

# Alcoholism Among the Priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese

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**Summary:** *In many countries today, alcoholism is becoming an increasingly common problem, the number of alcoholics is increasing, and the disease occurs in all professions and occupations. Therefore, it is important to talk about the increasing presence of alcoholism not only among lay believers but also among the clergy of the Catholic Church. The aim of this paper is to point out the causes of alcohol addiction and the consequences of alcoholism on the life and work of priests from the area of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese. Based on the results of qualitative-quantitative research conducted using a survey questionnaire (9 priests), sampled using the »snowball« technique, this paper will, for the first time, talk about a problem that has not been discussed in the Croatian scientific community. The conducted research points to stressful events, loneliness, and misunderstanding of superiors and the environment as the main causes of alcoholism among priests.*

**Keywords:** *alcoholism, priest, Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese, causes, consequences, »snowball«.*

## Introduction

Alcoholism is a complex condition that involves a series of mental, physical, social, and cognitive changes caused by excessive alcohol consumption. It is defined as a socio-medical addiction disease that occurs with long-term and excessive drinking and leads to »health-related, family and wider social problems« (Mihaljević 41). Alcoholism is not a disease of the individual but of the entire family and society itself. There are several theories that attempt to explain how and why the disease of alcoholism occurs.

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Biological theories advocate the opinion that »a certain type of metabolism is inherited« (Hudolin, *Bolesti ovisnosti* 43) which leads to alcoholism, while psychological theories speak of the »psychological conditioning of alcoholics« (Hudolin, *Bolesti ovisnosti* 43). External influences lead to stress, trauma, anxiety and tension, and personal resorting to alcohol. Theories of a sociocultural nature consider that »the causes lie in man himself, and then in his surroundings,« (Hudolin, *Bolesti ovisnosti* 44) interspersing each other.

Alcoholism is the most widespread chronic addictive disease, which »represents one of the most serious socio-medical problems of today.« (Hudolin, *Što je alkoholizam* 22) Modern society is permeated by »an increasing number of alcoholics, indicating the impotence of society and family« (Davison and Neale 340) as well as the Church in a constructive confrontation with the problem of alcoholism. An increasing number of priests are also feeling helpless. The plague of alcoholism of an increasing number of priests is a problem for the Church and in the Church. Following the above, the aim of this paper is to point out the problem of the presence of alcoholism among the priests from the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese and to point out the consequences of alcohol addiction on priestly life and work.

The first part of the paper discusses the phenomenon of alcoholism, its development, and its frequency in society, while the second part discusses the interpretation of alcoholism according to church documents, correlating it with the basic outlines of the formation of priests. The third part of the paper presents the research methodology, while the fourth part presents the results of research on the problem of alcoholism among the priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese. The last, fifth part of the paper discusses the causes of alcoholism of alcoholic priests from the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese and the consequences of alcohol addiction on priestly life and work.

## 1. The Phenomenon of Alcoholism in Society

The beginnings of alcohol use cannot be confirmed with certainty, but archaeological findings can give approximate dates when people began to use alcohol. According to the latest archaeological research, the first preserved traces of alcohol from 13,000 years ago were found in a tomb near Haifa in present-day Israel, which scientists presume served as part of a burial ritual (Liu et al. 783-793). Depending on the geographical area where they lived, people made alcohol from different plant crops such as grains, grapes, rice, and others. Alcohol was also used for medical, ritual, and afterlife purposes, as well as a means of bartering. It appears in the earliest writings of Middle Eastern civilizations, as well as in the later works of various poets since ancient times who described its purpose, as well as the enjoyment of drinking it. Therefore, it can be said that the production and consumption of alco-

hol were important social and economic elements of the first civilizations around the world (Gately 4-16).

The phenomenon of drinking alcohol has lasted until the present time when alcohol is ubiquitous and easily accessible. In today's Western culture, alcohol use is defined as a normal social phenomenon, even encouraged by the media in different age groups on different occasions and events (Breitenfeld and Kuzman 16-31). Prolonged and excessive alcohol consumption can lead to a severe physical and psychological condition called alcoholism in psychology (»Hrvatska enciklopedija«). The English-language scientific literature, or more concretely the manual for diagnostic »International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems« (10<sup>th</sup> revision) calls this condition »alcohol use disorder,« (ICD-10) and according to ICD-10 symptoms include increased craving for consumption, a state of psychological withdrawal in the absence of the substance, the loss of interest in other activities, loss of control in drinking and high tolerance to alcohol, or an increase in the amount required to achieve the effect of alcoholism, and persistence in alcohol consumption despite the obvious negative and dangerous consequences of the same. DSM-5 describes similar symptoms: »Alcohol use disorder is defined by a cluster of behavioral and physical symptoms, which can include withdrawal, tolerance and craving.« (492) Also, »anxiety, sweating and trembling of the hands are signs of an abstinence crisis that may indicate the presence of alcohol dependence.« (Sharma and Sharma 1347) The disorder does not occur all at once, but there are stages of its occurrence corresponding to the frequency of drinking alcohol. Scientists emphasize that a combination of different circumstances and conditions can lead to an individual's alcohol addiction, and that each individual has their own personal development and causes of alcohol addiction. However, science offers some models as an explanation, such as the »positive influence regulation« model where an individual experiences pleasure in drinking alcohol that is self-rewarding to him (Sher et al. 497). The second model is the »negative impact regulation« model in which a person is unable to cope with personal problems and resorts to alcohol consumption (Sher et al. 498). One of the factors may be genetic inheritance, that is, the interaction of different genes inherited from the parents who were alcoholics may be one of the causes of addiction.<sup>1</sup> According to the model of the World Health Organization (hereinafter WHO), there are sociological and individual factors (WHO, *Alcohol*). Sociological (external) factors include the social and economic situation (surroundings), the culture in which the individual lives, and the production, distribution, and regulation of alcohol. Individual factors

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<sup>1</sup> According to research, genetics can be the cause of addiction in more than 50% of cases, and this includes the model of alcohol consumption as an example to a family member. See Matošić et al. 134-135.

include age, gender, family surroundings, and socioeconomic status. But some scientific research include other elements that can be risk factors for addiction and that can increase the possibility of alcoholism, such as reduced »memory capacity, cognitive control, negative emotions, impulsivity, affective instability and depression.« (Yang et al. 303) The family surroundings are an important element in the development of the individual where family heritage, unhealthy relations within the family, poor financial conditions, availability of alcohol, and the very example of alcoholism in parents, can be causal elements for consumption and beginning of alcohol addiction at a younger or older age (Sharma and Sharma 1347). According to a WHO report, in 2016 more than half of the global population, or 57%, consumed alcoholic beverages in the last twelve months, ranging 15 years and older. Globally, the amount of alcohol per person between 15 years and older is 6.4 litres. The highest amount of alcohol per person refers to the European region. According to gender, women drink less and less often than men. There are significant gender differences in the prevalence of alcohol use disorders. It is estimated that there are 237 million men and 46 million women with alcohol use disorders globally, with the largest difference between men and women in the European region (14.8% and 3.5%). Alcohol addiction is more common in highly developed countries (WHO, *Global Status Report*). In a survey conducted in 2011 in Croatia, 86.4% of respondents aged between 15 and 64 stated that they had consumed alcohol during their lifetime. Men (92.5%) reported consuming alcohol more often than women (80.3%) (Institut Društvenih Znanosti Ivo Pilar). In 2010, disorders caused by alcohol consumption were present in 5.1% of the population (8.6% of men and 1.9% of women), and alcohol addiction was present in 3.4% of the population (5.6% of men and 1.4% of women). Regarding both categories, Croatia is below the average of the WHO European Region (Institut Društvenih Znanosti Ivo Pilar).

Research conducted by the U.S. Government's agency for the prevention of alcohol and drug abuse shows that alcohol addiction and disorders caused by alcohol abuse are not equally represented in different industries. The lowest rate of alcohol abuse was found in educational activities, health and social care, and among civil servants. On the other hand, the highest rates of alcohol abuse were found in mining, construction, and service industries (Bush and Lipari). Among the above-mentioned statistics and examples of alcoholism among different professions, the clergy hardly appears because clergy didn't participate in the above-mentioned research. Scientific research regarding the above issue exists in small numbers in foreign and domestic literature and are generally not of recent dates.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The article deals with the problem of alcoholism among Irish clergy in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Healy 610.

## 2. Alcoholism and the Dimensions of Priestly Formation

Despite the fact that being drunk has been considered a sin in the Church since the beginning of Christianity, alcoholism has always been present among believers as well as among clergy and bishops. Therefore, many church documents that speak about the life and formation of priests emphasize the need for a healthy and complete upbuilding and formation, so that addiction to alcoholism does not appear in the lives of future priests. The document of the Second Vatican Council on the Education of Priests, *Optatam Totius*, emphasizes that, in accordance with the age of the candidate for the priesthood, it is necessary to carefully and vigilantly examine spiritual, moral and intellectual suitability, adequate physical and »mental health« (no. 6, 339) and »human maturity« (no. 10, 343). Since the priest, through the sacrament of the priesthood, is involved in the mystery of Christ and the Church, performing multiple services in the Church and before the Church, the Congregation for the Clergy of the Catholic Church emphasizes that the priest as a man in spiritual guidance should have: »knowledge of the spiritual life, experience in it, sense of responsibility and wisdom... closeness, listening skills, optimism, hope, testimony, consistency, instilling a desire for holiness, stability, clarity, serenity, truthfulness, understanding, width or plurality of views, adaptation, perseverance in the path of holiness.« (*Svećenik-služitelj Božjega milosrđa* no. 102, 65) The priest in the priestly ministry »must be distinguished by openness, sincerity, truthfulness, consistency, honesty, the practice of the means of consecration (liturgy, sacraments, prayer, sacrifice, examination of conscience).« (Kongregacija za kler, *Svećenik-služitelj Božjega milosrđa* no.106, 67) The Church relies on the daily fidelity of priests to the priestly ministry. Loyalty to the priestly ministry assumes the most complete and comprehensive spiritual formation possible. »Spiritual formation, which is directed to the perfection of love, must above all strive for the candidate to become another Christ in a special way, not only by the power of all his sacred ordination, but also by the intimate communion of life: inspired by the Spirit of Christ, while celebrating the mystery of the death of the Lord, he should be truly aware of what he does, that he inherits what he does, following the one who did not come to be served, but to serve (cf. Matt. 20, 28)« (Biskupi Jugoslavije no. 44, 210-211).

In the latest document on the basic education and upbringing of priestly candidates, the Congregation for the Clergy of the Catholic Church emphasizes the need for unity and the presence of four dimensions of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral (*Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 89, 81). Human formation is a necessary precondition and element for evangelization because the proclamation of the Gospel is accomplished through personal humanity (Kongregacija za kler, *Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 97, 89). Spiritual formation is directed towards the creation

and strengthening of communion with God and people, based on friendship with Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, and training to listen to the Holy Spirit (Kongregacija za kler, *Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 101, 92). Intellectual formation consists of the adoption of basic philosophical and theological knowledge with the aim of influencing the better human, spiritual, and pastoral upbuilding of candidates for the priesthood (Kongregacija za kler, *Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 116-117, 102-104). Pastoral formation implies the complete preparation of a priestly candidate to be a »priest-shepherd« in the image of Christ the Good Shepherd, that is, to be able to manifest Jesus' love, mercy, and generosity towards every man (Kongregacija za kler, *Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 119, 105). Therefore, to be and to live the priesthood means to dispositionally, humbly, patiently, and joyfully proclaim, mediate and celebrate the Triune God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Kongregacija za kler, *Svećenik – služitelj Božjega milosrđa* no. 7-9, 14-15). The instruction of the Congregation for the Clergy requires every priest to be a shepherd, leader, teacher, educator, spiritual doctor, and especially a true witness and servant of the divine in every social and cultural environment (Kongregacija za kler, *Prezbiter, pastir i vođa župne zajednice* no. 1, 13-14). However, not all priests today perform priestly ministry, calling, and vocation in accordance with the will of God, and the teachings and instructions of the Magisterium of the Church. Today, as throughout history, some priests are occasionally or permanently disabled in life, ministry, and vocation by their own or others' weaknesses, flaws, mistakes, and sins.

From the document *Gaudium et spes* it is clear that every man, and thus the priest, can go through life following the path of meaning and inner freedom or the path of meaninglessness and slavery. For a priest who has »stumbled into alcoholism,« the first prerequisite to get rid of alcoholism is to avoid the company in which alcohol is consumed. Another prerequisite is regular self-control during pastoral events and encounters. However, without the permanent and daily psychological and spiritual maturation of the priest, there is no stable abstinence. That is why today's priest is called to make systematic progress in wisdom and grace in order to deal with the benevolent sociocultural attitude towards alcohol: »The priest is obliged to strive for holiness, which is based on regular and new consecration to God through ordination. To this must necessarily be added the elements connected with the ordination of the priest to Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, with the mission and service which mandates him to be a living image of Christ, the eternal priest, and to act »in persona Christi«, manifesting by his whole life, in his original way, evangelical radicalism.« (Merćep 237) However, the Church quickly realized that the priest's life was exposed to various temptations and obstacles. The priest has always been under the impact of three temptations that still plague him today: Satan,

the seduction of the world, and personal passions (Škvorc 138-139). All three of these temptations are sources of alcoholism among priests.

One of the reasons for the appearance of alcoholism among priests can be burnout. The first phase in the priesthood is a time of excessive and relentless enthusiasm. It is characterized by unrealistic expectations and idealization of the priestly vocation, especially unrealistic expectations of quick results, personal importance, and significance of success in vocation, profession, and work (Jakšić 74-75). The second phase is characterized by initial dissatisfaction with the priesthood and the appearance of the first signs of burnout: physical and mental fatigue, first frustrations with the service, loss of will to continue serving, initial boredom, and difficulties in communication with lay believers, confreres, and the hierarchy (Jakšić 76-77). The third phase is characterized by withdrawal, conscious isolation, loneliness and increased signs of stress with side effects: communication difficulties, avoidance of encounters and contacts with co-workers, confreres, and the hierarchy, feelings of hostility and anger towards fellow brothers priests and lay believers, chronic fatigue, depression, psychosomatic difficulties and a negative perception of the world and life (Jakšić 76-77). The fourth and most difficult phase of burnout in the priesthood is characterized by persistent lethargy or apathy, neglect of basic priestly duties, low personal and priestly self-esteem, chronically negative perception of the priesthood, poor or no communication with others, especially superiors and lay believers, and depression and anxiety (Jakšić 76-77).

According to our opinion – based on the definitions in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that »Sin is an offense against reason, truth and conscience« (no. 1849) and that »Sin is an offense against God« (no. 1850) in a very broad and profound sense – one of the most common sins that distances today's priest from his Source-God and performing his ministry in the image of Jesus Christ is the sin of intemperance in drinking, and with some priests, alcohol addiction or alcoholism.

### **3. Priests and Alcoholism in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese – Methodological Notes**

Not all priests addicted to alcohol, nor all those who have difficulties due to excessive alcohol consumption, are included in this research on the alcohol dependence of priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese. Since this is a specific population, whose attitudes were to be determined by this research, the »snowball« technique was applied in the sampling of respondents.<sup>3</sup> The final sample of respondents consisted of a total of 24 priests who face alcoholism, to whom we were referred by

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<sup>3</sup> See more detailed information in: Milas 413-414.

other priests. After getting their contacts, the respondents were sent survey questionnaires to their e-mail addresses and were asked to participate in the research, with a special note on the protection of their personal data and anonymity in the analysis and interpretation of the results. Ultimately, 9 priests agreed to complete the survey questionnaire, while the rest either refused to participate or took an ignorant attitude towards the survey.<sup>4</sup>

The survey was conducted in December 2020, and the questionnaire consisted of a total of 18 open-ended questions and 1 closed-ended question. The development of measuring instruments, relevant to the goal of the research, referred to measuring priests' attitudes about the causes of addiction, duration of addiction, type of addiction treatment, and experience of (mis)understanding before and during addiction by family or relatives, parish / religious community and church hierarchy. The impact of addiction on prayer life and other dimensions of priestly / religious life and work, i.e. on psycho-physical health, was also measured. For most of the positions and experiences that were sought to be determined, the priests were provided with answers on five-point scales (1 = strongly disagree ... 5 = strongly agree or 1 = Never ... 5 = Always).

#### **4. Priests and Alcoholism in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese – Research Results**

As previously mentioned, a total of nine priests from the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese took part in the research, as many as agreed to talk about the problem of alcoholism among priests. These are, therefore, those priests who have acknowledged their problem with alcohol addiction, but among whom two priests stand out who have completed the questionnaire intended for priests who have faced the problem of alcohol addiction at a certain point in life but deny their addiction. Thus, one of the priests in question interprets his problem with alcohol as »he does not drink much, but his body does not tolerate alcohol well« (Respondent 3), while the other states that he »does not see any addiction – he can but does not have to (drink)« (Respondent 1).

For most of the priests who took part in the research, alcoholism was a long-standing problem that some of them dealt with until the end of the withdrawal process, as one of the priests stated, »whole life« (Respondent 1), or up to 40 years (Re-

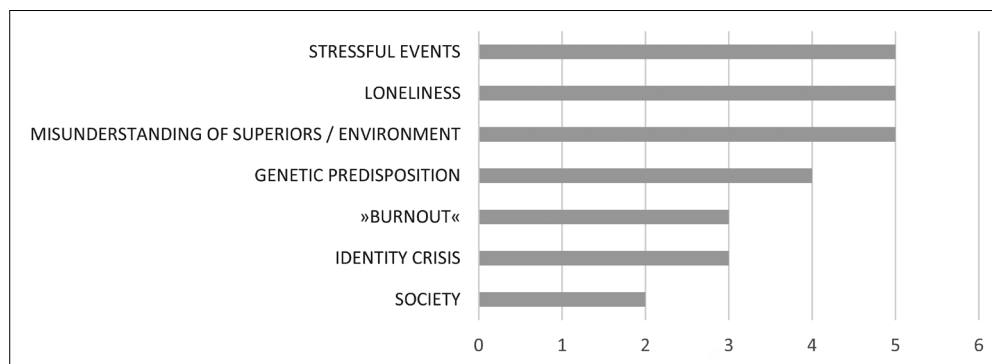
<sup>4</sup> Reasons for refusal of participation in the research range include the attitude that due to the hierarchy's relation towards those who have problems with alcohol nothing is done anyway and that the research will not achieve anything, the attitude that they no longer want to remember and look back on that period of life, the opinion that they are not addicts even though they admit to consuming alcohol regularly.



spondent 5). Others stated that they have accepted their alcohol addiction after 24 (Respondent 9), 20 (Respondent 7), or 17 years of alcohol consumption (Respondent 2). The remaining priests, mostly younger, stated that their addiction lasted between 7 and 8 years (Respondent 6), 2 years (Respondent 8), 2 and a half years (Respondent 4), or only a few weeks (Respondent 3).

As can be seen from the provided Chart 1, there is a significant disparity in the priests' responses about the causes that led to alcohol addiction. Given that the priests had the opportunity to assess the importance of more than one cause, the final analysis showed that a total of five priests primarily associated alcohol addiction with experienced stressful events, loneliness and misunderstanding of superiors and the environment. A total of four priests see the main cause of alcohol addiction in genetic predisposition, while three see the cause in »burnout« or identity crisis, and two of them in the society.

Chart 1: The causes of addiction among the priests



In addition to the problem of alcohol addiction, five priests reported difficulties in dealing with other forms of addiction, including one priest reporting addiction to cigarettes, one addiction to cigarettes and gambling, one addiction to the internet and pornography, and one to pornography.

During many years of dealing with the problem of alcoholism, it can be noticed that in only two cases the families of priests or relatives noticed their excessive consumption of alcohol from the very beginning, while most families noticed their addiction only a few years later. Regarding the perception of their addiction by other priests / monks, most of the respondents stated that the priests / monks they meet frequently noticed their excessive alcohol consumption only a few years later. Similar answers are given for noticing their addiction by the church hierarchy, i.e. their superiors.

After many years of (excessive) alcohol consumption, all participants in this study successfully overcame their own addiction, four of which thanked hospital treatment for success in healing, two cited self-recovery without hospital treatment, one cited meetings within the Club of Alcoholic Priests KLAS (hereinafter KLAS), one KLAS and Alcoholics Anonymous Club (hereinafter AA), one help of regular conversations with a psychologist, medication, prayer, and a more intense spiritual life. One of the priests who agreed to participate in the research, although he denies the addiction, pointed out that the AA, prayer, reading and meditation on the Holy Scripture, and prayer before the Blessed Sacrament have helped him a lot. Another priest who denies the addiction, but agreed to take part in the research, and who, as he stated, »has consumed alcohol all his life«, when asked about what contributed to his successful cure from addiction, stated, »I can but do not have to (drink), so I did not feel the problem of addiction« (Respondent 1).

When asked who showed the most misunderstanding while dealing with addiction, different responses were also noted. The results show that the priests believe they experienced the most misunderstanding from the church hierarchy / superiors, which was often or always experienced by a total of six priests. Furthermore, they state that they also experienced misunderstanding from the parish or religious community, which was often or always experienced by a total of four priests. The priests experienced the least misunderstanding from family members or relatives, only two of them, and only one experienced it from other priests or monks / nuns. On the other hand, the answers to the question about who showed the most understanding and offered them help indicate that most priests still felt lonely and condemned while dealing with addiction, because it is noticeable that only three priests stated that they often or always had help from family and relatives, and two of them that they have often or always experienced help or understanding from the parish / religious community, other priests / monks or the church hierarchy.

Table1: Frequency of the emergence of feelings during addiction<sup>5</sup>

FREQUENCY	1	2	3	4	5
FEELINGS					
1. Shame	1	2	2	1	2
2. Remorse	1	1	2	2	2
3. Self-disappointment	3	0	2	1	2
4. Disappointment with others	1	1	2	2	2
5. Condemnation by the environment	0	2	1	0	4

<sup>5</sup> One of the mentioned priests who denies alcohol addiction refused to answer this question.

The analysis also found that, as a result of dealing with addiction, various feelings emerged among the priests, as shown in Table 1, related to the perception and evaluation of oneself and one's environment. Assessing these feelings by the frequency of emerging on a scale from 1 to 5, it can be noted that the priests most often experienced a sense of condemnation by the environment, while the remaining feelings, i.e. feelings of shame, remorse, self-disappointment and disappointment with others appeared equally often among the priests. It can also be seen that the least common feeling among the priests during addiction was a feeling of self-disappointment.

Table 2: The impact of alcohol addiction on the prayer life of the priests

PRAYER LIFE BEFORE ALCOHOL ADDICTION					
	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
1. Holy mass	/	/	/	1	8
2. Breviary	/	2	2	2	3
3. Personal prayer	/	1	3	2	3
PRAYER LIFE DURING ALCOHOL ADDICTION					
1. Holy mass	/	/	/	2	7
2. Breviary	/	4	2	2	1
3. Personal prayer	/	4	2	1	2
PRAYER LIFE AFTER ALCOHOL ADDICTION					
1. Holy mass	/	/	/	1	8
2. Breviary	/	/	1	4	4
3. Personal prayer	/	/	2	2	5

When we talk about the consequences of alcohol addiction on the priestly life, the impact that addiction has left on priestly prayer life is first to be pointed out. The results shown in Table 2 indicate that the biggest changes can be observed in the frequency of practicing personal prayer, and then breviary, while the smallest changes are observed in the celebration of Holy Masses. Thus, during the addiction, almost half of the priests practiced their personal prayer rarely, and only two of them always, while after the addiction this number has increased to five priests who practice personal prayer daily and two who practice it frequently. Not a single priest appears in the 'rarely' category anymore. A significant increase in frequency is also observed in the practice of breviary, while no changes are observed in the celebration of Holy Masses.

Table3: Neglected dimensions of priestly life during alcohol addiction

	NEVER	RARELY	SOMETIMES	OFTEN	ALWAYS
1. Holy Mass	7	2	/	/	/
2. The celebration of the sacraments	5	3	/	/	1
3. Pastoral work	1	3	2	2	1
4. Catechesis	2	3	3	/	1
5. Administration	1	2	1	4	1

In addition to the observed significant influence of alcohol addiction on the prayer life of the priests, from the attached Table 3 we can see that alcohol addiction also left a mark on other dimensions of priestly life. Besides the already mentioned weak influence of addiction on the celebration of Holy Masses, we can see that it also disturbed the celebration of the sacraments the least, where only one priest pointed out that his addiction always obstructed this aspect of priestly work. It can also be noticed that only one priest stated that alcoholism did not affect his pastoral work, while three stated that it rarely interfered with it. Among the remaining five priests, it is evident that, to a greater or lesser extent, alcoholism hindered their pastoral work. A similar situation is noticed for catechesis, while administrative obligations were most often neglected during addiction, with most priests often or always.

Finally, when we consider the consequences that alcohol addiction has left on the priests, it is important to note that most participants in this study agree that it has left consequences on their physical health (five participants), while regarding the impact of addiction on their mental and psychological health there are more noticeable opposing views. Thus, three priests consider that addiction has left a significant mark, three are indecisive, while the other three believe that addiction has not left any negative impact on their mental health. Also, most of them, after successful healing, still perform the priestly service (six participants), while the remaining three are temporarily retired, permanently retired, or under suspension.

In the time after the addiction, as seen from Table 4, the people who provide support are of great importance for the priests. Again, we see that the priests have conflicting experiences about what motivates and encourages them the most to continue living and performing their priestly service normally. They believe the least support is provided by the AA, and that the greatest strength for daily dealing with the consequences of addiction on their lives is provided by regular prayer and sacramental life.

Table 4: Support and reliance for the priests after healing from alcohol addiction

THE GREATEST SUPPORT FOR THE PRIESTS AFTER ALCOHOL ADDICTION			
	Disagrees	Neither agrees nor disagrees	Agrees
1. KLAS	3	3	3
2. AA club	6	1	2
3. Support from fellow priests / monks	3	3	3
4. Support from the church hierarchy / superiors	3	3	3
5. Regular prayer and sacramental life	/	1	8

### 5. Causes of Alcoholism among the Priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese and the Consequences of Alcohol Addiction on Priestly Life and Work

The discourse about priests addicted to alcohol in Croatia and around the world is shrouded in secrecy. Occasionally in the newspapers, there is an article about a priest wrongdoer who caused a car accident (Vlakić) or caused a conflict (*CRKVENI TRANSFER*). However, even a small number of priests know that there is KLAS (*Biskupi posjetili katoličku bolnicu na Strmcu*) in Zagreb or that there is an informal club in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese for anonymous alcoholic priests who occasionally meet to help each other fight addiction:<sup>6</sup>

»I have to admit it is extremely difficult for me to accept the fact that I am an alcohol addict. Perhaps I would never have been ready to face my problem if it had not been pointed out to me by our Archbishop. That was a couple of years ago. Then I started attending as regularly as I could the KLAS meetings in Zagreb, where we were led by the late Markanović. After his death, priests with the same problem as me, at the level of our Archdiocese, began to meet at the Vicariate in Osijek. I attend these meetings regularly, there is frequent support and understanding from my friends, priests-alcoholics, as well as motivation and encouragement to continue to live and perform the priestly service normally« (Respondent 9).

<sup>6</sup> The testimony of several priests in a survey on priesthood and alcoholism.

Why do the phenomena described in the quotation above occur and why are the priests who have problems with alcohol silent? With a multitude of presumed answers, one certainly lies in the fact that today, as never before, the priesthood and the priest carry the burden of great expectations, challenges, and demands. The eyes of not only believers but also unbelievers are fixed on the priest and his life. Even the slightest mistake is met with condemnation. The priest is exposed to the »fires« of the public that has no understanding for either the priest's error or weakness:

»It is essential that an addict who abstains for a long time receives the recognition that he has done a heroic deed and that he can be proud of himself and that he pushes the stigmatization he feels away from himself and becomes aware of his value and beauty of life without alcohol. A former addict writes: 'When I stopped drinking alcohol, I felt many, numerous reliefs, and the biggest of them is: I stopped lying and I got rid of situations where I had to lie or hide the truth'« (Respondent 6).

In this context, it is significant that according to our survey 22.2% of alcoholic priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese do not admit alcoholism to themselves, although all other indicators confirm it. Not admitting to being an addict is a sign of a person's emotional immaturity. The difficulty of recognizing oneself as an alcoholic priest confirms the thesis that priests »addicted to alcohol are also emotionally immature« (Kovačić-Petrović et al. 497) as are the vast majority of alcoholics in other professions. With emotional immaturity, there is also a sense of shame. The shame of admitting to being an alcoholic strongly affects the »construction of a personality in which shame and embarrassment«<sup>7</sup> become a permanent habitus. The shame that is present, which is not only a consequence of sin but also of emotional immaturity, has largely directed the priestly identity, which is often imbued with deep-rooted emotions of »distrust, guilt, inferiority, isolation,« (Kovačić-Petrović et al. 508) introversion and withdrawal:

»During excessive alcohol consumption, I was extremely irritable, nervous, desperate, angry, often without any justification. I used to yell and threaten from the altar in the church, but none of the parish members wanted to point out the alcohol problem to me. Maybe out of respect for the priestly service or out of fear not to offend me. I often sang rude

<sup>7</sup> »Alcoholism is a syndrome based on shame just like other addiction syndromes... Alcohol can be considered as such a self-object, which a person compulsively consumes to reduce anxiety and to »heal« self-damage and at the same time reduce the feeling of shame and isolation; a person addicted to alcohol does not have an internalized function of self-pacification and is not able to independently calm psychological tension so that the function is achieved externally by consuming alcohol«. (Kovačić-Petrović et al. 508)

songs ('bećarci' – humorous, teasing and/or lascivious folk songs, and 'cajke' – folk music), told dirty jokes, thinking that I was popular, and it was completely different. I completely neglected every kind of prayer. A scandal and a disgrace to the priestly order to which I belong and the destruction of human dignity. I was really at the bottom. I used to convince myself that the parish members were to blame for my difficulties, and that was a big lie.< (Respondent 9)

For priests today, as well as for the church leadership (hierarchy), it is of great importance to find the causes of alcoholism among priests. According to our survey, more than 55% of alcoholic priests associate alcoholism primarily with experienced stressful events. Stress is defined as a set of emotional, physical, and behavioral reactions that occur when an event is assessed as disturbing, or as a set of mental and physical reactions to a stressor that puts demands on a person which cannot be met, and a stressor is an event that a person believes can disrupt the daily course of life (Jakšić 49-50). Exposure to frequent public appearances and numerous obligations for which the priest does not manage to prepare well, the stress associated with performing the priestly service,<sup>8</sup> and especially hectic lifestyle, on the one hand, make it difficult for most priests to joyfully, devotedly, fully and peacefully perform and live the priesthood, and on the other hand, it is a source of stress.<sup>9</sup> The stressor associated with the trauma of performing the priestly service points to the fact that the priesthood has its multiplicity and diversity of requirements for the lives of priests, while it also reveals that the complex preparation for the priesthood is often insufficient and incomplete. For most alcoholic priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese, alcoholism can be defined as genetically predisposed<sup>10</sup> (un)consciously false and systematic attempts to delay or prolong the response to stressful events or circumstances in which the priest feels extremely uncomfortable and upset and which he cannot control (Kozarić-Kovačić et al. 103-104):

>>I will never forget one funeral in 2005. I almost collapsed on the coffin which was lowered into the pit. That was resented by everyone present. On the same day, the whole parish was informed of it. Then, after a few days, the diocesan bishop called me. 'Reverend, what happened to you

<sup>8</sup> Such as frequency in preaching. A priest of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese gives five to seven sermons every week. See Šota, >>Poteškoće i mogućnosti<< 574-575.

<sup>9</sup> There are four types of stress: physical or external stress (e.g. exposure to heat and cold), psychological stress (e.g. conflicts with people), social stress (e.g. war), spiritual stress (e.g. sin committed). See Havelka 8-10.

<sup>10</sup> 44.4% of alcoholic priests in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese consider it the cause of their own alcoholism. These are priests who have been officially diagnosed with chronic alcoholism that has also been the cause of hospital treatment on one or more occasions.

at the recent funeral?’ – ‘Well, Bishop, the spirit is willing, but the body is weak. You know, as they say, an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. My father was an addict. Like father – like son!’ « (Respondent 5).

Another, equally important cause of alcoholism for alcoholic priests is the priest’s solitude. Solitude understood and lived as loneliness. In times of never greater opportunities for communication and never greater alienation, solitude or a feeling of loneliness is a common occurrence among priests today. The solitude of the priest is a question, not only of a comprehensive and quality preparation for the priesthood, but also a question of the lived Christological-pneumatological-ecclesial spirituality of the priest. In the image of Christ, the priest patiently, unobtrusively, and lovingly carries the daily cross of solitude. However, solitude in moments of weakness and spiritual fatigue becomes an unbearable burden that many priests find difficult to cope with. The Church’s Magisterium is aware of the weight of solitude. Therefore, the Directory for the Service and Life of Priests states that »with one of the most important problems of priestly life today – priestly solitude« (Kongregacija za kler, *Direktorij za službu i život prezbitera* no. 38, 73) today’s priests can only deal if they focus entirely on the spiritual dimension of the vocation, and cherish meetings with other priests and lay faithful, which will guide and help them walk the path of holiness through the dimension of communion.

The third, most common cause of alcoholism of the priests in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese is a lack of understanding from superiors and the environment or a feeling of misunderstanding from the hierarchy and the parish community for the difficulties they face every day. Although every priest during the formation prepares for selfless self-giving to Christ and the parish community, and is educated from the very beginning for »inner freedom that allows proper autonomy in performing the service and healthy distancing« (Kongregacija za kler, *Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no.148, 125) from any earthly attachment, it often happens that a priestly candidate during formation acquires a wrong picture of the priesthood or experiences personal disappointment in the hierarchy or the parish community during his priestly life. Disappointment in the priesthood is not uncommon. Pope Paul VI pointed out shortly after the end of the Second Vatican Council on Disappointment and Uncertainty in the Priesthood that »it affects the very nature of the priesthood, its human and ecclesiastical formation, its religious and apostolic function, its hierarchical and sociological position, its internal and external behaviour, its mission« (Rošićić 208-209). Therefore, disappointment can be subjective or objective in nature. The priest is today placed in question, under the question mark. Personal responses and responses at the institutional level of priests can lead to great personal disappointments. Many priests perceive misunderstanding as an everyday cross that needs to be patiently carried. The stimulating formative litera-



ture emphasizes: »The path to be followed in practice is the path of prudence« – it is a key virtue of action. It measures resources according to the goal and determines which ones to choose; it indicates which decisions should be made, which evils should be avoided, which values should be followed, and which risks should be taken« (Spiazzi 67). However, some priests fail to carry the daily cross of misunderstanding and initially withdraw into themselves, creating their own world isolated and distanced from the parish community, other priests, and the hierarchy, and eventually falling into addictive behavior, alcoholism.

One third of alcoholic priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese see the cause of their own alcoholism in the 'burnout syndrome', a syndrome of burnout in the workplace or burnout at work and identity crisis. Burnout at work and in life does not happen overnight. It is a cumulative process that has its phases and that affects many of today's professions and occupations (Samobolec and Železnik 5-9).

Identity crisis in the priesthood as a cause of alcoholism shows on the one hand that priests are also just people of their time. But on the other hand, it also points to the present universal identity crisis of the priesthood in the Catholic Church. Modern theologians speak differently about the identity crisis. Some of them see the cause of the crisis in outdated structures within the Church, from celibacy to lack of personal freedoms, others in the influence of the modern world on the priest, accompanied by insufficient formation, as well as disorientation in the changed pastoral paradigm after the Council (Bodrožić 595-596). The emergence of an identity crisis is inherent to every person, but what is specific for priests and their crises is the relationship of their fellow brothers and lay believers to their crises: misunderstanding and lack of personal support, conversation, and help is an additional burden and an aggravating circumstance, so some priests »seek salvation« in the wrong way and in the wrong places, in alcohol.

The »drinking culture« imbued with regular alcohol consumption at every significant event in human life looks favourably on alcohol consumption. Priests as »sons of the world« and as »shepherds in parish communities« are often found in personal and pastoral occasions where alcohol consumption is desirable. For most priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese, the occasional consumption of alcohol is not a problem. However, the company and socializing with »a glass« according to our survey is the cause of alcoholism for 22.2% of alcoholic priests in the Archdiocese. The pastoral constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, says about modern society: »The modern world shows itself at once powerful and weak, capable of the noblest deeds or the foulest; before it lies the path to freedom or to slavery, to progress or retreat,« (no. 9, 631)

Research shows that the consequences of alcohol consumption by alcoholic priests are significant, and in certain areas, like physical health, they are even permanent. According to our survey more than 55% of alcoholic priests have physical consequences due to alcoholism. The Congregation for the Clergy points out that »a priest is conceived in Christ's prayer to the Father for his apostles and in Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives.« (*Direktorij za službu i život prezbitera* no. 49, 94-95). Therefore, the life of a priest must be deeply imbued with prayer, connected with prayer, rooted in prayer (*Kongregacija za kler, Direktorij za službu i život prezbitera* 94-95). Research indicates that in a spiritual sense, chronic alcoholism disrupts the priest's overall evangelical personality based on the image of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10.1-21). In the life of an alcoholic priest, during the occurrence and duration of chronic addiction, personal prayer suffered most often and most significantly, followed by the breviary and personal sacramental life. Almost all addicted priests pointed out the absence of personal prayer during addiction. Only 22.2% of alcoholic priests prayed the Liturgy of the Hours regularly, while the rest occasionally or permanently neglected or ignored the prayer. On the other hand, research shows that after quitting alcohol consumption, it is personal prayer and the Liturgy of the Hours that give priests the spiritual strength to be and remain in permanent abstinence.

Since chronic alcoholism cannot be completely or permanently hidden or concealed, given that relatives, parish community, friends and the hierarchy observe and notice alcoholism almost simultaneously, the alcoholic priest thus becomes a source of scandal for the parish community, relatives, and friends, further burdening his life and work. Research shows that in the parish administration, where the priest, in addition to pastoral work, should be the most regular and conscientious, the alcoholic priest disregards or neglects his duties the most.

In the pastoral sense, the consequences of the priests' addiction are most evident in the neglect of regular pastoral and catechetical work. Pastoral activities according to some theologians are defined as »evangelical enthusiasm ordered by God« (*Škvorc*). The absence of enthusiasm, the partial or complete neglect of work, indicates that the addicted priest not only neglects pastoral and catechetical activity, but also like any addict is unable to perform his daily work and duties. The pastoral dimensions of the service are no longer feasible for an alcoholic priest, his view is missing or disappears, the view of the »Good Shepherd, who seeks, accompanies and leads his sheep« (*Kongregacija za kler, Dar svećeničkog zvanja* no. 120, 107):

»Sometimes I go through severe crisis situations, but I have learned to deal with them. I realize that years of excessive alcohol consumption have left visible consequences on my physical and mental health. But life

goes on. I try to fight with myself every day and every hour. The altar and pulpit are no longer the mouthpieces of my bad words. I try to understand my believers and accept myself as I am, but always in an effort to stay sober. Because when I was drunk then I was the worst nightmare, and now that I am sober, I feel better in the pastoral service I perform and in general as a person. I have set this parish on sound foundations, and I bravely move forward!« (Respondent 9)

### **Instead of a Conclusion**

Before Jesus Christ visibly left the earth, he made sure that his work remains in the Church permanently. He guaranteed to the apostles and their successors the service and mission until the end of the world, the service of sharing his priestly mission. The life and service of a priest has been and is being realized in a historical context that is regularly burdened with problems and contents in which the Church, a traveller in this world, exists and lives, as well as every priest of hers (Kongregacija za kler, *Direktorij za službu i život prezbitera* no. 45, 87). »Marginalization, subjectivization and ghettoization of the divine and the sacred in today's culture,« (Šota, »Pastoralno-teološka problematika« 165) are often a source of disorientation for both Christians and priests. Some priests of the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese, in moments of personal and pastoral evangelization crises, without seeking a solution and strength in the High Priest – Jesus Christ, fell into alcohol addiction and became chronic alcoholics.

The actual number of alcoholic priests in the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese remains unknown. The research indicates that there are nine priests in the Archdiocese who confessed the alcoholism and who participated in the research, five who briefly admitted the addiction, but were not ready to participate in the research for personal reasons, most often shame and embarrassment, and nine priests who have a big problem with alcohol addiction but who did not want to participate in the research. The research proved that 55% of alcoholic priests from the Đakovo-Osijek Archdiocese became addicted to alcohol due to exposure to stress, solitude or loneliness, and feelings of misunderstanding by the church leadership – the hierarchy and the parish community. One third of priests became addicted to alcohol due to burnout in the priesthood and the crisis of priestly identity, and 22.2% of priests became alcoholics because of the company in which and with which they began to consume alcohol intensively.

By participating in the research, priests (former) alcoholics, some of whom abstained for more than ten years, made it possible to point out the causes, nature, and consequences of alcoholism among priests. Also, research shows that alcohol-

ism among priests is not a negligible phenomenon, which is why it is necessary to talk about alcoholism among priests during the formation for the priesthood, at formative meetings of priests, and to provide a more systematic care for alcoholic priests by the church leadership – the hierarchy, and especially to help educate individual priests in order to better train them to help alcoholic priests.

Finally, the limitations of this study relate to the fact that it is not a representative sample which prevents the generalization of the identified difficulties encountered by priests facing alcohol dependence. However, given that this is a specific problem and the fact that the research presented here for the first time speaks about the problem of alcohol addiction of priests in Croatian society, we believe that the results still make a significant contribution to this issue and indicate that it is necessary to devote more meaningful and comprehensive work to the phenomenon of addiction, in order to facilitate the life and struggle of addicted priests during the fight against addiction, especially during their return to the lives of parish communities after successful treatment.

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## ALKOHOLIZAM MEĐU SVEĆENICIMA ĐAKOVAČKO-OSJEČKE NADBISKUPIJE

Stanislav ŠOTA\* – Ivana BENDRA\*\*

**Sažetak:** *Danas se u mnogim zemljama kao sve češći problem ističe alkoholizam, broj alkoholičara povećava se te se bolest javlja u svim zvanjima i zanimanjima. Stoga je važno progovoriti o sve prisutnijoj pojavi alkoholizma ne samo među vjernicima laicima nego i među klerom Katoličke Crkve. Cilj je ovoga rada upozoriti na uzroke ovisnosti o alkoholu te na posljedice alkoholizma na život i rad svećenika s područja Đakovačko-osječke nadbiskupije. Na temelju rezultata kvalitativno-kvantitativnoga istraživanja provedenoga metodom anketnoga upitnika na devet svećenika, uzorkovanih primjenom tehnike snježne grude, u ovome će se radu prvi put progovoriti o problemu o kojem se dosad nije progovaralo u hrvatskoj znanstvenoj zajednici. Provedeno istraživanje upozorava na stresne događaje, samoću i nerazumijevanje nadređenih i okoline kao glavne uzročnike alkoholizma među svećenicima.*

**Ključne riječi:** *alkoholizam, svećenik, Đakovačko-osječka nadbiskupija, uzroci, posljedice, snježna gruda.*

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