

The Illness and Cure of the Soul in the Orthodox Tradition

“ – But is it not confusing for us to speak of Orthodox psychotherapy? Did the Fathers use this term?

– All the patristic works mention healing the soul. Whether we say ‘healing the soul’ or ‘psychotherapy’, it is one and the same thing...In any case, the fact that we place the word ‘Orthodox’ before the word ‘psychotherapy’ differentiates it from any other psychotherapy.

– Do you completely deny, then, the views of contemporary psychology?

– First of all, I must underline what was said earlier, that the discovery of psychology...was the result of Western man’s disappointment, due to the betrayal and disregard of the whole neptic tradition of the Church. For people in the West, oblivious to the hesychastic and neptic tradition, the views of psychology came as a surprise. But they are no surprise to the Orthodox...The Fathers, and also contemporary ascetics, who know by experience the entire inner state of the soul, the wiles of the devil and the manifestations of the ‘old man’, as well as the energies of the grace of God, consider the discoveries of psychology as relatively uninteresting...

Our method is the following: without getting involved in a lot of inner self-analysis, we try to keep the commandments of Christ in our life. While we are attempting to keep the commandments, our old self with its passions is disclosed. Subsequently we struggle to be healed of our passions...We want more than psychological balance; we are looking for fullness of life.”

Orthodoxy and Psychology

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– You mentioned the gift of speaking in tongues, said Constantine. In the ancient Church this gift existed. Why has it vanished today?

- Who told you that this gift had vanished?
- But we do not see people today speaking in foreign languages.
- The gift of speaking in tongues was not for the Christians just to speak foreign languages. That, of course, also occurred, and it was the energy of God for the strengthening of the Church. As St John Chrysostom explains, once the Church was strengthened and the true faith was confirmed, it was no longer necessary. Miracles are mostly for unbelievers. So St John Chrysostom teaches that the fact that this gift ceased is a sign of the growth and consolidation of faith.

The gift of speaking foreign languages was combined with ceaseless inner prayer. The Apostle Paul says characteristically: ‘Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth: And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father’ (Phil. 2:9-11). In this apostolic passage, the connection between noetic prayer in the name of Christ with the phrase ‘every tongue’ is obvious. The name of Christ, which is pronounced in the heart, is a sign that the energy of God is within us and we have become at that moment the temple of the All-Holy Spirit. This name is a great power which subdues every other power, including, of course, the ruler of this world, the devil. This is noetic prayer. The Apostles were familiar with this inner prayer. The Apostle Paul is very explicit: ‘Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord’ (Eph. 5:18-19). These psalms and hymns and spiritual songs are noetic prayer, which acts in the heart by the energy of the All-Holy Spirit. This gift has never vanished from the Church. This is why we can say with certainty that those who have noetic prayer of the heart have the gift of speaking in tongues, because they speak the language of the angels.”