

## **A RELIGIOUS APPROACH TO THE CHALLENGES OF DRUG ADDICTION IN NIGERIA**

*By*

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### **Introduction**

There are things people do in order to alter the way they think, feel and behave. Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol and using illegal drugs are some of those things people engage in, in order to drive happiness. We are not just talking about addictions to “hard” or “illegal” drugs. These are ordinary and regularly-used addictive substances such as alcoholic beverages and even coffee. These are called psychoactive substances because they affect the mental function (Escandon & Galvez, 2005).

There are also non-chemical addictions and in our societies, these are on the rise: gambling, compulsive sex, pornography and Internet. There are even addictions to such common items as diet, medicines or physical exercise.

Considered loosely, addictions could be taken for habits. We all have habits. Some of them are good while some are bad. The good ones benefit us and add joy and power to our lives, whereas the bad ones do nothing but steal our peace and joy and prevent our success. A habit is something we do without even thinking about it. It is our usual manner of behaviour, or behaviour pattern acquired by frequent repetition. Addiction is a much stronger and more negative word than habit.

Woody & Cacciola (1977) observed that although we use the term addiction routinely when we describe people who seem to be under the control of drugs, there is some disagreement about how to define it. Franklin & Frances (1999) noted that in one definition, the person is physiologically dependent on the drug or drugs, requires greater and greater amounts of the drug to experience the same effect, and will respond physically in a negative way when the substance is no longer ingested. For them tolerance and withdrawal are physiological reactions to the chemicals being ingested.

The vicious cycle of addiction is very dangerous, whether addiction is legal or illegal, chemical or non-chemical, harmful or harmless to health (Melgosa, 2009). All addictions deprive those involved of personal freedom. Melgosa (2009, 130- 131) pointed out that addictions involve serious risks:

- (a) **Dependence.** Drugs or addictive behaviours produce a repetitive desire. The more one satisfies the desire, the more it returns.
- (b) **Tolerance:** The drug user needs an increased dose to reach effects of similar intensity as before.
- (c) **Withdrawal systems.** They can be psychological, such as extreme restlessness at one's inability to obtain the drug or perform the conduct. They can also be physical since the organism is used to substance and is not receiving it. Withdrawal symptoms include: insomnia, agitation, and palpitation, sweating, nausea, vomiting, etc.
- (d) **Effects in the brain (in chemical addictions).** Drugs affect the central nervous system. When a chemical reaches the brain, several vital functions are altered and the person becomes unable to perform the simplest of tasks. When use is prolonged, the drug may cause permanent damage.

The afore-mentioned risks are not only present in chemical addictions, but also in behavioral addictions. A person addicted to pornography for example, feels an extremely strong desire to repeat the behaviour. After some time, previous images are not sufficient, thus, heavier and more obscene ones are needed. And when images are unavailable, the person will experience strong tension and frustration.

The author observed that there have been many attempts to abandon the addiction by most of the addicts by following the prescriptions of chemotherapists, psychotherapists and other therapists without success. Even when victory has been attained, the fight is not over, as the risk of relapse is very high. It is the contention of the writer that it must be duly recognized that the power of addiction is such that only with the help of supernatural power can many reach victory. Myers (2004: 81) puts it clearly, "Underlying our teachings, preaching and counseling is the assumption that private beliefs determine public behaviour: If we want to alter people's actions, we therefore need to change their hearts and minds". Of course, this is the activity of God in man. It is against this backdrop that this study is poised to offer religious approach to the problem of addictions.

### **Other Approaches**

Historically, there have been three approaches to abnormal behaviour – supernatural, biological and psychological. In supernatural approach, unusual behaviour is attributed to agents outside one's body or one's social environment such as demons,

spirits, or the influence of the moon and the stars. Although still alive, supernatural tradition has been largely replaced by biological and psychological perspectives. In the biological approach, disorders are attributed to disease or biochemical imbalances whereas in the psychological approach, abnormal behaviour is attributed to faulty psychological development and to social context.

Each approach has its own way of treating individuals with abnormal behaviours. Supernatural treatments include exorcism to rid the body of the supernatural spirits. Biological treatments typically emphasized physical care and the search for medical cures, especially drugs. Psychological approaches use psychosocial treatments, beginning with moral therapy and including modern psychotherapy.

Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalytic therapy, offered an elaborate conception of the unconscious mind, much of which is still conjecture. In the therapy, Freud focused on tapping into the mysteries of the unconscious through such techniques as catharsis, free association and dream analysis (Blagy & Hitsenroth, 2000). Though Freud's followers steered from his path in many ways, Freud's influence can still be felt today.

One outgrowth of Freudian therapy is humanistic psychology which focuses more on human potential and self-actualizing than on psychological disorders. Therapy that has evolved from this approach is known as person-centered therapy. The therapist shows almost unconditional positive regard for the client's feelings and thoughts (Barlow & Durland, 2005).

The behavioral model moved psychology into the realm of science. Both research and therapy focus on things that are measurable, including such techniques as systematic desensitization, reinforcement and shaping (Ferster & Skinner, 1957).

With the increasing sophistication of our scientific tools, and new knowledge from cognitive science, behavioral science, and neuroscience, we now realize that no contribution to psychological disorders ever occurs in isolation. Barlow and Durand (2005) posit that human behaviour both normal and abnormal is a product of a continual interaction of psychological, biological, and social influence.

**Spiritual Psychotherapy:** In the past, the scientific community rejected cases that involved the effect of prayer, meditation and other forms of spiritual action. But then, spiritual psychotherapy has advanced a great deal during the last few years. Many psychologists and therapy groups now integrate religion, spirituality and mental health (Melgosa, 2009).

A good number of psychotherapists (and even physicians) are now recommending to their patients some of the following measures:

- \*Dependence upon a Supreme Being and his presence in one's life;
- \*Meditation;

- \*Forgiveness;

Prayer;

- \*Love;

- \*Private or group worship; and

- \*The hope of salvation.

**The client has to depend upon a Supreme Being and his presence in his life.** Nothing pacifies the soul and relaxes the nerves than the sensation of the presence of God in one's life. The Psalmist writes, "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God" ( Psm.42: 1-2). Feeling the presence of all-powerful being greater than self is an unspeakable sensation. One has to seek that presence in the silence of a Church, in nature, prayer or in Bible reading.

**Meditation.** It is known that meditation improves one's general physical state and particularly relieves high blood pressure and reduces tachycardia (Melgosa, 2009). When meditation has a solid spiritual component (for example, reflection upon Bible passages), it becomes more significant. Harries et al (1999) posited that spiritual meditation has ability to cause even better result than secular meditation.

**Forgiveness.** If one has the feelings of guilt for the wrong committed of which one has not been forgiven or of the wrong done to one of which one has not forgiven, of a necessity, one has to use forgiveness. Simply forgive the offences that others may have done to you and ask for forgiveness if you are the offender. Essentially, ask God to forgive you and rid yourself of the burden of guilt. "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more" (Heb. 10: 17).

**Prayer.** Communication with a Supreme Being is a necessity. Pray to God with faith and innocence of a child. This will lighten your emotional burden. You will observe that God always answer prayers, even though it may not always be to your expectations.

Praying for others also results in wonderful results. Several studies have revealed the efficacy of intercessory prayer (Harris et al., 1999).

**Love.** Love affects a sick heart more than drugs. It has some therapeutic effect. Love as a principle, not only as impulse, can be a decisive factor to achieve mental health (Melgosa, 2009). Love your dear ones and even the undeserving ones. Jesus even went further to say, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5: 44). If you do, you will notice a sensation of joy and well-being.

**The Hope of Salvation.** The certainty that God wishes you to be happy is a positive factor in present and future mental health. As you grow in grace, you will become familiar with the provisions and ways to enjoy the divine gift. All the resources that enabled Jesus to overcome will be placed at your disposal.

### **The Effects of Intercessory Prayer and Spiritual Meditation**

Harris and his team (1999), investigated the effects of prayer on a group of patients from coronary unit at Mid-American Heart Institute in the city of Kansas (USA). Participants were patients admitted for cardiac ailments. They were assigned to two groups: those who would be prayed for and those who would not be prayed for (control group). Patients did not know they were participants in the study. Physicians did not know to which group patients had been assigned.

During their stay in hospital, a group of believers from various religious denominations prayed systematically for those patients included on their prayer list. The result showed that those patients who were prayed for recovered their health in a quicker and more lasting way than did those in the control group.

Moreso, Amy Wachholtz and Kenneth Pargament, of Bowling Green University in Ohio (USA), studied the effects of several types of meditation (Wachholtz & Pargament, 2005). They assigned students to two random groups and instructed them in two forms of spiritual meditation: using the name of God and secular meditation. They also designated a control group who only received information about relaxation and how to reject stressful thoughts. There were no ethnic or cultural differences among participants; nor were there differences in knowledge of meditation techniques. They were all asked to practice their respective techniques for 20 minutes each day for two weeks.

Results showed that spiritual meditation group had less anxiety and a more positive mood than the other two groups. Furthermore, in an additional pain resistance test

(keep their hand in a bucket with crushed ice until they could not resist any longer), the spiritual meditation group resisted double the time as compared to the remaining participants. If religious therapy can have a positive effect in some ailments, can it have a remedial effect in the treatment of addicts?

### **Paul's Experience, a Type of Human Addiction**

In Romans 7, Paul was baring his very soul; and was telling us an experience which lies at the heart of human addiction:

I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. So then it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do not do the good I want, it is no longer I that do it, sin which dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I of myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7 : 15- 25)

Paul knew what was right and wanted to do it; and yet somehow, he never could. He knew what was wrong and the last thing he wanted was to do it; and yet somehow, he did. For he confessed: "I do not understand my actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Rom. 7: 15). Paul felt himself a split personality. It was as if two Pauls were inside one skin, pulling in different directions. Besides this tension, he was haunted by this feeling of frustration – his ability to see what was good and his inability to do it, his ability to recognize what was wrong and his inability to refrain from doing it (Barclay, 2009).

For the addicts who have insight into their problems, this is their challenge. Barclay (2009) quoting the Roman philosopher Seneca did mention of "our helplessness in necessary things"(p. 115). He went on to quote Ovid, the Roman poet as equally saying "I see the better things, and I approve them, but I follow the worse" (p. 115).

**The Jewish Experience:** Like every other people, the Jews had their own experience too. However, no one knew this problem better than the Jews. The Jews tried to resolve this paradox by saying that in every individual there were two natures, called the *Yester hatob* and *Yester hara*. It was the Jewish conviction that God had made human beings like that with a good impulse and an evil impulse inside them.

There were Rabbis who believed that that evil impulse was present in the embryo in the womb. They strongly believed that it was there even before birth. For them it was an “evil second personality”. It was the waiting, if need be for a lifetime, for a chance to ruin a person. But the Jews were equally clear, in theory that no one need ever succumb to that evil impulse. It was all a matter of choice.

Ben Sirach wrote of God's creation of human life:

It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and left them in the power of their own choice. If you choose, you can keep the commandments, and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice. He has placed before you fire and water; stretch out your hand for whichever you choose. Before each person are life and death, and whichever one chooses will be given...He has not commanded anyone to be wicked, and he has not given anyone permission to sin. (Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 15: 14- 20)

There were certain things which would keep people from falling prey to the evil impulse. There was the law. They thought of God as saying I created for you the evil impulse; I created for you the law as an antiseptic. If you occupy yourself with the law, you will not fall into the power of the evil impulse.

There was the will and the mind: When God created man, he implanted in him his affections and his dispositions; and then, over all, he enthroned the sacred, ruling mind.

When the evil impulse attacked, the Jews held that wisdom and reason could defeat it. To be occupied with the study of the word is rather safty. The law was looked upon as a means of preventing the advance of evil, at which time; the good impulse could be called up in defence. Paul knew all that. He knew, too, that while it was all theoretically true, in practice it was not true. There were things in human nature- that is what Paul meant by this fatal body- which responded to the seduction of sin. It is part of the human situation that we know what is right and yet do wrong, that we are never as good as we ought to be. At one and the same time, our minds turn to goodness and they turn also to sin.

Resulting from Paul's experience in Romans 7, we can note three things:

- (i) The limitations of human resolution;
- (ii) The limitations of diagnosis; and'
- (iii) The limitations of human knowledge.

### **The limitations of Human Resolution**

To resolve to do a thing is one thing; to do it is quite another thing. The will of man is essentially weak. Faced with problems, challenges and difficulties of life, it fails. Once apostle Peter made a great resolution: “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you” (Matt. 26: 35). Yet, no sooner he made the resolution than he failed at the point of action. Apart from the Spirit-given enablement, the human will on its own is bound to fail. That is why psychotherapy and other therapies mostly fail.

### **The Limitations of Diagnosis**

Paul like most of the addicts who had insight into their problems knew quite clearly what was wrong; but he was unable to put it right. He was like a doctor who could accurately diagnose a disease but was powerless to prescribe a cure. Jesus Christ is one person who not only knows what is wrong, but who can also put right what is wrong. Far from offering criticism, he offers help. Of course, those in the field of medicine claim they only care, but God heals.

### **The Limitations of Human Knowledge**

Human knowledge is rather inadequate. If to know the right thing was to do it, life would be easy. Knowledge by itself does not make us good. It is the same with every walk of life. We may know how a house ought to be built, that is very far from building it. We may equally know how music ought to be composed, but that is very far from writing it. We may know how we ought to behave in every situation, but that is very far from being able to behave in the right way. Barclay (2009: 117) writes: “That is the difference between religion and morality. Morality is knowledge of a code; religion is knowledge of a person; and it is only when we know Christ that we are able to do what we know we ought”.



## Knowledge of Christ as Indispensable Remedy to Addiction

Apostle Paul, amidst his tragic experience cried out: “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?(Rom. 7: 24). Then he added: “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7: 25). So you see, it is a divine person that sets free and not a good set of moral codes and etiquette, or sound knowledge of our problems or even correct diagnoses though good as they may be.

What some people regard as addiction can equally be seen as sin in some quarters. Sin like addiction is deceptive. Barclay (2009:113) quoted C. J. Vaughan, the former headmaster of Harrow School as saying that sin's delusion works in three directions

- (i) We are deluded regarding the satisfaction to be found in sin. No one ever took a forbidden thing without thinking that it would bring happiness, and no one ever found that it did;
- (ii) We are deluded regarding the excuse that can be made for it. Everyone thinks that doing the wrong thing can be defended ; but no one's defence ever sounded anything but futile when it was made in the presence of God; and
- (iii) We are deluded regarding the probability of escaping the consequences of it. We never commit a sin without the hope that we can get away with it. But it is true that, sooner or later, our sin will find us out.

In Romans 7: 14- 20, we saw a frank acknowledgment of innate sinfulness. It is a question of self knowledge. We *know* (Rom. 7: 14) and I *know* (Rom. 7: 18 ). And in both cases, the self- knowledge concerns the flesh (*sarx*). Although *the law is spiritual*, the writer is *unspiritual*, 'fleshy' (*sarkinos*), still possessing and being oppressed by his twisted, self-centred nature (*sarx*) on account of which he can also describe himself as sold as a slave to sin (Rom. 7: 14 ), or 'purchased slave of sin'. Those who are still under the law, although they love it being also *sarkinos*, (fallen) are enslaved, and so, incapable of turning good desires into good deeds. The conflict is between desire and performance; the will is there but the ability is not. The indwelling sin is responsible for the failures and defeats of the person whom Paul is impersonating.

Paul summarized the inward conflict in terms of double reality four times in four different ways as the two egos, the two laws, the two cries and the two slaveries (Stott, 1994). First there are two egos: “So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand” (Rom. 7: 21). The antithesis between the 'I' who wants the good and

the 'I' beside whom the evil lies is more obvious in the Greek sentence by reason of the repetition of *emoi*, meaning 'in me' or 'by me'. Secondly, there are two laws: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self (Rom. 7: 23). It is the object of my love and the source of my joy. This inner delight in the law is also called the law of my mind. But I see in addition another law, a very different law, which is at work in the members of my body. This Paul calls the law of sin which is continuously waging war against the law of my mind and making me its prisoner. The characteristic of 'the law of my mind' is that it operates 'in my inner being' and 'delights in God's law', whereas the characteristic of 'the law of sin' is that it operates 'in the members of my body' fights against the law of my mind and takes me captive. Thirdly, there are two cries from the heart. One is "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7: 24). The other is "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7: 25a). Sandy and Headlam (1895) noted that the former is not so much a heart-rending cry from the depths of despair as a cry of longing, which ends in a question mark, while the later is a cry of confidence and thanksgiving, which ends in exclamation mark. Yet both are the ejaculations of the same person who laments of his corruption and who at the same time yearns for the final deliverance; who knows the impotence of the law to rescue him, and who exults in God through Christ as the only Saviour. Fourthly, there are two slaveries. So then, Paul concludes, *I of myself (autos ego) serve the law of God in mind, but with my flesh* (in my sarx, my false and fallen self, uncontrolled by the Spirit) *I serve the law of sin* (Rom. 7: 25b).

How may the power of indwelling sin or addiction be broken? Here is the answer: "Thanks be to God through Christ our Lord!" (Rom. 7: 25). "Walk by the Spirit" Paul had said to the Galatians, "and do not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal. 5: 16). Paul never mentioned the Holy Spirit in Romans 7 but in Romans 8 did so and the Holy Spirit pervades the whole chapter, which describes the life of victory and hope lived by those who "are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 7: 1) and "walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 7: 4).

So long as they endeavour to rely on their own resources, they fight a losing battle; when they avail themselves of the resources of life and power that are theirs "in Christ Jesus" they are more than conquerors. There is therefore no reason why they should go on in a life of penal servitude, bound to carry out the dictates of the tyrannical law of sin and death and by extension, addiction. Christ dwells in them by his Spirit, and his Spirit infuses into them a new principle- the law of life- which is stronger than indwelling sin or power of addiction and sets them free from its tyranny.

## **Conclusion**

Obviously, each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. No psychotherapy can claim mastery over human addictions. In dealing with addictions an integrated approach appears to be the best. Religious approach tends to offer what other approaches lack. Through it we encounter the Person of God whose power is able to liberate us from the adhesive power of addiction.

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