



*Orange, California 92869-2914*

# **THE ADDICT,**

## ***THE CHURCH, AND THE FAMILY***

**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

2001

**Coptic Orthodox Christian Center**  
*491 N. Hewes St.*

# **ADDICTS, THE CHURCH, AND FAMILY**

## **FIRST: THE ADDICT**

We usually describe addiction as a “dangerous ghost” that hovers over all societies whether they be modern or backwards, poor or rich.

Addiction is a major disease facing modern society. It viciously destroys both human and national resources, hindering any progress in society. As a result, the world fights back with all of its power. The percentage of addicts has increased dramatically especially among teens and youth. Some American high schools have addiction rates of up to 75%, not to mention the economic losses which sometimes exceed an entire country’s wealth.

Recent increases in crime can be connected to addiction. Several politicians and high ranking judges have been murdered by the hands of drug dealers. Many addicts turn to crime in order to obtain drug money; slaughter of family members or even strangers may occur.

Despite global efforts to fight addiction, daily improvements in drug availability and potency continue to tantalize potential addicts.

Foremost is the addict himself, as a person. Consequently Church and community leaders should be concerned with helping each addict no matter how few or many...*even if there remains only one addict in society.*

In other words, our concern with the problem is regardless of the number of addicts or the damage caused by

addiction. However, the esteem of how valuable the addicted person is, no matter his situation or age, leads to the proper solution.

## **THIS IS MY RESPONSIBILITY:**

Every leader in society, church, school, or family must realize in his heart his personal obligation, so in effect say, “I am the one responsible!”

Meaning that it is reasonable for me, as a member of society to blame myself first rather than blaming the drug addict.

Why?! Because the addict is not really a criminal deserving cruel punishment or severe retribution, but is actually someone suffering from a disease caused by society. How?!

### **1. Addiction serves as an escape from emptiness.**

One of the main reasons for addiction is to escape from loneliness or lack of love. Because the human being is made after God’s image, he always strives to be like God. This means that he carries “love”, for God is precisely ‘love itself ‘.

Every human being wants to love and be loved...some men surround themselves by those who entertain or give them company, but can never give them the “self-giving” love of God. Such a person will feel empty and will attempt to fill this void with addictions.

It is the responsibility of a good leader, whether clergy or layman, to give himself to others. In this manner, addiction will never find a place in the community. If the addict begins to be full of real love, he will not feel the emptiness that once drew him to addiction.

### **2. Addiction is the result of inadequacy.**

Every time I meet an addict, I feel responsible for him, as a servant of God, parent, or teacher. The fact is, incorrect methods of raising the new generation makes our children lose

their self-respect. A young child who finds a person with a big heart who speaks to him with love and respect for his thoughts and his world of childhood, creates a spirit of maturity and respect for his life as a human being.

Father Pishoy Kamel once paid a visit to some family, and the lady of the house complained in the presence of her child that he is naughty. The father hugged and embraced the child and with his sweet smile told him, "I was a naughty child too!" The child was happy because Father Pishoy took his side rather than blaming him. The minute the father left, the boy started playing as usual. When his mother reprimanded him, he told her, "Father Pishoy was naughty just like me!"

What I am trying to make clear is that as leaders, clergy, or parents we should not make our children feel that we come from a different world, of better nature or that we are somehow more superior, since this makes them feel desperately inadequate.

It is reasonable for a leader to act as a friend rather than a superior teacher. You should approach children through the world of their childhood and youth through the world of the youthful.

The child accused of naughtiness will obey the clergyman when the clergy takes his side; he will go to him and obey him and in doing so will be encouraged to speak with him.

When God deals with man, he enters into a discussion with him. It was said of the prophet Moses that God spoke to him as a friend (Exodus: 32). In the same manner, we should give the new generation the chance of open discussion.

The new generation goes wayward when we give orders and ask for blind obedience.

A man once visited me, whose son was a senior in high school. He was angry because his son hit him during a heated

argument. The father insisted on kicking the boy out of the house and asked me to interfere in the matter. Consequently I paid them a visit and met the son. Obviously he was still in a state of rage and aggression, and unwilling to accept any advice. So I told him tenderly, "Your father told me about the fight, but I would like as well to hear you separately."

After hearing the boy's story, I explained to the father that they were both at fault for the argument. The father was angry and disapproved of my opinion. However I asked him to "allow me to deal with the situation in my own way." Actually I have told him, not wanting to embarrass him in front of his father, that he should think it all over by himself in order to realize his error and make amends.

After two days, the father returned and happily told me, "My son apologized, and is now seriously studying. Peace has returned to the house." I told him, "Your son told me that my words made him feel confident that someone was on his side. Your son felt guilty and was able to understand that he owes to respect you as a father.

Once more I say that a true leader approaches the child through his world, and youths through theirs; not with condescension, but with maturity, wisdom, and esteem for either ones. Thus, the new generation accepts their responsibility without the feeling of inadequacy, which leads to addiction.

### **3. Addiction due to violence**

Addiction is a response to the feeling of violence a person has against the world, the local society or the family.

During my stay for sometime in Canada, I visited a mother who complained that her children used violence amongst themselves. When I asked her why, she replied saying "My kids changed during our stay in France, due to the media and TV violence as in police movies...this badly influenced their lives."

The media often glamorizes violence, causing one to feel inner insecurity. Thus, people turn to violence, hatred, addiction or a combination of these.

Violence in the family is even more destructive than violence in the media. Violence directed at oneself, one's siblings or mother, may destroy a youth's personality, for home's peace and stability are replaced with bitterness and violence.

#### **4. Addiction results from incorrect beliefs**

We are responsible for the addict being entrapped into addiction, as a result of some wrong ideas. Either ideas that we have somehow incited in his mind or that bore in his mind and we were too late to uncover and correct. For example:

**A. The concept of freedom:** We usually confuse the idea of freedom with that of "looseness;" therefore, we think that freedom is to do whatever we want regardless of responsibility or respect for others' needs.

A spoiled person feels constrained by responsibility...so he mistakes freedom for "looseness." If he faces any problem, no matter how small, he feels confused and unable to cope. If he has a lot of problems, he judges them by his own ideas and seeks refuge in his friends who tell him that addiction is happiness and relaxation.

**B. It's wrong to believe that obedience is powerlessness.** If some youth parents, teachers, or church leaders give orders and expect blind obedience, he will hate being obedient. This road quickly leads one to the "friends" of addiction.

During a meeting with American Coptic families, we discussed the tradition of high school graduation parties, or "proms." Usually girlfriends and boyfriends go together and spend most of the night together. The parents asked, "How do we answer the question of whether our children should attend

this kind of celebration?" One parent answered, "My son asked me this, and I was puzzled how to answer, because I knew that my boy didn't like taking orders, but in my heart I was against him going. So, I told him to discuss it with his Sunday school teacher. When the boy went to ask his Sunday school teacher he said, "I can't answer you, but my son can, since he went through the same thing last year."

When the two young men discussed it, the teacher's son advised him not to participate in something that will not add something good to him, but rather spoil what he has already gained in his way to edify his character. Thus, the young man, with complete freedom, refused to participate in the prom, without feeling that this attitude makes him blindly obedient. In this manner, the Sunday school teacher gained the young man's trust through free discussion rather than the pressure of giving orders.

Our Savior in His obedience to His Father taught us a new concept of obedience; not as a result of powerlessness, but due to love. Obedience did not destroy His equality with the Father but gave Him the joy of equal glory.

A woman once asked my advice about her mischievous kindergarten child. She told me that he did not listen to her advice, so she did not press him. Later, while playing with him, her son told her, "I knew that your advice was right, but I didn't take it since ***I don't want to be a weak person!***" These are the words of a small child who, like his kindergarten classmates has begun to equate obedience with lack of character.

I told the mother, "Try to make a mistake in front of your child. If he corrects you, follow his suggestion. Afterwards, ask him, 'When I took your advice even though you are my son, does that mean that I am weak?' He will realize that obedience is not due to weakness or followed, out of poor character. Orders need not be given by the elder and taken by youth, but instead,

result from mutual love and open peaceful discussion.”

**C. Addiction results from the idea that religion is old fashioned,** out-of-date, a kind of slavery, and actually humiliating. Addicts consider religious regulations to be rigid and unforgiving!

Leaders must show through their words and deeds that religion is:

- A “meeting” with God and the way to happiness.

- An eternal blessing by which the believer can enjoy the love of Our Father, his membership in the Body of Christ, his acceptance of the Holy Spirit, and his soaring from glory to glory until settling in the bosom of God.

- Following the spirit and bypassing laterality.

**D. One mars the picture of the Church by thinking that it looks down on sinners,** including addicts. I hope that our deeds emphasize what St. John Chrysostom said, that the Church is a hospital not a court. By this means, even addicts would seek rest from the slavery of addiction in the haven of the Church.

**E. Addiction results from a negative view of repentance.** Whatever his situation, the addict believes that he is a slave to addiction. Although he may wish to be cured, he always feels helpless since he is like a wounded person who needs to be taken care of, not reprimanded. The addict needs to be cured with the Real Loving Spirit.

During the 1960s an old woman visited me and proclaimed, “My soul is lost.” I asked her to explain and she answered, “This is because of you!” Although I was shocked, I asked her why, and she answered, “Every time I enter the church, I hear you speak about the horror and bitterness of sin. I am a slave to sin, so what can I do?” I realized my error, and

started to speak positively of repentance. I told her, “Jesus Christ is full of love, tenderness, and acceptance for sinners.”

When we focus on sin, filth and slavery of addiction, it destroys the soul of the addict. Thus, it is our duty to emulate Our Savior who concentrated the more on showing us the joy of paradise, sharing the Eternal Glory, and the enjoyment of our new lives there, in heavens. In showing the positive, we incite the spirit of hope within those destroyed by weakness.

**F. Among misconceptions, which seep into our life and prepare us for corruption and addiction, is “leading a double-life.”** We see that some believers are people who live two different lives: one life inside the church or religious society, and the other at work or home. This bad behavior makes one lose respect for life as a whole; therefore, causing people to view the devout as hypocrites who carry a special mask for religious life and act bear faced in their dealings with others. In this manner, a person despises and rejects living in partnership with God; he shuns it, moreover he may lose trust in it as the correct way, thus he can easily be captivated by addiction or any other dreadful vice.

**G. Another misconception, which spread among the uneducated, comes the link of the use of drugs to sexual power.** As such, the newly married man may think that he needs drugs in order to have the sexual power of marriage.

## **5. Addiction and the feeling of despair.**

Psychological problems have increased in first and third world nations alike. Drugs offer a false refuge from these problems. As a result, the treatment of addiction requires a lot of psychological care. Modern man must face the complex world with a big heart, mature thoughts, and confidence built on reliance on God, Lover of mankind.

The more is insightful; he realizes how Christ opens His

arms to hold him. Christ does not carry such a person to get him out of the world, but while he still exists, he overcomes all oppositions through faith, eyeing the One who says:

“ But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

In West Covina, California, I met someone who greeted me warmly saying, “Don’t you remember me? I am from St. George’s Church in Sporting. I greeted him as well, then he added I will never forget my first meeting with Father Pishoy. My soul was completely destroyed. I told him, ‘I want you to give me three hours to hear my sins and prepare me for confession.’” With his usual smile, he sat with me for a few minutes after which I felt the Peace and Love of God. I asked the father for permission to obtain Holy Communion. This was start of my life with Jesus Christ and it didn’t take three hours as I thought it might.”

When one is taught to believe in Christ the conqueror, he will grow to be a strong believer who can surpass in triumph rather than being the victim of it.

## **6. Peer Pressure**

Many scientists assert that a high percentage of addicts become addicted due to peer pressure. Truly, societal and church leaders are those responsible for this pressure.

When a person in a position of power in the church loses his spirit of friendship built on an open heart, peaceful discussion, and mutual respect, one’s view of parents, teachers, clergy as well as leaders spiritual and layman is tainted forever.

Due to his tainted view, the addict fall prey to the pressures of friends whom he vies as his only haven, since he has no will, the addict allows them to mold him as they please!

## **7. Addictions and External Pressure.**

We cannot ignore the role of outside pressure in driving

some to addiction. The desire to make profit as with drug dealing, political advantage, as some countries do with other nations; the solution of economical problems as in Latin America where drug cultivation was encouraged in order to boost the Gross National Product after the collapse of coffee prices, all contribute to external pressure. Due to these pressures, we need education of the public regarding the dangers of drugs.

## **8. Addiction caused by curiosity.**

Some people fall into addiction in order to experiment with drugs. As a result, we must acknowledge that those who fall due to curiosity were not well educated at a young age to be quiet aware of this danger in a way that suits their mentality. This is our rule as faithful leaders or responsible believers at church thus as fan as we could allow them to get good opportunity for a trustworthy source of information rather than seeking for it from friends or through experimentation.

## **9. Addiction and self-confidence**

Low self-esteem and desperation can push one to addiction as way to flee from your inner-feelings. In contrast, cockiness and conceit can lead one to the same end. For those who smoke or take pills and feel that they have power over their addiction to use or refuse drugs as they wish, this over-confidence pushes them to use drugs until they are imprisoned by them.

This phenomenon must spur us to educate the new generation to lean on God, sure of His rich blessings, but not in negligence or carelessness. We should not fear but should be aware of God’s care for us, while simultaneously being careful not to fall.

## ***THE ADDICTED LEADER***

Often we view the addict as a criminal who should be severely punished, while in reality he suffers from an illness. Not only should the addict be absolved of all responsibility but we should feel personally responsible for his/her addiction.

Every person, even a child, wants to be a leader, the addict too wants to lead, if not for advancement then for destruction. An addict's treatment is to let him have his self-confidence once more, and in doing so show him his true self as a person who may have an effective role of leadership in the society that he lives in.

## ***ADDICTS TO THOUGHT***

When we discuss addiction, we think of drugs, alcohol, or smoking etc. but there exists another addiction, which controls even some religious people, that of addictive thought. This kind of addiction can exist in many forms.

1. The addiction to an idea: this occurs if someone holds a view and pushes it on others without free discussion. He refuses all those who think differently and carries much hatred, anger, and animosity for those who think differently. This is an addictive idea for which a person becomes enslaved.

2. Addiction to a certain person: this occurs when someone gets infatuated with a certain person. It may even reach a state of slavery, a person loses his identity, thoughts, and will to become a slave to another. For example, we often hear of people committing suicide after the death of a famous celebrity, or leader.

This kind of addiction also occurs with some religious

people. A believer may admire a religious personage deprived of the basis of gaining benefit of the virtues of such a leader in a way of discriminating what edifies him and suits his personality. Unfortunately some copy the person they are fascinated by blindly, in whatever his beliefs or opinions are, even may imitate his walk. The believer turns his humanity into a mannequin, which the other person controls. It is fine to emulate others if they are good examples, but this should be in the Lord, to edify our souls not making gods out of them.

## ***BECOMING A SLAVE TO RITUAL AND HABIT***

This is a soul-destroying addiction. Being a slave of a certain habit causes one to lose his freedom. When one is mad about hearing dram music (rock) and indecent songs, some become a slave of it, thus lose their inner peace, and ability to fetch one's conscience and repent.. he finds his joy in this clamor, while it leads him to lose his inner vitality (or his soul).

Jesus Christ's crucifixion restored man's freedom. "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John, 8: 36)." And as St. Paul the apostle says:" "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh." (Galatians 5:13)