

Orthodox Confession and Psychotherapy (Protopresbyter Konstantinos Stratigopoulos)

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Introduction

We have before us an immensely significant issue; and a very delicate one, which we need to examine very seriously, because this very comparison that the subject denotes - Orthodox Psychotherapy versus Secular Therapeutic Techniques - can generate a lot of confusion and even unnecessary oppositions. Given that the subject is a huge one, I will try -in the limited time that I have at my disposal- to give a simple outline, a somewhat broad one, and also to present to your kind attention some very important concepts with simple words, so that you might have some sort of clue, some level of understanding, whenever you encounter these analyses, which will enable you to comprehend them a little better.

First of all, what does this comparison aim at? What is its objective? We need to firstly clarify certain meanings; we need to know what we have before us, and what those meanings are exactly; what terminology is involved. What exactly do we mean by the word “psychotherapy”? And secondly, we need to stress something that is both essential and crucial to our Church; that is, the risk of “taking in” inappropriate elements.

What is meant by “intake”?

What is meant by “intake”? You know, whenever our Church enters a place to do its pastoral duties, when it does missionary work, it “takes in” the elements of the culture that exists there - in that land - the “flesh” of that land -so to speak- and

within that “flesh”, it proceeds to reveal the love of God. Christ similarly took on the flesh of mankind – its human nature. Thus, “intake” is an important issue. **We take in whatever can be taken in for sanctification. Christ took on human nature; He did NOT take in the sinfulness of human nature.**

So, is there anything that we can take in, from those places where these procedures take place, or not? Is there anything - of all these methodologies that are being developed - that we can use as new techniques for approaching conditions of the soul? I need to stress in advance -regarding the areas that I am going to refer to and especially psychotherapy- that those who have preoccupied themselves with the subject all have a positive outlook, a positive predisposition; in other words, there is nothing sinister in their efforts. They sincerely want to help today’s tired and wounded people. It is an honest endeavour to help man. The thing is, however, how they are acting to help man.

Let me begin by first clarifying the terms. The more familiar terms that we have before us are the terms: psychiatry, psychology and psychotherapy. These three terms differ from one another. I will explain how they differ and what they are, so that Christians may become aware and not be puzzled and confuse matters in their minds.

What is Psychiatry?

Psychiatry -as a branch of medicine- deals with the functions of the brain, the nervous system and its neurotransmitters. I’m just saying this now in layman’s terms; in other words, psychiatry mainly deals with the physical aspects of the problem. And, just as we show respect towards medicine for all parts of our body, we likewise show respect towards those who approach the organic aspects of the brain, the nervous system (this is also an organ), and the so-called neurotransmitters; this being an attempt made by science today to discover deeper, organic functions, in order to cure

people. It is all about an organic issue and one has to admit that the majority of the psychiatric branch today confesses that the term “psychiatry” is inappropriate, because its content is physical. Very many texts have been written, both in our homeland (Greece) and abroad, with regard to the inadequacy of the term “psychiatry”. You see, the term itself confuses matters. **Psychiatry is a physical approach.** We have to make this clear. Therefore, we have nothing against psychiatry in this sense, i.e., if it merely defines a diseased brain, or nervous system, or anything else pertaining to the body. Of course the body can also become ill, through certain functions of the soul. We will examine this later on, but I believe you now understand that psychiatry is a scientific branch - a science - which examines a part of the body; it is only coincidental that it happens to be expressing whatever it expresses through an inappropriate label. Besides, in other countries they don't even speak of psychiatry; they speak of “mental diseases”. Thus, we shall not preoccupy ourselves here with psychiatry, since psychiatry does not attempt to penetrate other areas which it is not familiar with. It is a purely physical operation. I hope this is now clear to you.

What is Psychology?

Secondly, there is **Psychology**. Again, the term is unfortunate: what does Psychology do? It determines how a person behaves under various conditions. In other words, if for example a labourer works in a noisy factory, he becomes tired and ill, because the noise is too much for him. Psychology observes these reactions and reports that: “when there is noise, this man becomes upset”. This is a simple observation of one's responses. I am telling you this in a very simple manner: psychology simply observes the reactions of the soul, but the soul itself still remains an unfamiliar thing. Psychology merely observes behaviour. Someone sleeps in a place where there is no sunlight, which makes him feel somewhat depressed: this is what psychology will record. **It is all about observing behaviour, responses.**

What is Psychotherapy?

And then there is also **Psychotherapy**. This is the attempt made by certain people, to “heal the soul”. However, it is possible even for a psychiatrist to overstep his boundaries and indulge in psychotherapy. Likewise, a psychologist can also overstep his boundaries (for example, when he comments that a child living in a family that shouts or quarrels is a nervous child at school). This is a psychological observation. But an observation does not constitute an explanation of what the soul is. It is only an observation on how a soul expresses itself; it is only an effort towards curing the soul. I will stress that it is not necessary for one to be a psychiatrist -or a psychologist - to practise psychotherapy. You can also be a psychotherapist, who embraces miscellaneous philosophical views. **Psychotherapy is an expression of various philosophical perceptions regarding the soul.** And this is where the danger lies, because psychotherapy strives to heal the soul, and in fact it even proposes methodologies for the healing of the soul. That is why what concerns us (and where there can be an incorrect combination, with ecclesiastic- pastoral therapy and confession), is the psychotherapeutic approach. The other specialities, as I have said, are specific, provided they do not get out of line; (if a psychologist practises psychotherapy, then he has deviated from his role - the observation of the patient’s behaviour).

Does Psychotherapy have a definition of the term “soul”?

So, if you have grasped these basic premises that I outlined with regard to the terminology being used, I can continue. Now I will pause here, to ask what psychotherapy is, what it strives to heal, and how it actually heals. The first question: The science of Psychiatry itself is beginning to disavow the term “soul”. It does not acknowledge it. So, what exactly is it, that they call “a soul”? What is their definition of “soul”? As much as I could, I checked out many treatises and dictionaries pertaining to the realm of psycho-sciences. Nowhere is the definition of the term “soul” to be found. In other words, we deal with something -assuming we are psychotherapists- and yet we don’t even know what the core of our science is. When I say “geologist”, I mean the one who researches the earth, the core of his research is the earth. When I say “biologist”, I mean the one who researches the organic life of a living organism. All of these sciences each have a core; yet the psychotherapist - and of course the psychologist, who merely observes reactions of the soul to various

situations - do not know the object they deal with! **In Psychotherapy, there is no definition of the term “soul”**. It does not exist. Nowhere. Therefore, essentially, the “specialists” don’t actually know what they deal with. And that is precisely why I will now proceed to make a theological approach; to tell you what our Church says and then make a comparison.

Definition of the term “soul”, according to the Fathers of the Church.

I have found several definitions of the soul, in Patristic texts. Let me just quote two of the Fathers who approach the meaning of “soul” and who also give a definition of the term “soul”. There is a very simple - but essential - definition, which is given first of all by Saint Gregory the Theologian. This definition is found in one of his texts, the “Dogmatic Epics” (Epics = songs), which have been originally written in the ancient Greek language and in fact in the ancient Iambic poetic form (which is an extremely difficult poetic form), but I shall read a translation of it to you. (This is truly a magnificent piece of dogmatic poetry). Saint Gregory the Theologian says in his “Dogmatic Epics”, regarding the soul: ***“The soul is the breath of God, and it embraced as its companion whatever God assigned to it”*** - that is to say, the body. This was Saint Gregory’s approach - a simple one: “God gave breath”. A more advanced definition - a much more advanced definition - was given several centuries after Saint Gregory the Theologian, by Saint John the Damascene in that superb book of his (which I pray that every Christian might read), called the “Precise Edition of the Orthodox Faith”, where Saint John the Damascene sets out and analyzes, in a simple and elegant form, the dogmas of our faith. That is why it is called the “Precise Edition of our Orthodox Faith”. Let me read the text that Saint John the Damascene has written in there... Definition of the soul: « **The soul, therefore is a living, ordinary, incorporeal essence, invisible by nature to our corporeal eyes; it is something logical and intellectual; something without form. While it utilizes the body as an instrument and endows it with life and augmentation and senses and birth...(...)...but itself being independently pure, self-governed, with volition, energetic, changeable - that is, it can be influenced to change - it is also a created thing, since it has acquired all the above qualities by nature from its Creator, who it has acquired its nature from.**» And that’s how he presented it; it is a profound definition that would require hours to analyze.

Notice the word “essence”. This “simple” word - “essence” - is crucial to our analysis. Let’s recall Gregory the Theologian once again, who said that God is “simple”. And, since the soul is a creation of His, but is also the image of God, it too is “simple”; in other words, it is not made to have any discord. And it is of course invisible, logical and intellectual. So, just keep in mind that it is a living essence, a simple one, and everything else that we just mentioned, and of course that it is created - it has been created by someone.

I will now beseech your attention, to follow my words as much as you can, in three vital areas, which, if comprehended by the body of the Church, we will have in hand those weapons that are needed for differentiating and discerning among all the psychotherapeutic methods. I won’t say what they are, just yet. We must firstly be aware of the kind of treasure the Church possesses, then, by examining what the others have to show, we can make our comparisons, without any rivalries. I have already said that I respect the toil and the trouble taken by these people **they try to help some people to hold on; perhaps to keep them even from suicide. I can respect that! But that doesn’t mean I accept their methodologies or their definitions. Even though I have refrained from calling them blasphemers (I merely say that they are ignorant), it is a fact that we have a bounteous theology, which has ample beauty to offer, even to what they are doing.**

So, let’s take a look at three crucial points of our theology, which give essential replies to our overall research. I have the great pleasure today to present for the first time to you these things, as an outline of a large book that I am preparing on these issues. This is the first time that I am presenting my very first outline, to your kind attention.

First theological point.

What are those three crucial, theological points? Many Fathers of our Church have spoken on these points, but I have selected only a few parts and excerpts of their most sublime quotations.

The first theological point. Saint Gregory Palamas wrote something amazing; **that a person's soul possesses essence and energy**. Now, you shouldn't let the terminology confuse you. "Energy" is whatever we can perceive expressed: emotions, feelings are energies of the essence, which we cannot approach. "Energy" is all those things that express our behaviour. Essence and energy. Saint Gregory Palamas says that the soul of animals (note here, how he admits that animals have a soul; the only question is, what kind of soul is it ?) is the life force of their body. There is no essence to their souls; it is only energy. They feel hungry, they prance and jump about, because they possess nothing more than the energies that are displayed through the body. That is why, when their body is disintegrated, that energy is disintegrated along with it. It is nothing but an energy. It says so in the Holy Bible also. It says: "the blood of the animal is its soul. "But this is not the soul that we are talking about; what we perceive as "in the image of" ; it is merely an energy of the animal. Therefore, as you can see, we humans have both "essence" and "energy" in our souls. Only man has "essence". Energies are merely certain vital movements. The animal is not just flesh; it has movements; the Creator gave these to the animal. But they are only energies, they are not the essence. Saint Maximus the Confessor says: "the soul of man moves; it is nutritive and augmentative". (Motion-nutrition-augmentation: these are energies of the soul). He also says that the soul is "impulsive". Animals also act on impulse (they have urges) and that is an energy; but he says that in man **there is also "logic"; it is the Grace of God, which comes and establishes itself "logically" upon the soul**. That is the essence of God. Animals have the augmentative element and the impulsive element, but they don't possess the "logical" element; that is why Saint Basil of Caesaria - a Father of the Church - had said the following so eloquently in a work of his, the "Hexameron" [=The six days of creation]: "It is because animals do not possess this essence of the soul, that God substituted their lack of logic with a predominance of the other senses. We all know how animals are able to leap better than people; they run faster than us, and they do other things that we don't do, because they lack that essence of the soul, where logic resides, therefore they only have the impulsive and the nutritive elements. If we disregard the essence of the soul, what are all the other things? Mere animal expressions: anger...annoyance...nervousness... agony...I feel hunger...I don't feel hunger... I have needs... If I remove the essence - which only the Church

knows, who was the one that has also defined it - then what kind of soul am I talking about? If I can't discern this point regarding the essence and the energy of the soul as denoted by Palamas, Basil of Caesaria, Gregory the Theologian and Maximus, then how can I presume to approach the soul?

We shall see presently - with the few examples that I intend to present - how **all the psychotherapeutic methods ignore the logical side of the soul; how they merely curb or aggravate the human instincts as a therapeutic method. But they miss the essence of the matter. How can they cure the soul, when they are unaware that the soul is both essence and energy, and they assert that it is only energy?** I hope this point has become clear to you.

Second theological point.

Second theological point. And now the second definition, which is equally important. It is found in the theological treasure of Saint Maximus the Confessor. I will convey it in a simplified form. It says that everything -man of course included- has acquired its existence, its very being from a state of nothing, of non-being and it now moves. It is because everything was made by a cause that it moves. This is how man was made by God: he moves, because he was made by God. **He moves; he is in continuous motion. This motion was bestowed by God, so that man can move towards God. That is the purpose of the motion.** It is an ever upward motion; man is forever and ceaselessly moving upwards and towards God, until he finally ends up inside God, where - as the great theologian Maximus the Confessor says - man reaches a condition that seems as if he has paused, but in fact he hasn't. God is never-ending; He is eternal. Doesn't the Apostle Paul say: "from glory to glory"? And yet, man does eventually come to feel comfort, in God. And what does that mean? It means that man eventually becomes an inconvertible man. You see, although we may be incessantly moving towards God, we nevertheless succumb to sin - a little bit here, a little bit there - and we frequently fall into sinful thoughts, but, we still keep moving towards God, and **the therapeutic method of our Church is precisely a prompting, to keep us moving towards God.** The Church prompts us to keep moving, with its therapeutic advice: we pray, we repent, we put all our might into

it...this is the kind of movement that will take us to Him. But we constantly fall, again...and again... Well, to **“come to feel comfort in God” means to -at last-reach a motionlessness, which however is not motionlessness as we know it; it is the state of man when he becomes forever inconvertible. Only now, his soul is forever in motion; because, how would it be possible for the soul to cease moving, inside the Eternal? Inside the Never-ending? So, we have here something extremely significant: the movement of the soul towards its Creator, as a therapeutic process.** By ignoring this movement, how can you approach therapy? Pay attention to what is going on in the world today: people move about, horizontally. They run about incessantly. Others run excessively and become worn out, while others go to rest themselves because they are tired. Then there are others, who do nothing but rest themselves. Well, those who run may become ill, and those who don't run, may also become ill. What does the Church say? Both of these examples are wrong. If you simply run, without running towards your Maker, you run incorrectly. If you don't move, and therefore if you don't become inconvertible (which is a pausing - a “stasis” - as we have said), again it is an illness. How should a lazy person move, and how should a dynamic and active person move? Both of them should move towards God. It is not a matter of putting the lazy one to work, or putting the overworked one to rest a while. Both these conditions are illnesses.

If we do not comprehend this concept of “movement towards God” as saint Maximus the Confessor described it -which is the only therapeutic course for man- then we have achieved nothing. Not even within the realm of the Church. See how repentance is combined with confession. “Make a move”, you are advised. Make a move with your body. What is kneeling? What is fasting? What is observation of an icon with the eyes? What are all these physical acts that we perform in Orthodoxy, which cannot be comprehended by many people of other denominations? They are the movements of man as a whole, towards God. What is this continuous cycle of services by our Church? It is a cycle comprised of movements, morning, noon, evening: Midnight prayer, Evening prayer, Matins, Vespers...a continuous movement: The Hours - First, Third, Sixth, Ninth...a continuous motion, towards Him, towards God.

So, this point of “movement”, is momentarily called “comfort” by Maximus the Confessor, but he also gives it a slightly different name; you see, the term “stasis” is not the most suitable word. **Instead, he calls it “ec-stasy” - a different kind of “stasis”. It is a “standing still” within God. You stand still in Him, in comfort.**

And because God is Never-ending, you will continue to be in motion, but now it will be “from glory to glory”. Thus, our Church’s therapeutic approach - this one and only therapeutic approach -defines this method as “therapy of the soul”. You see, first we have the “essence” and the “energy”, and then we have this “movement”, this continuous movement towards God. So, if one doesn’t guide the ailing person along the lines of this “movement”, he will only be subjecting the patient to more oppression from all sides.

Usually, the patient is simply restrained so that he does not commit suicide, or become despondent, or destroy the world around him. Restraint is commendable, but a person cannot be restrained forever unless he is guided into this “movement” therapy. See, this is another determining difference; the crucial, unprecedented difference between our Church and any other psychotherapeutic procedures, even those with the best of intentions. I will say it again; I do not want to be misunderstood. People’s intentions are basically good; they truly do put in their best efforts and they really do exert and exhaust themselves in their efforts, but the exit from the patient’s tragedy is not exactly where they seek it.

Third theological point.

And it is the other crucial point, **the third theological point**, which can provide a difference. It is something quite amazing, which had been written by the two major Fathers, Maximus and Palamas. Let me read Maximus' words. "God" -he says- "who created human nature, did not implant sensuality in it". Now you shouldn't misinterpret this, because he then proceeds to clarify this, as follows: "but only a certain mental tendency towards sensuality." I would like to pause here for a minute; it is of vital importance. We humans are full of sensations; we see, we hear, we feel everything - all things are sensations. Sensations are given by God; however, God -Maximus says- did not endow all the senses with desire. **He did however endow them with the desire that will "move" them towards God**, provided the senses are directed towards God and they move in the direction of God - and we mean all the senses - which is what Orthodoxy does.

Man has this innate attraction towards desire; he definitely has it inside him, but the question is: what kind of desire is it? According to Maximus, it is the desire related to the "loving of God". Given that we possess this attraction, this "movement" towards desire, then the senses are nothing but mere senses (taste etc.), if this attraction is not destined for God. If it simply remains inside us, it becomes reversed, and becomes a desire focused on the senses only; and that is where sin begins.

You can see what an important point this is, in a psychotherapeutic procedure; in fact, Maximus stresses: "...and because God saw how man diverted all this desire - this tendency towards desire that was supposed to be directed towards God but was now directed towards the physical senses only - He introduced a medicine, a crucial therapeutic means. It was the medicine called 'grief', to which the desire that is about

to break out and become predominant is gradually submitted.” God therefore introduced grief as a medication. It is grief, which comes to thwart man’s desires.

Please allow me to repeat these three crucial theological points, simply so that you may keep them in mind further along, because they are what our talk will be based on; **these points define the essential difference between the Church sacrament (Confession) - and the therapy it offers - and all other, well-meaning and honest therapeutic endeavours. I will firstly repeat the difference in essence and energy in the soul. “Energy” refers to the external expressions, while “essence” is the aspect of “logic”. The second point is that only the “movement” in the direction of God -and no other movement- can heal man, as defined by Saint Maximus the Confessor; movement, which evolves into “stasis” (non-movement), then “ecstasis” (ecstasy), then into movement again. The third point is the impact of desire, the inclination towards desire; when desire isn’t directed upwards, vertically towards God -because we don’t make this movement to love God thus with our senses. This will cause side-effects that break out in horizontal directions.** It’s something similar to holding on to a rocket which should move upwards but, if the launch is unsuccessful, the rocket explodes horizontally and wrecks the environment around it. That’s what happens. This force called desire - which is God-given - is a strong desire that should be a desire to love God. We move towards God and then this desire appears. If it is not manifested upwards towards God, with the force that it has, it will manifest itself downwards and infiltrate all of man’s senses, thus making man a man of desires, like gluttony for example. So, there we have the three crucial theological points.

Now let’s see what a psychotherapeutic approach does. I have already explained how psychiatry is a physical approach, psychology is a simple observation of behaviour, therefore, all that remains is psychotherapy in today’s society. These things that I have just told you, are not known to psychotherapists, although they should have known them, since they talk about and study the soul; and yet, they haven’t given a definition of what the soul is (whereas we did define it, with the terminology of Saint John the Damascene), and they haven’t even bothered to do any research, and find out what the preceding centuries have said about the soul. So, they started something, without having any background information. And they began to make assumptions. They asked things like “why is man like this?”. They coined two terms

- two basic terms: “neurosis” and “psychosis”. I won’t go into their analysis - I don’t want to tire you. What is the cause of neurosis? This is the psychotherapists’ biggest concern: how to cure neurosis. They see man tired, collapsing. Now observe the critical point: they begin to make assumptions. But assumptions will always be assumptions. An assumption carries in it a philosophical proposition, because it is just an assumption. Thus, they will say the cause is this, or that, or that... Over time, they have “declared” 200, 300 different causes, and that’s why nowadays we have 200 and 300 schools of psychotherapy. Each therapist focuses on one aspect, and he might also possess an element of truth therein; thus, every time such a school begins therapy sessions, the therapist appears to be aware beforehand what the patient’s problem is. He just tries to reveal it. If he has “diagnosed” that the problem is egoism, then that’s the area he will focus on; if he says it’s something sexual, then he focuses on that area. The therapist “recognizes” the problem beforehand as a philosophical hypothesis, and then he proceeds to locate the problem that he has defined.

And this is where things become more complicated: **all psychotherapeutic methods are nothing more than philosophical approaches. They are not genuinely scientific approaches.** Psychotherapy has nothing to do with psychiatry (the brain, the nervous system, neurotransmitters); nothing whatsoever. These people have maintained an inappropriate label - “psychiatry”- which is one thing, whereas **philosophizing about the problem** is an entirely different thing. I need to stress something important once again. They claim that: “it doesn’t matter that we don’t know the definition of the term ‘soul’. Isn’t the soul a created thing? Isn’t it a creation? If only God is uncreated, therefore the soul must be a created thing. OK. Then everything created can be subjected to research.” Well, do you know what Saint John the Damascene says? That: “not everything created can be analyzed”. But, what are you saying here, John? If it is created, it surely can be subjected to examination, or put under a microscope, or be placed under observation. Or not? Question: *Tell me, are the heavenly hosts of the Archangels created, or uncreated? They are definitely created. Well, can they be examined or analyzed? No. Therefore, we see how “not everything created can be analyzed”.*

The same Saint continues his train of thought: “What similarity is there, between humans and the heavenly hosts [the angels]? It is that mental movement towards God, which is not found in the souls of animals as we have said, because they only

have energies, not the essence, as is the case with the soul of man. You see, **that which cannot be analyzed by man, is the essence of the soul, which, albeit created, cannot be examined, as is the case of the heavenly hosts. Therefore the soul cannot be analyzed.** Those who dare to claim that the soul can be an object of analysis, are mistaken. The soul is created, but cannot be analyzed. Thus, even if they try to identify the soul, they will still be unable to analyze it.

Some might say that one day a scientific methodology will come along, and will disclose the soul to us. No, this will never happen. The only thing it will do, is define the energies, not the essence of the soul; the energies that we can perceive. And yet, despite all the above, we have every school making its own proposals - proposals on the appropriate therapy - and that is where the maze called “psychotherapy” begins.

I will give you a few examples, a few hints about all these schools, just to give you a small taste of what things are like, but again reminding you that the so-called therapists do have the best of intentions at heart. Nevertheless, it is both impossible to analyze the soul, and to give the soul those things that I have mentioned: the essence, the logic that is Christ’s, the movement towards God, and the direction of desires vertically, upwards, because all their proposed therapies move in a horizontal direction. They observe man as something that is beyond God and they try to heal him. How? Can they heal the essence? The movement? The desires? All of their theories - 25 of which are prevalent in Greece nowadays - **all of them, but absolutely all of them, approach man without taking into account the magnitude of these three points that I have mentioned. Therefore it is impossible for the soul to be healed.**

What are the secular methods of Psychotherapy?

Well, here are some examples. The first well-known example is from Freud; the father of psychotherapeutic methodologies. Remember, he was a psychiatrist, but he inaugurated the combination of psychotherapy and medicine, which means he essentially became a philosopher. Now, pay attention to this observation: **every form of psychotherapy is an exclusively philosophical approach; that is why in Greece today, so many psychotherapists are not doctors**. They usually attend a seminar of a year or a year and a half, and they instantly become psychotherapists. You could go to a social services school, take a lesson in psychotherapy and become a psychotherapist, as a social worker. You must bear this in mind: this secular “psychotherapy” is only a philosophical approach. Thus we see how Freud, being unaware of this upward direction of the soul, quite correctly specifies that the root of the problem is located in the instincts; that it is found inside the instinct of desire: within man’s instincts. And that is exactly where he places the term “subconscious”. That is where it is hidden. Now, because there are certain social restrictions, certain laws, or regulations, well, you feel somewhat constrained and you don’t express those instincts openly; you are somewhat fearful of them. These regulations are referred to as the “superego”, which is above the person and exerts pressure on him. Thus, under the pressures of the law, of ethics, and reinforced of my own urges, what eventually springs forth is the “ego”, i.e. how I project myself. There are certain things that I want to do instinctively, but I am hindered by law and ethics, therefore I am this “ego” - this oppressed “ego”. From that moment on, the person begins to disclose what the dominant instincts are. One such instinct is the sexual drive. That’s how they start off. They have correctly defined that it has to do with instincts, but what instincts are they? How can they cure these instincts? They do not have the upward motion, the movement towards God, the desire-grief. How can they cure, then? They can’t.

From there on, each school’s proposal begins to align itself with Freud, or be a slight variant of it. Freud’s concept, as you well know, is for the patient to start narrating his life, on, and on and on... for a very long time... Freud’s basic, primary method was to pursue this narration for 5-6-7 years, after which time, gradually, from inside you, you will be freed of all the taboos and the superego that oppresses you; all those ethical laws that you only disclose to your psychotherapist are eventually released from inside you, until finally the subconscious is also released from inside you. But, where is the therapy here? If the findings show sexuality as the root cause, how is the patient going to be cured? What will become of that desire? Where is that perverted desire going to be directed? There are no answers to these questions.

There is yet another process, which also goes through another philosophical method called “transference”, where the patient has a unique rapport with his therapist; this is a relationship, where the therapist assumes the role of the patient’s parent, or even mentally substitutes the role of the lover. This condition, where the subject under therapy idealizes his doctor, his therapist, is a basic method of the classic Freudian approach. Here, the patient idealizes and also acquires a role model at last in his life - because he has never had one before; because he has gone through those innermost instincts that were also expressed improperly and now at last he has found a role model in his life. Thus begins the dreadful process called “transference”, where the persona of the patient becomes attached to the persona of the therapist - a process that takes several years. You see how a mere specification of the sexual instinct receives no actual therapy, and is also handled with an inappropriate methodology.

How the “ego” is cured, according to Saint Maximus the Confessor.

Let’s attempt a few other observations. Here’s the familiar Adler story. He says there is a superiority instinct, but doesn’t say how it can be cured. He says I should locate where it is, and see how accurately I can express it. Well, we call this phenomenon egoism. **How can this be cured? Where will that “ego” end up?; According to Maximus the Confessor, the “ego” ends up with God and becomes a proper “ego”. Without God, it is merely a sensual “ego”.** You see, the “ego” again; the ego which has to present itself before God: “I Am He Who Is” - and you, who are you, the creation, finally finds “Him Who Is”. But that is a humble - a humbled - “ego”, that finds itself face to face with God. So, what becomes of that “ego”? Where will it express itself? What are the means, the mechanisms that will pin it down? Freud asks: “How did man reach this condition? How did he get there? Sex is to blame.” Adler says: “What is the patient trying to achieve with what he’s doing? Well, he wants to become a leader.” Then along comes a third specialist, Carl Jung, who defines the symbolisms of what man does. So now, symbolisms enter the picture. The patient enters a chaotic procedure. Questions: what is the symbolism of what you’re doing? Quite possibly it does symbolize something. But again, that is not where therapy is located. From there on, an entire sequence of phenomena unravels - there

are students of Freud who have denied Freud and have established their own schools. For example, there is Otto Rank who focuses on the trauma of birth. Apparently, according to him, the moment that a child is born it suffers a kind of shock and that shock stays with that person forever. Whatever happens to that person throughout his life -whatever psychological problem arises- is the result of the birth trauma, every time. He asserts that birth is the cause of primeval stress; you see, he claims that exiting from the mother's womb into the outside world is a kind of shock, and that this shock is a determining factor in your life. Well, that's what Rank says. Now, Theodore Reich asserts something else. In fact, he wrote a book titled "Listening with the third eye". It refers to the absence of maternal attention during the first stages of our life. He has transferred the previous theory of birth trauma to the first years of childhood, the first weeks of a person's life. For example, in the case of a somewhat carefree mother, a working mother who could not be near the child etc., the psychotherapist searches...searches...for the root cause. If you were to go to a Reichian school, they would know beforehand that you are neurotic, because you were deprived of maternal caring during the first years of your life, so they search in that area. But what if that isn't the root of the problem? Even if the problem were there, is the therapy there as well? Supposing they found the root of the problem; it might be thus in some cases, but not in all cases.

Or you could go to other methods such as Erich Fromm's. Erich Fromm, who asserts that "for a man to be cured, it is not enough for one person to be cured; all the society must be cured; because society is the measure of everything". And I ask, how is society supposed to be cured? "They all have to undergo psychoanalysis," is the reply. Could this be possible? The proposal is so absolute. It simply cannot be realized.

And what does the Church say? It says that we want a communion in Christ; we want all the world to be one, in Christ. **We begin by healing the individual, and each individual will subsequently cause society to be transformed. But the question is: how is the individual healed? Well, he is healed by submitting himself to the upward movement, through grief, through asceticism and pain.** This is a vertical statement that doesn't appear to have much to say. Listen to what the well-known "psychotherapist" Wilhelm Reich has to say: he says that the reason for a neurosis is that we do not express ourselves bodily; that we do not allow our body to express itself freely. And absolute expression is found in absolute sexuality -

a sexual explosion, according to Reich; an explosion that must be pursued. Listen to Reich's therapeutic method: you must scream, beat yourself, and -excuse the vulgarity- you must force yourself to vomit, to masturbate, to perform mutual masturbation, mutual sex and group sex. Apparently, this "therapy" is supposed to relieve the body. Well, this is far from just a simple tendency towards sensuality; this is an all-out concentration of sensuality, poised to express itself outwards. What can this sort of thing heal? **What do all these methods have to do with the wholesomeness of our Church?**

Unfortunately, our time is limited, and I can't read any of the Patristic texts on the matter. All the pertinent texts by the Fathers will be included in the humble piece of writing that I am preparing.

Then there are numerous other positions pertaining to psychotherapy: there is the existential analysis - the problem of why we live, why we exist, man's agonies etc., according to Rollo May. Another theory is the one that says man can be comprehended only on the basis of his overall "data base", i.e., you must know his living conditions, what he is like, why he is like that, what he eats, etc. and only then can he be healed. This is called "morphological therapy". So many names... "rationalist psychotherapy" by Albert Ellis: the inability to prove anything in our lives; Maslow's analysis : if we attain self-realization, we save our lives; Erikson's analysis. What a bunch of unlikely hypotheses !! I am holding a list of them in front of me, and it's making me dizzy. And all these versions end up in another form of evolution - "group therapy" - where the therapists realized that they were each telling theories and every patient could be in a totally different situation, with a totally different problem, and with a different cause. So they thought, why not put them all together, and if all the cases are heard, then we will have a mass result. So, you listen to 20 different causes of ailments and you assert that they are all yours. One person shouts out: "I have become sick because of my mother"; the other person claims he is sick because he didn't express himself bodily; the other person claims he suffered shock during birth, and the other one claims his problem was a sexually-based one. They listen to all these things in one group, and they tell you: "you too are somewhere within these causes". Unfortunately, in this way, you enter the group with one problem and you leave the group with twenty problems. The end result is a vast chaos, which has nothing to offer to this research of ours.

Whosoever despises his soul for my sake and the Gospel's, he shall save it.

Concluding this brief analysis, I will mention one or two final things, which you might find helpful. First of all you will come to realize that in all these “therapies” (where the people involved are sincere and truly seek to help others - but how?) there is no mention whatsoever of a therapy for the human vices and urges; no reference to the soul, or to ascesis, to desire, to “logic”- no mention of any of these issues. Not a word. Finally, I am reminded of what Christ had said in his amazing talk, which the Fathers interpreted. Have you ever pondered on our Christ's words, when He said “whosoever wants to save his soul, must despise it”? **«Whosoever despises his soul for my sake and the Gospel's, he shall save it»**. Have you ever considered these words? Tragic, isn't it? To hear Christ Himself say: «Whomsoever **despises** his soul». What are You saying here, my Lord? You are the One who gave us our soul. To which, our Fathers reply with an awesome interpretational skill: **«the soul here is the one that moves without essence, and only with its energies, only with its animal capacities»**. Hence the Gospel event, where the foolish man had said: “oh my soul, eat, drink and enjoy yourself, for you have many riches”. Do you see? These are the animal energies, and the excessive preoccupation with the soul without the necessary upward movement, without the essence, without the pain and the grief. «Whosoever despises his soul». **This is the soul that you must despise: the one that you preoccupy yourself with incessantly, in response to its animal energies only. You must abandon the ways that you are accustomed to, and attend to the logical side of your soul (=the essence), and the upward movement, towards God (the second therapeutic means) and thirdly, direct yourself, by transcending your desires, and turning towards God and grief and ascetic pain. Finally, you will arrive at the Sacrament of Confession. That is where therapy is assigned. That is how the ailing soul is transported to another dimension.**

Can a Sacrament tolerate techniques and methodologies?

They ask, what penance am I given? Well, that's the rule: a turn towards God, of the body, of the senses, of my entire existence; the introduction of logic, the Logos, into my soul, so that Christ the Logos may reside inside the soul. Having achieved this, the soul will no longer be a soul that says "oh my soul, you have so many riches"; instead, it will be a soul that says "my soul, my soul, rise up! Why do you sleep?" Can you see the difference? We are going through the period of Great Lent. And **the Sacrament does not tolerate the techniques of all the above methodologies.** Techniques? What techniques? Techniques are nothing more than philosophical formulations and attempts to control a person's passions from exploding even more, horizontally. There is no technique that we can borrow. So I return to what I began with. No, we cannot take in any of the above methodologies. It is not possible. It is not acceptable. It's one thing that the Church can take the bread from the bakery to use it for the Holy Liturgy; that is a kind of "intake". And it's another thing to take in methodology. We cannot take in methodology. From Psychiatry we can take in the information about the function of the brain, the neurotransmitters, and understand a few extra things. We can even take in the observation from the psychologist: «see, a child living in a family where it is being oppressed, will be a disturbed child at school» and absorb it as an ordinary observation; just listen to this viewpoint. **But, we cannot take in any of the secular so-called "psychotherapeutic" methods. It is against the law of our Church. The Sacrament is not subject to such a methodology,** for the reasons that I have analyzed.

The subject was a difficult one, and I tried to bring it to you in a simplified manner, in many, many small pieces, so that you might have a reasonably clear idea of the chaos that prevails nowadays. Other than that, with regard to those who are not in the body of the Church and yet try to hinder others from jumping out of windows (until they eventually discover the Church), well they are doing their best to help.

(From a tape-recorded talk by protopresbyter Konstantinos Stratigopoulos to the Panhellenic Parents Union in the Athens suburb of Saint Paraskevi, on 18th March 2003).

(SOURCE: I.M. GLYFADAS)

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