still, believed that they had a good enough job or chance in Romania. One thing, however, they had in common with those who left – they, too, were hoping for a better life and were determined to get it.

9.2. The impact on family life

9.2.1. Family life for Romanians who did not emigrate

For those who did not choose the road of emigration, the typical way of "bettering" their life has been that of increasing their working hours to supplement their income. Inevitably, increasing the working hours meant that those hours had to be cut off from somewhere else. There were not very many options available. The family time was the evident "time capital" which could be transferred towards work. The implications of this situation are easy to guess.

To be sure, the increase in working hours and decrease in family time has not impended only on the parents-children relationships. Couple relationships were also facing new challenges and the significance of this for family life can hardly be overestimated.

However, the pressures of earning more by extended work hours lead people not only to less family time but less time for rest and leisure. The combination between increasing work and insufficient rest lead inevitably to yet another set of problems for family life. It was not only that people were spending less and less time with their spouses or with their children, but whatever time they did manage to have together was becoming more and more loaded with irascibility, frustration and anger. Mental health issues among adults and even children started to multiply exponentially.

To this description, one should also add the complicating factor of the current economic crisis. Shortly before this crisis started to hit, Romanians were at the very top among the European nations in terms of how much financial credit, related to personal income, they had been taking from the banks – all of this, of course, was part of their enthusiasm and determination to better their lives overnight. With the economic crisis underway, and astronomic financial credits to cover, many Romanians started to find themselves stretched even further, and their optimistic dreams were beginning to turn into nightmares. Family life was once again receiving a powerful blow.

9.2.2. Emigration and family life

The situation for the families who emigrated for work has brought to surface even more distressing realities. For many people around the world, "Home alone" is just an entertaining film, whose protagonist is a child. For Romanians, "Home alone" became the sad reality experienced by many young children. If the collapse of communism in Romania called the world's attention to the shocking realities of the Romanian communist orphanages, the more recent years have brought about a new phenomenon – one which has not created much international noise, but which, one may venture to say, is comparable in its social effects to the communist orphanages. Many Romanians are referring to this phenomenon as "orphans with parents", i.e. children whose parents are (generally speaking) alive but who are being brought up, long term, without their care and affection.

According to a UNICEF survey in August 2007, approximately 350.000 Romanian children had, at that time, at least one parent working abroad on a long term basis. Out of these, around 126.000 were growing up without both of their parents. Of course, these figures

refer to how many children were living without their parents *at one single moment in time*. If one was to take into account the number of children who would have been affected by this condition *at some stage* of their childhood, the magnitude of the phenomenon would be more fully appreciated.

To be sure, the high majority of these parents were not consciously and deliberately abandoning their children. They would have tried their best to make some reasonable arrangements for their children before they left. In most cases, this meant that the children were going to be cared for by other members of the extended family or close relatives. It was also assumed (and often promised) that during the "temporary" period when the parent(s) would be away, those who were caring for the children would receive generous financial support from the child's parent(s). In reality, things often became complicated with the relationship between the children and their carers, with the carers' ability to adequately look after the children, or with the amount of financial support the carers were actually receiving from the parents. All this meant that in a lot of cases the children's situation was gradually beginning to worsen, so that in many cases the children had to be relocated (by the child protection authorities) with other relatives, with foster parents or even in residential institutions. Situations of child abuse and neglect, of work exploitation, and even of child suicides, unfortunately started to become more and more frequent. The dramatic side of this situation has been most vividly explained by some of these children themselves – many of them starting to write affectionate and desperate letters and poems to their "virtual" parents.

Perhaps the biggest irony is that if the parents were asked what the main reason was behind their decision to emigrate, a significant majority of them would quickly answer that they were doing it for their children's sake – to be able to pay for their education, to offer them better living conditions or better clothing, to give them a better start in life when they get married, etc.

9.2.3. "Post-exilic" challenges

It was not long until the situation for many Romanian migrants started to deteriorate in the countries where they had gone to find work. Increasingly restrictive policies towards immigrants, combined with the impact of the economic crisis on those countries, meant that it was becoming harder and harder for them to find work or social security there. The result was that they started returning to Romania in great numbers. Needless to say, the situation they were finding back home was often very different from what they had left behind or from what

they would have envisaged. After years of immersion in another culture, they were returning home with significantly modified views and values, often leading to relational clashes with other members of their families. The inevitable loss of friends and contacts during their stay abroad was now giving them an unexpected sense of alienation. Many of them had even lost family members (especially aging parents). But perhaps the most difficult loss for many of them was the emotional loss of important family members or previously close friends. The long awaited chance for some of them to properly reconnect with their children or spouses was now turning into the drama of seeing that their children were now virtually incapable of relating to them in a filial capacity or that their spouse had become involved in a new relationship.

9.3. Christian responses

It has been beyond the scope of my research to offer a precise evaluation of the distinctively Christian contributions (through churches, NGO's, individuals) in relation to the migration phenomenon and to what extent these contributions have added something significant to other efforts from governmental or non-religious organisation. Still, there is no question that such distinctively-Christian responses have existed.

First of all, many Christian leaders have tried to use available venues (such as churches, media, personal contacts) to underline the fact that "good life" could mean more than material progress. Other values, such as relationships, spirituality, charity could be much more important for personal happiness than most people would be inclined to admit.

Secondly, churches and Christian organisations have often teamed up with specialised social organisations in order to offer social programs aimed to support the children and families who have been affected by migration or by the desperate efforts to keep the family income afloat.

Thirdly, given the effects of the overall phenomenon described above on family relationships, as well as on personal and family wellbeing, many Christian individuals and communities have started to take an active interest in developing specialised counselling services, either under the umbrella of religious organisations (local churches, faith based NGO's) or as part of the public sector.

10. The role of Christian spirituality in the prevention of drug use among youth

The research in this area has come as the result of a joint project of The Regional Antidrug Prevention, Evaluation and Counselling Center (CRPECA) Timişoara and The Areopagus Centre, Timişoara. The cooperation was centred on a seminar which was entitled "The role of Christian spirituality in the prevention and overcoming of drug use among high school students". The seminar highlighted a series of challenges and solutions concerning the contribution which the church (through priests and pastors, religion teachers and others specialists) can offer in the area of managing drug use among youth. With the purpose of identifying the best lines of action, the participants in the seminar (professionals who, in different ways, are connected with the subject) were asked to answer and discuss a number of specific questions related to the subject matter. The findings of this seminar were then presented and published as proceedings of an international conference on "Contemporary issues facing families: psychological, social and spiritual perspectives in dialogue" (Tomiţă & Neagoe, 2013). The conference was held in Timişoara, on 14-16 September 2012.

10.1. Spirituality and drug use

"For several millennia, certain plants have been and still are being used during religious ceremonies, as part of magic practices or in order to generate pleasure, but also due to their medical virtues. The active principles of these plants are obtained today through extraction or chemical synthesis, their effects being much stronger than those of the plants they originated from. The widening and development of international transport and trade in the modern age has literally reduced distances between countries, so that plants and drugs which in the past only had a local use have come to be known and purchased in other regions of the world" (Roibu, Mircea, 1997, p. 3).

The property of some plants to relieve pains, to heal illnesses, to generate pleasant feelings, sometimes even strange ones, influencing the effects of the passing of time, the perception of colors and of sounds, was noticed by people as early as antiquity. Starting from these times, when people identified the effects (whether pleasant or unpleasant) of what we today generically call drugs, these substances have been used both in therapeutic activities and in mystical-religious practices.

Spirituality has been and still is closely connected with the practice of drug use. This link between the two may take two different forms: on the one hand, spirituality implying the use of substances by those persons seeking to transcend the current level of consciousness; on the other hand, spirituality being recognized as an element of high importance in the treatment and prevention of psychoactive substances.

In his book *Psychology of the Future*, psychiatrist Stanislav Grof (2000) defines spiritual emergency as a situation, a state or a moment with double significance in the life of an individual, representing at the same time a crisis but also an opportunity to pass to a higher level of spiritual consciousness and psychological functioning. Drug use represents such a spiritual emergency, a major crisis in the life of an individual, a crisis which, as mentioned before, may open up the possibility for imminent disaster or for rebirth. From the viewpoint of supporters of the use of spiritual counselling in the case of drug users, change occurs due to the fact that the spiritual dimension gains, or in some cases regains, its legitimate importance, as the drug users begin, through this counselling, to strengthen their faith and to respect the norms dictated by religious teachings.

According to Freudian psychology, drug use represents an oral fixation, a subconscious need to regress, to return to the safety, the peace and the sublime feeling which was experienced at the mother's breast. In this understanding, the most powerful force of a spiritual nature that represents the basis of drug use is the misguided need for transcendence. This is supported by much evidence which would seem to suggest that behind the irresistible urge to use drugs is the unrecognized impulse towards transcendence or wholeness. A great number of persons in recovery talk about the continuous search for a certain "something", an element, an unknown dimension in their lives, describing the lack of fulfilment and the frustration caused by seeking a substitute which can satisfy that need – substances, relations, possessions, wealth or power. The same individuals refer to the efforts, but also to the failures of this endeavour: regardless of how much they consume, regardless of how prosperous they are, this is not sufficient to satisfy their need for general good and for transcendence (Zamfirescu, 2007).

10.2. Empirical research through a focus group

Starting from observations such as those in the previous sections and acknowledging the gravity of the drug use phenomenon, especially among high school students, The Regional

Antidrug Centre for Prevention, Evaluation and Counselling Timişoara, in collaboration with The Areopagus Centre, Timişoara, organized a seminar with the theme "The role of Christian spirituality in the prevention and overcoming of drug use among high school students". The seminar sought to highlight not only the problems and challenges related to drug use but also the possible contribution of the church, of priests and pastors, of religion teachers and of other specialists in managing this phenomenon.

The seminar took place on May 30, 2012, with 63 participants, all of them being practitioners who during their professional development have come into contact with the phenomenon of drug use among high school students. The seminar aimed at identifying ways of supporting schoolteachers in their dealing with the problem of drug use among students. Beyond the strictly cognitive dimension of the meeting, a special emphasis was placed on the role of Christian spirituality in the prevention of drug use, as well as in the systemic efforts towards the recovery of drug users. As a connected issue in relation to drug addiction, the seminar also touched on the issue of smoking among students, given the fact that the following day (May 31, 2012) happened to be the "World No Tobacco Day".

In addition to the information which was shared by the participants during the seminar, as a means of obtaining further concrete and (as much as possible) structured information, after the closing of the seminar, the participants were asked to take part in a focus group, organized with the purpose of identifying the most appropriate solutions based on which projects and activities could be generated, with a view to preventing and treating drug use among youth.

10.3. Methods of investigation

During the focus group, discussions took place at a round table, face to face. The discussions were coordinated by a moderator, who had the role of articulating the topics for discussion, coordinating the discussion according to the established themes and ensuring that the questions were understood correctly.

The time allocated for discussions is estimated to have been 90 minutes, during which the participants reported from their own experience in interaction with young drug users and with different programs and activities aimed at stopping or preventing drug use among this segment of the population, but also shared their opinions regarding the necessity and possibility of involving different social actors in this process.

Consequently, there were two overarching themes around which the participants were invited to share their experiences and opinions, in connection with the schools or communities they belonged to:

a) The extent and the specific characteristics of the drug use phenomenon;

b) The actual or potential involvement of various social actors and institutions in the prevention of drug use and in the spiritual development of children.

c) Moving from the discussions to the focus group, the objectives here were as follows:

d) Evaluating the extent of drug use in the respondent's school or community;

e) Identifying specific ways in which the church may provide healthy alternatives for spending free time, through social, recreational and educational programs;

f) Evaluating the level of the respondents' willingness to be involved in organizing clubs which aim to promote spiritual values among youth, through specific activities;

g) Analysing the degree to which they would regard as useful the creation of a local support network based on Christian spiritual values;

h) Identifying specific ways in which teachers of religious education could become involved in the prevention of drug use;

i) Analysing the role of the family in the spiritual development of children.

10.4. Specific results

The results indicated that the respondents were interested in the topics under investigation and were able to propose numerous solutions and activities with the potential of being the basis for future drug use prevention programs among youth. At the same time, they expressed their opinions with regard to the possible involvement of the church, of clergy, of religion teachers and of families in this endeavour, as well as in cultivating the spiritual wellbeing of young people.

We will present here the specific results which were afforded by the focus group, based on the main objectives indicated above.

1. The extent and the severity of the drug use phenomenon (tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs) in the respondent's community or school. Regarding this aspect, the respondents who

confirmed the presence of drug use in their school or community referred generally to legal drug use, mainly tobacco and, in some cases, alcohol. One of the respondents also mentioned inhalants ("aurolac") use, identified not in the school but in the community, among the homeless youth. Regarding alcohol and tobacco use, the level perceived by the respondents was described as being high. A connection was also made between the use of these substances and the financial status of the students from most of the institutions they referred to, but also with the affordable (or not) price of the respective drugs.

2. The extent to which the church can be involved in providing healthy alternatives for spending free time, through social, recreational and educational programs. With regard to the involvement of the church in offering positive alternatives for spending free time, the respondents' perceptions were unanimous. They all showed awareness of the involvement of churches in the attempt to prevent drug use and viewed this involvement as valuable and necessary. The willingness of young people to become involved in projects developed by these institutions was also mentioned, as was the precarious relationship between them and the church. Additional mention was made here of the valuable but low-level involvement of families in helping their children to assume in practical terms their Christian identity.

As for the specific activities named in this respect (whether existing ones or new suggestions) we may recall: weekly church meetings that will include "discussions, confessions, singing and praying"; religious camps; religious competitions; charitable missions; lecture rooms; informal meetings during which "important situations of maladjustment, frustration, selfishness and cowardice are addressed".

3. The respondents' interest regarding their involvement in organizing Vacation Clubs, or other activities which aim to promote spiritual values and reduce the incidence of drug use among young people. Regarding this aspect, all respondents expressed their availability for an interest in participation in such activities, underlining again the importance of cultivating moral and spiritual values in the future development of young people. As for the concrete activities which could be organised towards these goals, the answers indicated the following possibilities: media campaigns for raising awareness about the risks of drug use; counselling for drug users; the development of educational, training and informational activities for youth; ecological activities; volunteer activities; activities aimed at stimulating young people's creativity; activities aimed at developing their love towards family, society, and the church; team games, with the purpose of cultivating team spirit and group cohesion; activities aimed

at promoting civic norms and values, based on mutual respect; sport activities; workshops; open air trips.

4. The possible value of creating a local support network (prevention and systemic care) for drug users, based on Christian values, with a view to reducing the drug use phenomenon in the community. Regarding this aspect, the opinions of the respondents were unanimous, in the sense that they all considered this to be a very useful project, raising the awareness of young people with regard to the risks of drug use. Additional mention was made of the responsibility of all individuals to care both for themselves and for other members of the community, given that, according to the Christian faith, we have all been designed by God as social beings who base their existence on love for and communion with others.

5. The possibility of involving religion teachers in the prevention of drug use among youth. With regard to the issue of involvement of religion teachers in the prevention of drug use among students, this was highly appreciated by the respondents. They suggested that the involvement of religion teachers may be done by the following: implementing educational programs that will sustain the healthy education of the children, making them aware of the fact that it is the church that guides believers to the true fulfilment of the human; offering prevention-related counselling sessions during which Christian values may be promoted, both among students and among teachers or parents; bonding with the students and showing availability in relation to the problems which they verbalise; leading the students to become actively involved in drug use prevention programs, thus helping them in passing from the potential user category to the category of those fighting against drug use.

6. The role of the family in the spiritual development of the child. Concerning the role played by the family in the process of spiritual development of children, the respondents mentioned the great importance of the family's responsibility in the spiritual development of the child. The family offers children the opportunity to consolidate their spirituality by consciously planning towards this and then acting accordingly. The family is regarded as holding the most important role in this process, given the fact that it is within the family that the character and the personality of the children are developed; it is here they are shaped for their future adult life.

On a negative note, reference was also made to the very limited understanding of Christian realities by many parents, an element which, in the opinion of one respondent, represents a major hindrance in the spiritual development of children. Moreover, this respondent pointed out the fact that in many contemporary families there is an actual reversal of roles, with the children being those in the role of the teacher, while the parents are the students.

10.5. Concluding remarks

Given the fact that the data offered by the focus group came from respondents who have regular contact with young drug users (whether we refer to legal or illegal drugs), we regard this information as being of genuine value in the development and implementation of future drug use prevention programs among high-school students. On the one hand, the study has highlighted a number of negative realities, such as the precarious religious education of young people's families. Such realties indicate the need for appropriate intervention, especially through a more substantial and diverse involvement of churches and religion teachers. On the other hand, the analysis has generated numerous constructive and practical ideas, such as the creation of summer clubs that will include different educational and entertainment activities, as well as creating a local support network aimed at raising the level of awareness among young people concerning the dangers of drug use.

PART TWO:
PLANS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

In the coming years, I indent to build on my previous research activity and extend it in several directions, including the following:

1. Spiritually-aware social work practice in Romania and the US

For several months, I have been in touch with teaching staff from the Social Work Department of Baylor University, USA, about implementing a research project which will seek to explore, comparatively, the ways in which a spiritually-aware work practice is understood in different parts or cultures of the world (by faculty, students and practitioners of social work) and what are the factors which shape these understandings. On this latter aspect, we intend to analyse the ways in which the various approaches are influenced by personal identity (gender, ethnicity, religion, family values, sexual orientation), by professional context (education, professional codes and principles, national legislation, employer policies), by cultural norms, or by any other factors. The underlying assumption is that if social workers are helped to critically reflect on influences which impinge on their practice, their chance of providing a spiritually-aware social work practice increases.

In order to reach the specified objectives, a qualitative research approach has been prepared. The data will be collected by semi-structured interviews and through a number of focus groups. Both the interviews and the focus groups will seek to explore topics such as: the educational, religious and cultural background of the interviewees, the way in which they view the relation between spirituality and social work; specific situations, from their experience, where spirituality has provided important resources for the social work practice; instances where spirituality or religion were found to be a very sensitive issue in the helping process; frequent challenges and dilemmas resulting from the theory and the practice of the social work profession; etc.

A random sample of minimum 50 participants will be interviewed (for 90 minutes each) – 25 participants in Romania and 25 in the USA. The participants in the interview will have to be social work faculty, social work students (graduate level or final year undergraduate level), or social work practitioners (from a variety of practice settings). The

participants will be identified by cooperation with social work faculty members of various universities in Romania and abroad, as well as through professional social work associations. In preparation for the interviews, a guide of 10-12 topics related to the project objectives will be prepared. The interview will allow, however, for the discussion of relevant aspects not anticipated in the interview guide.

At least two focus groups (one in Romania and one in the USA) of about 10-15 participants belonging to the same categories as the interviewees will also be organized. The focus groups will be scheduled for two-hour periods, during which a moderator will facilitate a group discussion around the topics associated with the research objectives. A brief interview, along the same lines, will also be taken from some of the participants.

Once the qualitative data has been collected, it will be carefully analysed in accordance with the set objectives. A bibliographical research will also be brought to bear on the investigation and thus will lead to the bibliographical validation of the collected data. Finally, the written results of the project will provide an additional contribution to existing research so far in this field.

This project is expected to be of significance for the social world field (in Romania, in the US, and possibly elsewhere), but also for my own professional development. Insofar as the research field is concerned, the unique character of this contribution is expected to be determined not only by the specific objectives of the project, but also by its association with the distinct cultural settings and by the specific academic and practical experience which the partners will bring to the field. For my own professional development, this project would be a major gain. It would give me the chance of broadening my understanding of the subject in various cultures and environments. It would also give me fresh insights not only for my lectures but also for improving the course curriculum (especially for the Master's program on "Values-oriented social work practice"). Last but not least, it would certainly facilitate the publication of new materials in the field.

In order to maximize the benefits of the project, a variety of dissemination venues will be used, such as the publication in social work journals and/or a specialized monograph, the presentation of results at national and international conferences, academic exchanges with other universities, etc. The numerous similarities between the context of social work in Romania and in many other EU countries (especially the formerly communist region) make it probable that the project will also be of some value at European level.

2. The impact of religion and belief on social work professional practice in Romania and the UK

A similar research project in which I am already involved and which will continue to be a priority in the coming period is related to a comparative, qualitative, study of the Romanian and the UK situation related to the impact of spirituality on the social work practice. The project is run in cooperation with Dr. Philip Gilligan of Bradford University, UK, who, together with Ms. Sheila Furness, senior lecturer of the same university, have conducted numerous research projects on this subject within the UK (Gilligan, 2003; Gilligan & Furness, 2006; Furness & Gilligan, 2010; etc.). Their publications so far provide some of the most helpful bibliographical resources to date in this field, at European level. I have had the pleasure of being involved together with Dr. Gilligan in the effort of extending this research among undergraduate and postgraduate social work students in Romania. The data which we have collected is presently being processed and the results of the research will be available later this year or in 2015.

3. Drug use among students in the USA and Romania

Another area of research on which I will continue to concentrate is related to the drug use among young people and the ways in which religion or spirituality may or may not provide an appropriate resource in the helping process. Building on my research so far in this area, and on the cooperation with my colleague Dr. Mihaela Tomiţă, associate professor in the Social Work Department of the West University of Timişoara and head of the Timiş Regional Anti-Drug Centre, I intend to extend this research to a more international level. To this purpose, I have been working, since 2012, together with Dr. Jan Ligon, associate professor of Georgia State University, USA, on a quantitative research related to drug use among undergraduate and graduate students in the USA and Romania. A total of 800 questionnaires have been applied (400 in Atlanta, USA, and 400 in Timişoara, Romania). Once again, the data is being processed at the moment and the results should be available in the near future.

Last but not least, my academic responsibilities related to the leadership of the Master's program on "Values-oriented social work practice", as well as my undergraduate teaching related to social work and spirituality, as well as family social work, will

undoubtedly continue to provide for me important incentives to further develop this area of research. An important element in this respect will be the application for new grants from Kerk in Actie, Netherlands (beyond 2015, when the existing grant ends), in order to secure further support for the above-mentioned Master's program and the research related to social work and spirituality.

In addition to the subject area of the present thesis, I will certainly want to explore other areas of research, especially in the area of family social work. For this purpose, I intend to invest consistent time in the coming years in the writing of grant applications for EU funding, especially as part of the EEA and Erasmus+ frameworks. These efforts will also come as a natural extension of my present responsibilities as vice-dean of international relations for the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology of the West University of Timişoara. Over the last couple of years since I have occupied this position I have been able to make a lot of new contacts with European and non-European universities and especially to extend the number of Erasmus contacts of our faculty. Such contacts will undoubtedly be of great value for many applications which require cross-border cooperation.

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