



Archim. Hierotheos Vlachos

# The illness and cure of the soul in the Orthodox tradition

translated by  
**Eric Meyerschal**

## CONTENTS:

- INTRODUCTION
- FIRST MEETING - FIRST ACQUAINTANCE
  - The sermon
  - Meeting at the parish center

### 1. ORTHODOXY AS A THERAPEUTIC METHOD

- How I was led to the conclusion that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment
  - Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science
  - Orthodox faith is connected with cure
  - Two kinds of faith
  - Orthodox Theology
  - Differences between Orthodoxy and other confessions
  - Theology is not philosophy
  - Orthodoxy and psychology
  - Theology and religion

### 2. THE ILLNESS OF THE SOUL

- A clear idea about Orthodoxy
- The soul of man
- Soul and body
- What exactly the illness of the soul is
- Nous and reason
- The Fall of man
- Locating the illness is a necessity
- The darkness of the nous-a consequence of the Fall
- Phantasy-another consequence of the Fall
- Emotion and how it is cured
  - The movement of the nous according to nature, contrary to nature and above nature

### 3. THE CURE OF THE SOUL

- People uncured, being cured and already cured

- How the cure of the Saints is meant
- Cure is the illumination of the nous
- Ways of cure
  - Orthodox faith
  - Being aware of our illness
  - The Orthodox therapist-priest
    - a. About the term "therapist"
    - b. The basic work of the priest
    - c. Baptism and cure
    - d. Two kinds of Baptism
    - e. Mysteries and asceticism
    - f. Priesthood and the stages of spiritual life
    - g. Connection between theology and spiritual fatherhood
    - h. The deified
    - i. The difference between a spiritual father and a psychologist
    - j. Is it likely that a spiritual father becomes an idol?
- The Orthodox therapeutic method or Orthodox asceticism
  - Purification, illumination, theosis
  - Separating nous from reason
  - Watchfulness and prayer
  - Noetic hesychia
  - Noetic hesychia - "the way" to theosis
  - Our age is anti-hesychastic
  - St. Gregory Palamas on hesychia
  - The Theotokos-the perfect model of a hesychast
  - Phantasy
  - Logismoi
  - The Passions
  - Dispassion
  - Sacramental and ascetic life
  - Noetic prayer and prayer of the intellect

#### 4. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

- Natural and spiritual knowledge
- The three kinds of knowledge according to St. Isaac the Syrian
- Knowledge according to St. Gregory Palamas
- Theoria-vision of God
- Degrees of theoria

#### 5. ORTHODOX MONASTICISM

- How the Orthodox Tradition changed
- Orthodox Monasticism-a manifestation of Orthodox Tradition
- Life on the Holy Mountain as representing the Orthodox way of life
- Monasticism and the cure of the soul
- Apostolic communities
- Western and Orthodox Monasticism

#### 6. THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

- The Orthodox Tradition is connected with cure
- Liturgical arts and man's cure
- Customs and how they are related with man's cure

#### CONCLUSION

## INTRODUCTION

In a meeting with some Christians some time ago we had a very interesting discussion on matters of spiritual life. Their questions and even their objections were so many that I accepted to return in order to continue our conversation. I considered it my obligation to present the basic points of these discussions, because I think that they will be more generally beneficial, since there are many contemporary Christians who have similar questions and objections.

By introduction, I feel I should give a few details about my conversants and mention some of the most characteristic features of their personalities. This will help the reader to understand better their questions, because a person's questions and objections are closely related to his whole way of life, and also to his personal experience with its negative and positive aspects.

Fr.Philip: He is a very good priest, who works with missionary zeal with his flock. He is very sensitive and very interested in effectively helping his flock. He regularly celebrates the Liturgy and tries to develop the liturgical life of his parish. He is a successful preacher. Nevertheless he is very hesitant when it comes to the ascetic teaching of the Church, not out of objection, but out of ignorance regarding this side of ecclesiastical life, and on account of the ideas he was moulded with both in the University and the Sunday Schools.

Athanasios: He is a person who relies more on reason. He aims at his inner self-improvement through reasoning. And it is true that many times his strong mind has helped him in the past to avoid serious mistakes. Therefore, he stresses the importance of reason too much. He was involved in many social and political organisations, even in religious communities, having been frustrated by all of them. He has been learning about the Orthodox tradition lately and seeks to live it. Yet, his greatest problem is the priority he gives to reason, its deification, absolutization, and autonomization on his part.

Constantine: He has lived many years guided by his reason. Lately though, he comprehended the great distortion which self deification of reason causes to spiritual life. He has powerfully realised that the excessive stressing of reason is a heretical state which does not constitute an Orthodox life. It is the Barlaamite attitude of the interpretation of spiritual life. He has studied psychology. He can judge people by their words and reactions and present their personality with great ease. He has a great thirst for the Orthodox Tradition, read a few books and realised that the Holy Fathers see man and the world through another prism. He would like to attain this life. However, he is dreadfully prevented by his previous knowledge, as well as by his own background: a tradition founded on reason. Nevertheless, he is drawn to patristic teaching and makes great attempts to live it.

Irene: She is the only woman in the group. She has an intensely emotional nature. She has had many negative experiences. She sees the patristic teaching of the Church with great interest. She feels the Church to be a Hospital, without anyone even having taught her this. A hospital which cures the sick person. She feels she is sick and is seeking cure. But she sees cure only externally- as a deliverance from the pangs of a guilty conscience and a liberation from anxiety and insecurity. She considers love and loving care as cure.

Basil: He is a person of conservative principles. His elderly age helps him to be conservative. He has learned the practical side of Christianity and often revolts against the expression of new opinions. The ethical and practical side of Christianity comforts him, and thus he sees the patristic teachings with considerable scepticism. His perspective of things is very limited. The patristic analysis of the soul; discussions about the nous and the heart; the distinction between reason and the nous, etc., bother him very much. He considers them to be philosophical pursuits which distort spiritual life.

This was the group with which we often conversed, after our first encounter. Of course during the conversation I did not have the possibility to cite passages of the holy Fathers of the Church. Sometimes I used a few from memory. But the reader of this conversation can find full patristic proofs in my books concerning the Orthodox Cure of the Soul, that is in 1) "Orthodox Psychotherapy", 2)"Therapeutic Treatment" and 3)"Conversations about the Orthodox

Psychotherapy". In these books the reader will find a greater analysis of the positions which are presented here, where they are simplified. Furthermore one should not forget that what is presented here are the main points of the discussions, and of course, in a conversation one cannot make greater analyses, but touches only upon the basic topics.

I pray that the publication of these conversations benefits the readers. And the benefit is none other than the realisation of one's illness and the seeking out of a therapist and therapy.

Written on the 14th of November 1987 memory of our Father among the Saints Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica.

Archimandrite Hierotheos S. Vlachos

## **FIRST MEETING - FIRST ACQUAINTANCE**

A Sunday in 1987, I celebrated the liturgy at a church in Athens. It was a very large church, filled with people. During the divine Liturgy I developed a passage from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians, which was the reading of that Sunday. The passage which I analysed briefly was: "I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jew's religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1,13-14). I persisted more in the phrase "being a zealot of the traditions of my parents". Among other things I also said the following.

### **The sermon**

"The Apostle Paul was not an ordinary personality. He studied the Law with the most important teachers of his time. He had Godly zeal. Yet, despite the knowledge of the Law and his Godly zeal to keep the paternal traditions, he reached the point of fighting God Himself, Who gave the Law. For, according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, all the revelations and Theophanies of God in the Old Testament were Theophanies of God the Word- of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, Christ handed down the Law, which Saul knew, and it was in the name of this Law he fought Christ. Here we see a tragic situation.

However this also happens in our day. Many times we have Godly zeal, but it is "zeal without discretion". Today we have a tendency to follow the teaching of the Fathers, to speak about the Tradition of our Fathers and attempt to revive these patristic traditions. Yet, it is possible that we struggle for the Tradition and in reality we fight the essence of it or, at least in the best case, we might be ignorant of it. I will mention three cases:



There are certain overzealous Orthodox who struggle to keep the Church's dogmas. And indeed this is necessary, because the dogmas are the expression of the life of the Church. It is for this reason, in fact, that the dogmas are called boundaries, which draw the lines between truth and error. Simultaneously, though, the dogmas are the way and the medicines which we receive to be cured and reach theosis- they are the personal revelation of God to us. There are some people today who view the dogmas as philosophical thoughts, as the philosophy of the Fathers. Just as there are also others who belittle them for the sake of an experience. Yet, this is an error. The dogmas are the expression of the life of the Church. Guided by them we shall reach the "unspeakable words".

There are many people in our days who are interested in the art of the Church. They speak a lot about the so-called Byzantine iconography, Byzantine architecture, Byzantine music, etc., because these ecclesiastical liturgical arts show the qualitative difference from any other religious art. Certainly, this is not an exaggeration, since the experience of the Church is manifested in ecclesiastical art. The element of joyful sorrow is expressed in Byzantine music and this alone can present it. Panselinos' frescoes convey the entire faith of the Church and the theology of St. Gregory Palamas, who is indeed the voice of the Church. The theology concerning the uncreated Light and the development of hesychasm- which reveals man's capability to reach the vision of God- were very well embodied in Panselinos' art.

Furthermore many modern Greeks, tired of the western alienating tradition and mode of life -which in many aspects is inhuman- seek the true tradition which imbued the life of our ancestors. Thus in our day there can be seen a revival of the traditional way marriage was performed as well as of traditional architecture. In general, people make efforts to cultivate traditional habits and customs.

And of course, we cannot criticize all these efforts. But there is also the danger of our being zealots about our paternal traditions, like the Apostle Paul prior to Damascus, while in reality fighting the life which these traditions express. It is dangerous for us to see the dogmas as philosophical definitions or, even, as theological definitions which do not relate to life. It is possible to study ecclesiastical art and see its aesthetic side, while simultaneously

rejecting its ascetic side, which is its most important aspect. Moreover the danger lurks that we may be reviving the mode of life of our forefathers, but also be completely ignorant of all those vital elements which constitute our manners and customs; all those presuppositions which created them. Thus we simply make a culture out of Tradition. This is one of the most crucial temptations of our days.

However, how can we escape this difficulty and this contemporary temptation? The only way is for us to follow the correct Orthodox way and Orthodox methodology so as to be cured and encounter life itself, which is expressed by everything we mentioned earlier. The Holy Fathers have presented in their works this Orthodox method, which is summarized in the three fundamental stages of spiritual life: purification of heart, illumination of the nous and theosis. If we study the works of the Holy Fathers, we shall find these three stages of spiritual life everywhere. Evagrius Ponticos defines Christianity as "the dogma of our Saviour Jesus Christ consisted of the practical and natural and theological". St. Dionysios the Aeropagite speaks of three stages, which are purification, illumination and perfection. St. Gregory of Nyssa uses the same distinction. St. Maximos the Confessor speaks of practical philosophy (purification), natural vision (illumination) and mystical theology (theosis). St. Symeon the New Theologian divides certain of his chapters into practical, gnostic and theological. In all the Orthodox tradition these three stages of perfection are spoken of. This is how man is healed and this is how he lives the Tradition. He "becomes" Tradition and creates Tradition. He is a bearer of Tradition.

Therefore, what makes a person an Orthodox is not only his persistence on external sides of the Tradition, but the experiencing of its inner aspect, which is the ascetic method- purification, illumination and theosis. This method, these stages of spiritual life are the foundation of dogmas, the basis of ecclesiastical art, but also the creative cause of habits and customs of our people, because it is this theology which imbued our forefathers before we were westernized.

For this reason, I concluded, we must struggle to keep this inner side of the Tradition, the method of Orthodox piety, through which we are healed, and then we shall be true zealots of our paternal traditions. Because outside this ascetical therapeutic method, even if we have a

good disposition, there is the danger that we may become enemies and opponents of the Orthodox tradition".

### **Meeting at the parish center**

It was these things I said, more or less, that day in the sermon. These thoughts greatly impressed the parish priest, a good family man and a zealot of the patristic Tradition. He studied the Holy Fathers, but had certain reservations about the whole ascetic tradition, because he thought that asceticism is identified and associated with moralism. Yet, as we know, the ascetic tradition is not a moralization, but theology, which is cure. He had studied the "Orthodox Therapy of the Soul", which had already circulated, and told me that, truly, these thoughts and positions could take us out of the impasse which we have reached. Today there is on the one hand a philosophical tendency and on the other hand a psychological one. There is a great temptation for us to see things and man's problems externally, humanistically and humanely. The teaching, though, of the Holy Fathers can help us out of this impasse.

I admired the opinions of the priest. I was delighted because we are not, indeed, used to hearing such views. Today other "languages" prevail, which do not resemble the "language" of the Holy Fathers of the Church.

He asked me to have a conversation with him, because he had a few reservations about certain ideas of the book "Orthodox Psychotherapy", but also of other related books which I had published. He also wanted a few clarifications on certain points of the book. I accepted the suggestion of the good priest, Fr. Philip - for that was his name - with much love and enthusiasm and we went to the parish center, which is next to the church, to discuss.

We entered the parish center. There were also other Christians there who had come to church and had heard the sermon. They were people of various and many opinions, and I could say, traditions. I should mention that there is a good habit at this parish: after the divine

Liturgy, whoever wishes can go to the parish center to receive a treat and discuss various topics, because they feel that the life of worship is not independent of the whole Christian life. Today, unfortunately, the urban attitude has made us get used to an inhumane way of life, where we live together and do not know one another. This has also been extended into the ecclesiastical area. We partake of the divine worship, while being strangers to one another. We are strangers prior to the divine Eucharist and we remain strangers after it. We are hermetically closed in ourselves, jailed in the dreadful prison of the senses and passions, especially the passion of self love, which is the root of all other passions.

Thus the parishioners of this parish, at the suggestion of the priest Fr.Philip, sought to have this meeting. The young people sought it out more, and would meet after the divine Eucharist and exchange their thoughts. Four people mainly approached us, Athanasios ...,Constantine..., Irene..., and Basil...The common characteristic of these four persons was that they were members of the Church and of this specific parish, acquaintances of Fr.Philip with whom they often discussed, not only on Sunday after the divine Liturgy, but also on other days. They had almost the same age, except for Basil, who was middle-aged, and they had the same quests. They were searching to find the Tradition of the Church. They wanted to live the authentic way of life which the Orthodox Church possesses. Nevertheless, the experiences that each one had had, but also their points of departure were different. For this reason they did not totally agree on various aspects of spiritual life. One relied more on reason, another, disappointed by reason, wanted to live a life beyond reason and the senses. Another had an intense emotionalism but sought to transform it, without knowing the real method for it. Another was dominated by the old teachings concerning Christian life, which are not far from moralism. But although he realised this, he did not know the way to escape from this great temptation.

So there were many common points, but also particularities. The Church embraces all people with all their problems and worries, and strives to transfigure them. The Church, in any case, is a spiritual Hospital which heals people's spiritual illnesses. She does not reject anyone. Only groups of anthropocentric political, social and even religious systems reject people who are not able, or who do not want

to be fully obedient to their principles. In all these systems there is an intense mysticism; an ideology dominates which demands obedience to abstract commandments. And for this reason we cannot speak of obedience but of discipline. Furthermore, a mania for perfection dominates. They want you to be perfect according to the principles of the system. Alas ,if you would sin consciously or unconsciously. They will cast you out and give the stigma of crossing you off to all the friends of the system. They will make the decision public, so that it becomes known and the system is not put to blame. And I believe that this mania for perfection is an indicative sign of an existent schizophrenia. The person who has a mania to be perfect is in reality a schizophrenic. The Church, without supporting and justifying the sick person, receives him as he is and strives with the ways she has at her disposal to cure him. This is why in the Church there are people of various spiritual ages.

Thus the existence of those Christians with different backgrounds and concerns, yet with a common goal -the eagerness to discover the Tradition of the Church- can be explained. They had been disappointed by many other humanistic systems and strange ideas and they have been seeking something true to fill their soul.

After we became acquainted, exchanged our first thoughts and were offered a treat with much love by the ladies of the Charity Fund, who had taken up this work, we started discussing. I should note that the whole discussion which I describe here did not take place just in one day, on that sun-drenched autumn Sunday, but it also continued thereafter. We met at the same place and exchanged opinions many times. It was them who would ask and pose questions and I responded, because I had dealt with the subject and they knew it. I shall subsequently attempt to present the most important conversations we had. It is not just my memory which helps me in this, but also the cassette recorder which we had, and furthermore the notes which my conversants kept. These comprised the raw material for the transcript of the discussions which follow.

## **1. Orthodoxy as a therapeutic method**

The priest, Fr.Philip, began the conversation.

-In your sermon, he said, you spoke of the three stages of spiritual life, which are purification, illumination and theosis. I think you also write about this in your book. You also said, if I am not mistaken, that through this method of Orthodox piety we are healed and thus can come to know God. This reminds me of what you write in the book "Orthodox Psychotherapy", that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment and science and only in this way should we look at it. I would like to ask you: How did you come to this conclusion? Is it a teaching of the Holy Fathers or a conclusion and thought of your own? I consider the question absolutely necessary, because we are tired of individual theological thinking. Everyone speculates on theological and spiritual issues to a degree which creates terrible confusion. How did you reach to this conclusion?

### **How I was led to the conclusion that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment**

-Yes, I really owe you some explanations. I must admit that I was very disappointed of the moralism which prevailed among many Christians. And when I say moralism, I do not at all mean the morality which we respect -because even the body must be sanctified and purified-; I mean the mentality that we must see all topics externally and physically. The Pharisees of the Lord's time had moral principles and such ideas, yet they were not able to accept Christ. Also, even now I get distressed when I realise that a variety of concepts prevail in the Church. Many theologians develop a certain teaching of Christ or of the Holy Fathers and, without having personal experience, give their own analysis. Thus concepts are created, which in reality "kill" man and even life itself. I am also a man of my time and I have at times faced this situation.

However, when I was still a University student I visited Mount Athos and met sanctified people, who practised the Orthodox Tradition. I clearly saw the difference between the life according to Orthodox

Tradition and the life which I had met in other religious circles. Simultaneously, with the help of my Professors at the University, I began studying patristic texts. Furthermore, certain colleagues of mine and myself dealt with the manuscripts of the Sacred Monasteries of the Holy Mountain for a long period. This combination -the study of patristic texts within the atmosphere and life of the deified Athonite Fathers- opened for me new paths of communication with the life of the Church. I began thinking differently. I was particularly aided in this by the study of St.Gregory Palamas. I believe that St.Gregory Palamas is one of those Fathers who can exert a great influence and benefit the Christians today. His theology, which is the theology of the Church, is revealing. From then on, I came to know other sanctified people on the Holy Mountain, but also outside the Holy Mountain - Athonites in their heart and life- and thus I reached the conclusion that Orthodoxy cannot be a philosophy or a barren ethicology, but it is a therapeutic method. It cures man. Orthodox Theology is associated more with Medicine than with philosophy. I shall mention the more characteristic stages of this course of mine.

I studied St.Maximos the Confessor. I was concerned with the topic of love. I wanted to ascertain precisely what true love is, since so many things are being said about it. The 400 chapters of St. Maximos the Confessor concerning love moved my curiosity. But reading the chapters of St.Maximos, I realised that they referred mostly to man's therapy. St.Maximos the Confessor mentions what man's nous is, how it becomes ill, how it is cured. He also speaks of the passions and how they are healed; of the movements of man's soul, which can be according to nature, contrary to nature and above the nature. He connects love with dispassion. I also realised that love "is the offspring of dispassion"; it is the "fire of dispassion," as St.John the Sinaite says. In order for one to reach Godly love, he must be previously cured. For, on the one hand there is love which seeks its own, that is selfishness, and on the other hand there is love which "does not seek its own" . The whole attempt of the Church is to lead man from selfish and utilitarian love to selfless love. But this presupposes man's healing.

I was, later, engaged specifically with the Philokalia. As it is known "The Philokalia", which is a collection of many works of the neptic Fathers, is a work of the Church compiled in its final form by

St.Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain and the bishop, formerly of Corinth, Makarios Notaras. Its subtitle is: "within which by means of ethical philosophy of praxis and theoria the nous is purified, illumined and perfected". I saw there that all the texts are therapeutic. They speak of how man's nous becomes ill and how it is healed.

I read a lot as a student and I have continued to study St.Gregory Palamas, this great hesychast Athonite, whom Tradition has named a theologian and classified him among the four greatest theologians of the Church, along with St.John the Theologian, St.Gregory the Theologian, and St.Symeon the New Theologian. In the debate which he had with Barlaam I discerned the development of the way in which we must theologize so as to be saved. He speaks of holy hesychia (stillness) and the method of hesychia. Moreover he stresses, that this is the only therapeutic method which leads to the vision of the uncreated Light, and this entails the knowledge of God and the salvation of man. His homilies, most of them given to his congregation in Thessalonica, are amazing. There he speaks of the rest (Sabbath) of God and man, about the therapy of the passions, noetic prayer, the vision of the uncreated Light, etc.

I also studied a lot St.Gregory the Theologian. His works made me realise that theologians of the Church should be called "those who have reached theoria (vision of God)", who formerly purified their heart from passions or at least are struggling to purify them. Speaking about the Second Coming, he also writes that God Himself will be "light to the purified in mind" and even more so, "according to their purity" -this is what we call the kingdom of the heavens. And God Himself will be "darkness to those who have blinded their power of intellect; so more so according to their own blindness". He even names this darkness alienation from God. Therefore, it became clear to me that the priest does not "issue tickets" for man to go to paradise, but cures man , so that God becomes for him light --and this is the kingdom of heavens-- and not darkness, which is Hell and alienation from God.

Allow me, though, to say that I realised all these things not only by studying Patristic books. On the one hand I also met spiritual fathers filled with grace, "changed" by the grace of God, and it is through them that one can understand the patristic texts; on the other hand



through my pastoral experience. As a spiritual father I see daily that alongside confession cure is also needed. Many people confess, but are not cured. A special method is necessary, so that man can be healed from his passions.

All these things and many other which I cannot mention here made me believe that we must see Orthodoxy as a therapeutic treatment and science.

### **Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science**

-May I interrupt you? asked Athanasios. I have listened to this analysis with great interest. I would not like to contradict you. I respect your research on this delicate point of spiritual life. But I think that the use of certain terms of yours is a little provocative. For example, first you said that Orthodoxy heals man and then you concluded that it is "a therapeutic science". I cannot understand this word "science". What relation does Orthodoxy have to science? As a scholar, I consider that science formulates intellectual sentences and does research on a human level. How can we maintain that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science?

-I like your point of view. I do not deny that many other people have come to me with the same thoughts after the publication of my book. I think, though, that there is no essential problem. I use the word science (epistimi) in its original meaning. It comes from the verb EPISTAMAI ([ἐπίσταμαι]), which means, I know well. Thus, here, science (epistimi) means the correct method we use to be cured. Medicine is also called a science because it knows the way by which man's body is cured. If we accept that Orthodoxy cures man, then I think we have the right to maintain that it is also a science, because it knows the true way by which man is cured. I do not think that there is any problem in accepting this.

-These things are clear, he responded. I can understand them. But do you have patristic corroboration for this approach of yours? In other words, are there Fathers who use this term?

-The matter is not whether there are Fathers who use this term. The matter is whether we can use it, whether the Church knows indeed the true way of curing man, that is, what the foundation of the term is. What does the term wish to convey? The problem lies therein. The Holy Fathers of the Church did not hesitate to use terms which did not exist in the Holy Scripture in order to express the truth which the Church possesses. For example the Fathers of the 4th century applied the term "co-essential" (of one essence) to Christ and said that Christ is of one essence with the Father. Then a reaction was expressed by a few conservatives. They said that the term is anti-scriptural, i.e., it is not mentioned in the Holy Scripture, and therefore we cannot use it. They also criticised the Fathers, because the term was first used by the heretics -Paul of Samosata employed the term, yet with a different meaning. He identified the co-essential with the co-hypostatic. The Holy Fathers though considered it right to take this term, disengage it from its co-hypostatic meaning and define that the persons of the Holy Trinity have the same essence, but particular hypostases. Thus they established that the persons of the Holy Trinity have the commonality of essence and the particularity of the mode of existence. And employing the term hypostasis, they designated it as essence with properties. They did the same with the term "person". Whereas in their time "person" had the meaning of the outward appearance (mask) and excellently served the heretical teaching of Sabellios, the Fathers identified the person with the hypostasis, adopted the term, gave it ontology and applied it to the persons of the Holy Trinity. Thus it is the entire atmosphere which the words want to describe and not the words themselves that cause problems.

But here, in the subject at issue I can say that the Holy Fathers also use the word science. I have analysed this in my books. However at this point I would like to present a distinctive passage of St. Gregory the Theologian: "truly this seems to me to be a craft above all crafts, and a s c i e n c e a b o v e a l l s c i e n c e s, to lead a man, the wiliest and most manifold creature". St. Dionysios the Aeropagite many times uses the term science, even for the state of theoria (vision of God). Referring to a theologian who knew divine things, he writes: "He was wisely and s c i e n t i f i c a l l y exercised in divine things". St. Gregory of Nyssa also refers many times to the therapeutic

diligence and the therapeutic method. And, of course, he who knows the true method of therapy can be called a scientist (therapist).

### **Orthodox faith is connected with cure**

-I have the opinion, said Basil -a man of conservative principles- that we must speak with caution about these issues. I also agree that we must be cured, living within the Church, but don't you think that there is a danger that we may deny the basic element of Orthodoxy, which is faith? When we support that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment and science, don't you think that there is a danger to overlook the Orthodox faith?

-Dangers may be created. This depends on how we consider cure and how we consider faith. And I think that I should expand my thoughts more on this. There are many people who by cure mean simply the formulation of character and social behaviour. They place, that is, cure within a moralistic atmosphere. We go to the priest and say: "Father I stole". And he answers: "In the future do not steal..." This, also, is a conduct. But the therapeutic treatment of the Church is not exhausted here. Or, further, many people attempt to become good, by not committing sin externally, by having virtues, yet they despise the Orthodox Tradition.

-In other words what is cure? How do you mean it?

-We shall come to cure later. Please, let us not change the subject. Now we are speaking about whether the use of the expression "Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment and science" is acceptable or not. So, when we speak of cure while detaching it from the Orthodox Revelation and Tradition, then of course we run the risk of changing it. Also, another danger lurks everywhere. It is possible for us to speak of faith in a completely abstract way; to signify by it a few rational and objective principles which we must accept logically and believe that this constitutes salvation. Theologians who work intellectually live in such a way, and this is why today many people speak of academic theology. In my opinion, therapy cannot be detached from the Orthodox faith, because one presupposes the other. I would like to analyse these things more.

The term Orthodoxy consists of two words: "orthi" (true, right) and "doxa". "Doxa" means both belief, teaching, faith, and glorification-glory. These are connected with each other very closely. Correct teaching about God constitutes right, true glorification of God. Because if God is abstract, then prayer to that God is abstract. If God is personal, then prayer assumes a personal character. God has revealed the true faith, the true teaching. Thus we say that the teaching about God and all matters associated with man's salvation are the Revelation of God and not man's discovery. Yet God has revealed this truth to people who have been prepared for this. Judas, the brother of God, expresses this point well by saying: "exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). In this quotation, as in many other related passages, it is evident that God reveals Himself to the Saints -to those people, that is, who have reached a certain level of spiritual growth which enables them to be receptive of this Revelation. The holy Apostles were healed first and then received the Revelation. And they imparted this Revelation to their spiritual children not only by teaching them, but primarily by mystically effecting their spiritual rebirth. We accept the dogmas and the definitions; in other words we accept this revealed faith and remain within the Church in order to be cured. For this faith is, on the one hand, Revelation to those purified and cured and, on the other, it is the right path to attain cure, for those who choose to follow the "way".

### **Two kinds of faith**

It is obvious, according to the Holy Fathers, that there are two kinds of faith. The first is rational faith, called faith from hearing, and is introductory faith, simple faith. The second is faith based on the vision of God (theoria); it is the faith of the perfect and that which saves man. There is no antithesis between the two kinds of faith. The former is introductory and the latter the result of the former. Thus we accept the faith of the Holy Fathers of the Church in order to cleanse our hearts from passions and to successfully follow the stage of purification. And when this is achieved, we shall then reach illumination of the nous, which is the second faith, the so-called faith based on theoria. When Adam was created by God, he was at the

illumination of the nous. But after the Fall he was subjected to various passions. So, now we need the correct faith in order to reach the faith based on theoria, that is the illumination of the nous, and from there to the vision of God. The first faith opens unto us the way towards cure and the second faith is the fruit and result of man's cure.

James, the brother of God, speaks of the first faith, which, however, needs works to purify man. He says: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2,26). Both the theoretical acceptance of faith through hearing and the works which it entails are necessary for us so as to be purified and healed. The Apostle Paul speaks of perfect faith, faith based on the vision of God, when he says: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom.3,28). Many Christians think that the brother of God James contradicts the Apostle Paul. Interpreting the Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Romans, Luther, in particular, reached the point of speaking only about faith without works; he was ignorant of the fact that the Apostle Paul means therein the faith from theoria-vision of God, which is beyond the works of the Law. He does not say that there is no need for the works of the Law. Both the first faith and the works are necessary for us to pass the stage of purification of the heart correctly and effectively. When this is accomplished, we reach the illumination of the nous, whose characteristic is noetic ceaseless prayer. This is faith from theoria, which is a surpassing and not an abolishment of the works of the Law.

Thus I do not see any difference between the statements: "Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science and treatment" and "Orthodoxy is faith". They are connected with each other. Detaching one from the other entails a heretical life. We can say precisely the same thing about the term "Orthodox theology."

### **Orthodox Theology**

-I have wanted for quite some time now to ask you this question, and I finally have the opportunity, said Constantine. You said before that theology cut off from the life of the Church may be called academic theology. How do you understand Orthodox theology?

-I think that what we said earlier about faith holds also for theology. For, theology is not an intellectual science, but the voice and life of the Church. And the Church is the domain of Orthodox theology. Just as the Holy Fathers say, theology prays and prayer is theology. When we speak of Orthodox theology we do not mean a simple history of theology. It can also be this, but it is not limited to this in an absolute way. In patristic tradition the theologians are those who see God. St. Gregory Palamas may call Barlaam also a theologian, but he clearly stresses that this intellectual theology differs greatly from the vision of God. Theologians, according to St. Gregory Palamas, are the beholders of God, specifically those who follow the whole methodology of the Church and attain perfect faith -the illumination of the nous. Therefore, theology is the fruit of man's therapy, but also the path for us to reach cure and acquire the knowledge of God. What we previously mentioned about faith holds here, too. The Fathers teach that the vision of God is a gift from God, which He gives when He wants and to whomever He wants. We must pray to be cleansed internally; to be delivered from passions -in reality to transform our passions- and for our nous to be illumined, that is to acquire the noetic prayer of the heart. St. Maximos the Confessor says that a person's deliverance from pain and pleasure is the sign that he has passed the stage of purification; the sign that he has passed or is at the stage of illumination is his deliverance from ignorance and forgetfulness of God; and the sign that he has reached theosis is his liberation from fantasy and all images which the world of the senses brings to him. Thus we can entreat "illumine my darkness" and, if God wishes, He will reveal Himself. Then, on the one hand, we know that we have been cured and, on the other hand, that we are receiving the gift of theology, of speaking of God. From the stage of illumination of the nous to the stage of theoria unceasing noetic prayer operates. Vision of God may last a few seconds up to even several days, but afterwards the deified person returns to the state of noetic prayer. At the state of theoria prayer is suspended and restarts when the vision of God ceases. Of course, I must say that there are many stages of vision of God. Vision of God (theoria) begins with repentance, continues with noetic prayer, reaches illumination, is led to the vision of God and then to continual theoria, in other words, it may last for a few hours even days. Thus I can maintain that Orthodox Theology is both the fruit of cure and the way to reach cure. When we make it an academic

science and only study the various ecclesiastical topics externally, then we fail to help people effectively.

-I have observed until now, father, said Irene, that you constantly use the word "Orthodox". You speak of the Orthodox Church, of Orthodox cure, Orthodox theology etc. Might it be a word in fashion? Many speak about Orthodoxy, but probably see it as an ideology. Why don't you speak of Christianity?

-I confess that it is an idiosyncrasy of mine. I know that this term is excessively used today, going even to extremes. Many attribute an ideological shade to the word. I acknowledge, certainly, that genuine Christianity is identical to the Orthodox Church. When we speak of Christians, we mean the disciples of Christ. And when we call someone a disciple of Christ, we mean that he is united with Christ. A person also objected to me that I use more the word Orthodoxy than the word Church. He wrote to me saying that both terms -Christianity and Orthodoxy- should be put aside, since they have come to be an ideology; and that we should talk of the Church. However I counter argued that we can misuse the word "Church" in the same way. We can consider it an association, an institution... Thus the question is not what terminology we employ, but how we apply it. One may speak of Christianity and interpret it correctly. Another, however, may not. The same may happen with other terms as well. Many people identify the Church with the clergy and others with the people. In accordance to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, and especially of St. Irenaeus, the Church is identified with Orthodoxy and the divine Eucharist. These three terms are closely connected with one another. The Church cannot be conceived outside Orthodoxy and the divine Eucharist. Orthodoxy cannot be conceived outside the Church and the divine Eucharist, just as the divine Eucharist cannot be conceived outside the Church and Orthodoxy. These three terms are synonymous.

Without overlooking this reality, I speak of Orthodoxy not abstractly, but concretely. I distinguish the Tradition which the Church has -the real Body of Christ- from the traditions the other denominations have. Many people today are called Christians, but they do not all have the same tradition, concerning the method of cure and of the knowledge of God. This is also evident in dogmatic teaching.

-Father, we have learnt that the difference of Orthodoxy from other denominations lies in the dogmas. You are now adding that the difference also lies in the method of cure. What do you mean by this, please? Could you clarify your views more?

### **Differences between Orthodoxy and other confessions**

-I think that we said something earlier on this point. Faith and theology are on the one hand the fruit of cure; while on the other hand they are a way for one to attain cure and vision of God - which, being communion with God, is simultaneously knowledge of God. And this constitutes man's salvation. Dogmatic differences reflect corresponding differences in cure. There are cases in which the so called Uniates appear as Orthodox, even concerning the dogma of the procession of the Holy Spirit. They do not add the filioque to the Symbol of faith and yet they differ in their therapeutic treatment. I think there are two criteria by means of which we distinguish that a person who has passed away is an Orthodox and a Saint: the first one is the way and method of cure he applied and the second is his holy relics. We believe that Orthodoxy obtains both of these. In other words, we have both an Orthodox method of cure and the relics of deified Saints. This difference is certainly manifested in the dogmatic teaching, since, as we mentioned formerly, theology is an expression of life, it is a formulation of a person's mode of life.

Within this perspective, if we examine Orthodoxy in relation to the Latin and Protestant denomination, we shall immediately locate the difference. The Protestants do not have at all a therapeutic treatment. They think that as long as they believe in God, they can be saved. But as we have already pointed out, perfect faith which saves man is faith based on theoria, the presupposition of which is the purification of the heart. And this is achieved by accepting the introductory faith, which is expressed in works of repentance; and works of repentance are whatever contributes to man's therapy. Thus, the Protestants do not obtain a therapeutic treatment. The Latins' therapeutic method is not as complete as the Orthodox one. The fact that they reached the point of speaking about the filioque is a fruit of their weakness to combine the relation existing between the person and society. Thus they



confuse the personal properties, which are the unbegotten of the Father, the begotten of the Son and the proceeding of the Holy Spirit. The Father is the cause of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Holy Spirit. This weakness and the failure in expressing the Trinitarian dogma indicates the nonexistence of experience and revelation. Because where there is vision of God, there exists a clear dogmatic formulation.

For example the disciples of Christ upon Mount Tabor saw the glory of Christ. They simultaneously heard inaudibly the voice of the Father -"this is my Beloved Son"- and they saw the coming of the Holy Spirit in the cloud. As St.Gregory Palamas says, the cloud is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Thus the disciples of Christ obtained knowledge of the Triune God in theoria and revelation. It was revealed to them that God is one essence and three hypostases. This is what St.Symeon the New Theologian also teaches. In his poems many times he maintains that during the vision of the uncreated Light the deified person receives the Revelation of the Triune God. The Saints in theoria do not confuse the hypostatic properties.

The fact that the Latin Tradition came to confuse these hypostatic properties and teaches that the Holy Spirit proceeds in essence from the Son as well shows the nonexistence of empirical theology. Also the fact that it reached the point of speaking about created grace, signifies that it does not have experience of the grace of God. For, when a man attains the experience of God, he then realizes well that this grace is uncreated. Since they did not reach this experience, it is obvious that there is no correct therapeutic method there. And, indeed, in the Latin tradition this therapeutic method -which we find in Orthodoxy- does not exist. There is no reference to the nous; reason is not distinguished from the nous; the darkening of the nous is not taught to be an illness and illumination to be its restoration. Many Latin texts, widely spoken of, are sentimental and exhaust themselves in a barren ethicology, whereas in the Orthodox Church there is a great tradition regarding these issues, and this shows its true therapeutic method.

It is through its therapeutic effects that a faith demonstrates its truthfulness. If it cures it is a true faith, if it does not it is not a true faith. This applies to medical science also. A true scientist doctor is he

who knows how to cure and has therapeutic effects, whereas a quack doctor does not have any therapeutic results. The same holds true on matters of the soul. For this reason I believe that the difference of the Orthodox from both the Latin tradition and the protestant confessions is seen primarily, in the way of cure. The difference in cure is a result of dogmatic differences. The dogmas are not philosophy, nor is theology philosophy.

### **Theology is not philosophy**

-You know, Athanasios interrupted, I have dealt a lot with philosophy. I have read many books about these things and have verified that Christianity became greatly associated with philosophy and developed it even more. For example St. Basil the Great, who studied philosophy -like other Holy Fathers- developed further the philosophy of the "person" in his age. Until then the "person" was an abstract concept. From the time of St. Basil the Great it obtained ontology. I have read that in the teaching of the Cappadocian Fathers the "person" is not an attribute of the being, but that which makes the being be truly a being. Also the "person" is not exhausted in its own self, but it is led up to the Being, to God. If we are able today to speak of the person and personality, we owe this to patristic theology. So how do you say that Orthodox theology is not a philosophy?

-Your question is quite justified. I would like to say that I enjoy our conversation a lot and especially the way in which it is being conducted.

Usually we shout, get upset, angry and cannot converse calmly and seriously, but this does not occur here. Yet, I should give a few explanations and necessary clarifications of this position of mine. In fact, I have heard similar views and for this reason you give me the great joy of explaining precisely what I mean by saying that Orthodoxy and theology are not philosophy.

First of all I must clarify what I said earlier, that Orthodox theology is, first and foremost, experience, Revelation. God reveals Himself to those worthy of this revelation. And those who have other gifts as well become theologians in the Church. St. Gregory the Theologian has

said epigrammatically that the Fathers of the Church do not theologize in the manner of Aristotle but in that of the Apostles. This means that they do not theologize rationally, but in the manner the holy Apostles, who were fishermen, theologized. Yet, when they received the Holy Spirit they were proved to be the real theologians of the Church. Theology, therefore, is experience.

It is precisely this point which shows the difference existing between philosophy and theology. Philosophy is an offspring of man's intellect -that is, intellect and reasoning define the expression and formulation of concepts; conversely, theology is a fruit of God's Revelation to man's pure heart. First the heart receives the Revelation and then reason formulates it. This difference is characteristically seen in a passage of the Prophet Isaiah and in the interpretation which St. John Chrysostom offers. The Prophet Isaiah writes: "Behold the master Lord Savaoth shall take away from Judaea and from Jerusalem, him and her who is powerful...the judge and the prophet and the thinker" (Is. 3,1-2). Here a clear distinction is made between the prophet and the thinker. St. John Chrysostom says: "a thinker speculates on the future out of his great wisdom and personal experience". And he goes on to say that speculation is one thing and prophesy is another. The Prophet speaks in the Holy Spirit "contributing nothing of his own"; whereas the thinker employs his own understanding. Thus there is a great difference between the Prophet and the thinker, "as much difference there is between human wisdom and divine grace". In the language of the Holy Scripture the Prophet and the theologian are identified. It is obvious then that there is a huge difference between a theologian and a philosopher, and therefore, between theology and philosophy. Although they studied the philosophy of their age, the Fathers of the Church followed, nevertheless, a different method to acquire the knowledge of God. And this method has been the hesychastic one.

A characteristic distinction between the heretics and the Orthodox was and still is that the heretics used philosophy to expound on matters of faith, whereas the Holy Fathers used the Revelation, which is a result of hesychia with all its importance. If we diligently study ecclesiastical history, we shall clearly see that in the ecclesiastical domain there have always been these two traditions. One tradition was philosophical. It was based on the intellect and was expressed by all

the heretics, who attempted to interpret God with their intellect. The other tradition was hesychastic and the holy Fathers are included in it.

Let us take a simple example. The heretics always attempted to solve the problem of how God, being one, is simultaneously three. This was incomprehensible for philosophy. Therefore, in his attempt to solve this question Sabellios speaks of one God with three modes of manifestation; that is the same God appears as the Father in the Old Testament, as the Son in the New Testament and as the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In this way however he abolished the personal mode of existence of each Person of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Fathers had the revelation and the experience that God is one, but also trinity. And they expressed this experience employing the terms the heretics used, after first cleansing them and giving them another content. Moreover they used apophatic language to demonstrate the incapability of the mind to understand and express God. This apophatic theology is the "Golgotha" and the "cross" of human knowledge, but also of human reason.

In speaking of how God is one and Triune St. Maximos the Confessor says: "God is divided, but indivisibly...and He is united dividedly." And he concludes: "for this reason both division and union are a paradox". St. Thalassios also writes the same thing: "the monad moving up to a triad, remains a monad; and the triad brought again up to a monad, remains a triad; which is a paradox". How can such a revelation be formulated philosophically and be understood intellectually? Philosophical terms may be used for its formulation but, still, it cannot be understood intellectually. The Fathers once again have humiliated human reason and transcended philosophy by means of apophatic theology and apophatic expressions. St. Gregory the Theologian characteristically says: "it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to conceive Him". After such a statement how could it be possible for man to express and conceive God? There is no place here for any dialectical speculation. St. Gregory Palamas teaches that we cannot have dialectical speculations about God but only demonstrative principles, received by revelation. All the Holy Fathers criticize the philosophy of their time and reject it. St. Basil the Great denies philosophy and cries for the time he spent to acquire worldly wisdom.

What you previously mentioned about the term "person" is true. The Holy Fathers adopted it, gave it an ontology and identified it with the term "hypostasis", and naturally with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Yet, by doing this they did not philosophise, nor did they encourage philosophy. Moreover, this example reveals the incapability of philosophy to interpret God. Another vantage point was necessary for this to be done. The Holy Fathers -it must again be clarified- did not work philosophically, thinking of themselves as philosophers, but had experience and subsequently expressed it in terms of their time, which they loaded with a new life. And they did this not because it was needed for faith, but because the heretics had appeared, who were trying to alter faith.

Early Christians knew well that in the Old Testament there is the revealed God (Yahweh), who is the pre-incarnate Word, and the hidden God (Elohim). They also experienced the presence of the All-Holy Spirit. There was no confusion. In his journey to Damascus, the Apostle Paul received the great revelation that the God of the Old Testament is Jesus, and thus, being in theoria, he identified Yahweh of the Old Testament with Christ, whom he was persecuting. Later though the Gnostics maintained that the manifested God of the Old Testament, Who created the world, is a lower God. In order to reject these heretical teachings, the Monarchians came to support that there is no superior and lower God; God is one, of one essence and one hypostasis. In that case, to respond to the heretics, who formulated such a teaching based on their reason, the Holy Fathers said that God is of one essence and three hypostases -three persons. They did not do so because they wanted to advance the philosophy of their age, or because they were philosophers, but because as theologians they wanted to avert the great temptation lurking in philosophy. In this way they responded to philosophy. They were not philosophers, just as they were not psychologists or sociologists or even ethicologists, etc. They were Fathers of the Church, true shepherds, who pastored theologically and theologized pastorally.

## Orthodoxy and psychology

-I think that it is my turn to ask you now, said Constantine, who in the past was involved a lot in psychology. I have not been engaged in theology or philosophy, but I have dealt a lot with psychology. In the beginning, when you mentioned that Christianity is a therapeutic science and treatment, that it heals man's soul, I was excited. I followed you with much interest, because I believe that in this way Christianity and especially Orthodoxy, can help today's man. Today psychology and psychiatry have been developed to the extreme, since it has been proved that man suffers from psychological illnesses. I was amazed, however to hear that just as they were not philosophers, the Fathers were not also psychologists. So I would like you to back up this position of yours.

-I don't think that one has to make a special effort to support this viewpoint. The subject is very simple. The Holy Fathers were Saints. Sanctity does not have a moral sense, but an ontological one. They are called Saints "by virtue of the Holy one Whom they partake of". Holy God imparts His uncreated energy to people and sanctifies them. He actually dwells in man by grace and thus man becomes a dwelling place of the holy Trinite God; a living temple of God. The Apostle Paul divides people into three great categories. *M e n o f t h e f l e s h* are those who are deprived of the Most Holy Spirit, those who live contrary to nature. *U n- s p i r i t u a l* men are also men of the flesh, since they do not have the Holy Spirit and live according to nature, in other words, they have virtues yet they are natural virtues. They are good people, merciful, continent, have natural love, etc. Nevertheless, they are not Saints, because they have not been an indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Consequently they cannot attain to the partaking of the deifying energy of God. St.Gregory Palamas says: "If God does not act in us everything done by us is sin". *S p i r i t u a l* people are those who are actuated by the Holy Spirit "by adoption and by knowledge and theoria". The Apostle Paul explicitly says: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man"(1 Cor. 2,14-15).

Psychology is a modern science, an offspring of western Christianity. In their great despair and immense hopelessness, people have discovered psychology, precisely because the "Churches" of the West have lost the hesychastic tradition of the Church. However, in patristic teaching much is said about the soul, its illness and its therapy. We, Orthodox, are not overwhelmed by the discovery and progress of psychology. The monks, who are engaged in the cure of the soul, know very well how passions are expressed, how the devil acts and how the grace of God enters the heart. In my book "A conversation on the Orthodox Psychotherapy" a particular chapter is included about this topic which is analysed. The difference between psychology and the Orthodox cure of the soul or rather between humanistic psychotherapy and Orthodox psychotherapy is also pointed out. I can underline the fundamentals here.

In psychology the soul is not in the image of God, as in Orthodox theology, but it is a simple activity of the body. For this reason we talk of "a psychology without a soul". In contemporary psychology the soul has no ontology. And when psychology speaks about the illness of the soul, it simply means man's psychological imbalance or the various traumatic experiences of his previous life. But in Orthodox theology illness consists in the darkening of the nous. Also, in humanistic psychology therapy is the balance of the inner powers of the soul, whereas in Orthodox theology therapy is associated with man's union with God, with the vision of God, the attainment of theosis, which is identified with the vision of God. The therapeutic method of anthropocentric psychology is clearly different from that of Orthodox psychotherapy. Moreover anthropocentric psychology cannot distinguish between created and uncreated energies; in other words whether an illness is due to exhaustion, or to possession, neither does it accept the activities of the uncreated grace. It attributes everything to only one factor. Psychology does not believe in the existence of the devil and for the most part denies the actions of the uncreated grace of God.

-Yet, is it not confusing for us to speak of Orthodox psychotherapy? Have the Fathers used this term?

-In all patristic works the cure of the soul is mentioned. Whether we say cure of the soul or psychotherapy it is one and the same thing. The

question is to see whether the Fathers speak of the cure of the soul, and furthermore the question is which is the anthropology and the soteriology of the Fathers. Here the truth lies. In any case, the fact that we place the word "Orthodox" before the word "psychotherapy", differentiates it from any other psychotherapy.

-Do you say then that you completely deny the views of contemporary psychology? Are they of no use? Asking this I have in mind a psychologist who claims that if the Fathers lived today they would of course use the principles of contemporary psychology. What do you think?

-First of all, I must underline what was said earlier, that the discovery of psychology, which occurred in the West, was the result of the western man's disappointment, due to the rejection and disregard of the whole neptic tradition of the Church. For the western man, who has been alienated from the hesychastic-neptic tradition, psychology was a marvel. Yet this is not the case with the Orthodox. If the Fathers lived today, they would be probably amazed with man's marvel at these theories. Just like contemporary ascetics, the Fathers who know by experience the inner state of the soul, the crafts 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. I say relatively uninteresting, because for him who receives the perfect knowledge, mediocre knowledge is of low importance. As much is the difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom, so much is the difference between human and Orthodox psychotherapy. A man who lives and experiences the divine love, which is the perfection of love, "unifying and restraining power", "ecstasy of the nous", "intoxication of the spirit", "a sharp and unbearable" yearning and a "hungering" condition, how will he see fleshly and impure love which is an idol and a fall of love? The Fathers of our days -whose life express the whole experience of the Church- also consider relatively insignificant the so-called enlightened discoveries of contemporary psychology.

Now, to come to the question: if the Fathers lived today, would they accept psychological interpretations without any examination, as they did with philosophy? We should start by clarifying certain things. First of all, Fathers exist today also and having met such Fathers I



realised their reservations about psychology. In any case, Fathers did not only live in the past, they exist today too. Secondly, the holy Fathers in their age did not accept the concepts of philosophy. Having themselves the perfect knowledge, did they need the knowledge of the philosophers? They simply employed philosophical terms, which they charged with a new meaning and ontology. They would most probably do the same thing with psychology.

St. Gregory Palamas criticises Barlaam because he promoted psychological interpretations of spiritual life. Many other Fathers had the same attitude. We do not attempt to enter into the so-called subconscious on our own, through the help of our reason, because this can lead us to schizophrenia. Our method is the following: without getting involved in exhausting self-analyses, we try to keep the commandments of Christ in our life. Whilst attempting to keep the commandments, our old self with its passions is disclosed; subsequently we struggle to be healed of our passions. In parallel, we attempt to keep our nous clear from malice and arrogance and it then distinguishes the good thought from the demonic one. We exercise ourselves in watchfulness and thus the nous can discern thoughts, as St. Diadochos of Photiki says; it stores the divine thoughts in the treasury of memory, while it rejects the "dark and demonic ones" from memory. And in this climate true repentance is activated.

Of course, we accept by economy the views of contemporary psychology and psychotherapy in two cases. The first case includes people whose nervous system has been harmed because of various reasons -psychical or mental overstress- and now face serious psychological problems. The second case: There are people who by choice do not have any relation with the Church and its mysteries. I think they can be helped by modern psychology-psychotherapy, so as not to be driven to an irreparable condition. Psychology can act as a pain-killer to comfort them in the dreadful prison of despair in which they are.

There are also people who confess, are related to spiritual fathers, but the latter do not have the strength and the knowledge of spiritual life to help them. For we should not turn a blind eye to the existing reality. Unfortunately men's indifference for confession and the inability of many spiritual fathers, who are ignorant of the therapeutic method of

the Church, lead many people to the psychiatrists. But, I repeat, man is created in the image of God and he must reach His likeness. This is, I could say, the final aim and the mystical entelechy of man. As long as this yearning is not satisfied and man remains far from God, he suffers all the more. Inasmuch as his basic destination on earth is not accomplished -that is, communion with God- no matter how efficient medical treatments and psychoanalyses he undergoes, he is always in nostalgia and in tragic searching. We not only seek psychological balances, but also fullness of life. We do not simply wish to develop religious feelings, but to acquire the fulfilment -pleroma- of life. When we analyse more extensively how the Orthodox Church interprets the cure of the soul, then we shall be able to understand the difference between anthropocentric and Theocentric psychotherapy. So, the subject is not closed, it remains open for further discussion.

### **Theology and religion**

-I would like to pose a question, said Fr.Philip. I am the one who invited you here to converse with you, yet I spoke less than anyone else. I am very glad, of course, because my spiritual brothers elevated the conversation to this spiritual level with their questions and gave the opportunity so that many aspects of the subject of psychotherapy be cleared. Since you gave me earlier on the opportunity, I would like to ask a question, which I had intended to from the beginning. You said formerly that, by living in the Church, we do not simply seek the development of religious feelings, but the fulfilment of life. Moreover, you have written in your book that Christianity is not a religion in the sense given to religions today. Can you clarify these things?

-Christianity is and is not a religion. Since you referred to my book "Orthodox Psychotherapy," I would like to remind you that I analyse there what we mean by religion today. By religion we mean, primarily, a concrete theory which enables us to surpass the dividing wall between us and God and thus to expiate God. Also, we often refer to religion as man's invention: God is man's creation, since the latter feels isolated in the universe and weak. So he needs a strong God to secure his weakness. Moreover by religion it is considered that

we ensure our future so as to be happy in the future life. Or finally religion is simply the satisfaction of our religious feelings.

However none of these definitions apply to Orthodoxy. Christianity is called and actually is the Church, that is, the real Body of Christ, whose Body Christ Himself is the head. The Church is the unity of all worlds, earthly and heavenly, of angels and men, of dead and alive. We obtain real communion with God, we participate in God's uncreated energy. God is not isolated in heaven, governing history from there, but He rules the world with His uncreated energies, that is, with His uncreated governing energy. We do not aim at appeasing God, but at healing ourselves, so that the vision of God becomes light for us and not fire. Furthermore, in the Church we experience eternal life from now. We do not simply expect the life to come, but we enjoy it from now. The Kingdom of God, according to the Fathers, is not life beyond death, but it is communion with God; the vision of the uncreated Light.

We can say, though, that Orthodoxy is a religion, because it speaks of God and attempts to deify man, to bring him into union and personal communion with God. Also, we can even call Orthodoxy a religion because there are many Christians within the Church who are at an "infantile" state spiritually and perceive God as the other religions do. The Church accepts both the class of the servants and the class of the paid servants as stages of beginners in spiritual life. But it struggles to make man perfect, to bring him to a state of doing God's will not in order to avoid Hell, not in order to enjoy Paradise, but out of mere love for God.

I think we can conclude that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic science and treatment. It heals man. Of course, there may still be a few objections and reservations, which we shall discuss later on. Yet, I, personally have no reservation. I unshakeably believe that we can see Orthodoxy only as a therapeutic treatment and science. It is only by this presupposition that Orthodoxy has the true, real and unadulterated faith.

## **2. The illness of the soul**

-I am very interested, said Constantine, in the issue of the illness of the soul. I have also dealt a lot with psychology in the past, thus I also have mistaken views on these topics. So I would like to learn the teaching of the holy Fathers on the illness of the soul.

### **A clear idea about Orthodoxy**

-I shall try with pleasure, to respond to your question. I should first point out that there is a clear position of the Holy Fathers of the Church, that Orthodoxy differs in relation to all anthropocentric systems. Many religions may use the same expressions, the same terms, but they are understood differently. For example, the Stoic philosophers also spoke of dispassion, but they meant it differently than Orthodoxy. The same holds true about the nous, ecstasy, etc. Many Easterners who belong to other religions, such as Buddhism, speak of the nous, inner sense, etc., yet they give to them an entirely different content. For this reason he who has dealt in the past with such theories, either of psychology, philosophy, or even Buddhism has great difficulty in proceeding to obtain a clear conception concerning the Orthodox teaching. He may get perplexed and confused in the process. I have met such people who are in a dreadful confusion about these matters. They read neptic theology and find no difference from Buddhist teaching. They think that the Buddhists and the neptic Fathers say the same things. Not to mention that this human knowledge, with its emphasis on reason, engenders a certain self-awareness, which the Fathers name "wealth" of the mind". As a result man is filled with satisfaction and self-sufficiency. And wherever satisfaction and self-sufficiency exists the grace of Christ cannot act.

-What do you think must happen in these cases? In other words, I have studied psychology and am familiar with the various Schools of psychology based on which I analyse people. Can I not then acquire a clear sense of Orthodoxy? And if this is so, then how can I be delivered from this dreadful condition?

-Your question is critical. I truly believe that there is a problem. However man can be cured. There are two basic ways of cure.

The one is for him to abandon this "wealth" of the mind. St.Niketas Stethatos, speaking of poverty, maintains that poverty is not only the renunciation of material goods, but also the denial of the "wealth" of the mind. Moreover, I can add that spiritual poverty is the renunciation of all the knowledge which man formerly obtained, while living in the way of the flesh. St.Thalassios claims that noetic poverty is perfect dispassion. It is when the dispassionate nous is freed from the prison of the senses and sensorial things. When a person possesses such philosophical or psychological knowledge and approaches the Church retaining all this within him, at moments of great inner concentration he may take this knowledge as a state of mystical contemplation. Then man thinks that this state is the revelation of God. And in this way he defiles the undefiled and pure teaching of Christ.

The second way of cure is for man to pass through deep repentance. Profound repentance is the entrance for the uncreated grace of God to man's heart; it burns passions and makes man a bearer of Revelation. For this reason when we read patristic works we must disassociate ourselves from the knowledge and ideas of the past, in order to acquire a clear sense of Orthodoxy. I lay emphasis on these things so that you do not make parallels with psychological knowledge, which prevails today. There is a great danger of seeing spiritual life from within psychological interpretations of contemporary anthropocentric psychological systems.

-I thank you for this clarification, said Constantine. But, please, could you analyse for us the illness of the soul so that we can grasp the difference.

### **The soul of man**

-In order to speak about the illness of the soul we should first see precisely what the soul is, because this is a weak point in many psychological Schools when they speak of psychotherapy. They have also realised that we cannot speak of the illness and therapy of the

soul, if we do not give it an ontology. This is why I believe that Orthodoxy with its neptic teaching has a great role to perform today even at this point. I shall try to analyse the subject in a simple way.

Man, according to the Fathers, is in the image of God. He does not refer his life to himself, but to God. Christ is the image of God, as the Apostle Paul says: "Who is the image of the invisible God"(Col. 1,15), and man is in the image of Christ. Man, therefore, is an image of the image. Man was made in the image of God and he must attain to His likeness. According to the teaching of St.Maximos, the image of God consists in "being" and "eternal being"; and the likeness of God consists in "wisdom" and "goodness". We can say that "being" and "eternal being" constitute man's nature, whereas "wisdom" and "goodness" constitute the "person". Thus, when man's soul does not move to the likeness of God -which is theosis- when it does not live in a Godly way; when it does not have the energy of the Holy Spirit within it, then it is dead. Not only does it suffer malady, but it is dead. I must clarify that the soul is God's creation. Every thing created by God has a beginning and an end. Yet, God wished to create and make the soul immortal. Thus, the soul being by nature mortal, is by grace immortal. It is immortal, because God wishes it to be. Consequently, we cannot see the soul independently of God. This very statement shows the difference from the old philosophical ideas about the soul, but also from modern psychological positions.

-I think, said Athanasios, that the ancient philosophical view on this issue, expressed by Greek philosophy, but also by certain heretical Christians, mainly the Gnostics, was that the world, and consequently man is the fruit and result of the fall of the real world. This, naturally, points out what you were saying earlier about the soul.

-Yes, I think you are correct. Many heretics saw things in a similar way. However we believe that the world and man, therefore man's soul also, is a positive work of God the creator. It is not the fruit of the fall of a real world; in that case evil would be immanent in the creation of the existing world. God created the soul. The soul is not a particle of divinity, neither God's breath, as some people say. But since, as Holy Chrysostom says, the in-breathing of God is the energy of the Holy Spirit, it is this energy of the Holy Spirit which created the soul, without itself becoming the soul. This is a very important point

to be stated, because thus we realise that we cannot examine the soul autonomously, but in connection with God.

-These truths are Orthodox, said Fr.Philip, although a little deep. I believe, nevertheless, that they are absolutely necessary for us in order to understand what exactly the illness and cure of the soul is. Can you, please, analyse that man's soul is an image of the Triune God? For, since it is in the image of God I believe that it has a trinitarian nature.

-Indeed, St.Gregory Palamas deals with this subject in his works. The Holy Fathers were able to speak about these things, not because they studied at a School of psychology, but, engaged in the therapy of their passions, they came to know this inner world by the illumination of the divine grace. The teaching of St.Gregory Palamas is not a result of speculations, but a result of the revelation of the Most Holy Spirit, through his struggle to heal his soul. This should be made clear because in the West they also spoke about a triune division of the soul and Augustine employed this psychological argumentation for the existence of the Triune God. Western theology however ended up in the Filioque, whereas on the contrary, St. Gregory Palamas, experiencing the Triuneness of God in his soul, ended up in the rejection of the Filioque. To return, St.Gregory Palamas teaches that just as God is Triune, Nous, Word and Spirit, thus the soul also has a trinitarian nature, that is, it has nous, word and spirit. The nous is what we would call the core of the soul's existence; the word comes forth from the nous and the spirit is "the noetic love of man".

-I have read, interrupted Constantine, that, according to the teaching of St.Maximos the Confessor, the soul is divided into the intelligent, the appetitive and the irascible powers. I think that St.Gregory Palamas also refers to this in another context. Is there possibly a contradiction with what you told us about the triunity of the soul?

-The soul, according to the Fathers, is single and manifold. It has many powers. The division of the soul into nous, word and spirit is to be meant by way of condescension and not exactly as it is meant for God. Because in God the three Persons are of a common essence, but they also have particular hypostases, whereas concerning the soul, the nous, the word and the spirit are energies and not hypostases. But there is no essential difference regarding the divisions of the soul. It

depends on which aspect the Saint examines it each time. Examining the soul from the aspect of the passions which we want to heal, we divide it into the intelligent, appetitive and irascible powers. Studying the triunity of the soul's nature we speak of noetic, intelligent and sensible powers. And seeing the soul from the aspect of its turning to itself and its ascent to God, we speak of nous, knowledge and love. In any case all these triads show that the soul is in the image of the Triune God and cannot be healed without Him.

-You referred to the division of the soul in relation to the passions and you said that the soul is divided into the intelligent, the appetitive and the irascible powers. Which passions correspond to these powers?

-The Holy Fathers teach that the passions of disbelief in God, heresy, pride etc. dominate the intelligent power; the passions of pleasure-loving and greed develop in the appetitive power; finally, the passions of wrath, anger, malice, etc. prevail in the irascible power. In particular St. Gregory Palamas teaches that ambitiousness is the offspring of the intelligent part of the soul; love of possessions and avarice is the offspring of the appetitive power of the soul and gluttony is the offspring of the irascible power of the soul. Both the appetitive and the irascible powers belong to what is called passible aspect of the soul.

### **Soul and body**

-As long as you have been speaking about the soul, something has been troubling me, said Fr. Philip. Why are you examining the soul separately from the body? Are they truly separate and independent of one another?

-Of course, they are not independent. The soul is very closely connected with the body. The Fathers say that it happens with the soul what happens with an iron in a brazier; it becomes fire through remaining iron by nature. The soul is everywhere in man's body. The fact that the soul gives life to the body joined to it proves that man was made in God's image to a greater degree than were the angels. This is why in the Orthodox Church we say that the illness of the soul affects also the body, just as the illness of the body sometimes affects



the soul. Due to this inner bond it happens that, although the soul wants to attain communion with God, the body, on account of the passions, refuses to follow the course of the soul and thus a physical fatigue occurs. Then we realise that although the soul feels rather healthy, nevertheless the body feels ill and weak. What the Lord said holds: "the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mat. 26,41). For this reason the Orthodox tradition establishes that the course of the soul is to be parallel with that of the body. Hesychasm cures also the body in various ways and methods in order to reach communion with God. And when man receives the grace of God, then the body also undergoes change. We see this in the Transfiguration of Christ, when His face shone as the sun. We see it in the case of Moses, whose face shone brilliantly, as also in the face of the Archdeacon Stephen, which became as the face of an angel. Consequently there is a clear distinction between the soul and the body, but it is not possible for both of them to exist independently of each other. Furthermore, even at death the soul "is violently separated from the harmony and affinity of this natural bond". And this separation occurs "by divine will". Thus the soul is not man but the soul of man; and the body is not man, but the body of man. Man consists of soul and body, he is a psychobiological being. Therefore, the body will be deified also and it will be resurrected at the Second Coming and will pass into eternity.

### **What exactly the illness of the soul is**

-Where, then, does the illness of man lie? In which part of him is this illness located? An answer to this question will make things easier for us. In other words it will be clear to us how we should proceed in order to be cured.

-As we said previously man's being as a whole is ill. But the center of malady is located in man's nous. The nous is ill and then imparts the results of the illness to the entire human being.

## **Nous and reason**

-When you say "nous", do you mean "reason"? asked Athanasios. If nous and reason are one and the same thing then how does it become ill? If the nous is something different from the reason, what does illness of the nous mean?

-As I mentioned earlier, man's soul consists of nous, logos (word) and spirit, according to the mode of existence of the Most Holy Trinity. St. John of Damascus says that God created man's soul logical and noetic; it is also endowed with spirit, which, as the Fathers say, is "the noetic love of the soul". Thus we distinguish the energy of the nous from the energy of the reason. Nous is one thing, reason is another. The nous is the eye of the soul. And just as the eye of the body sees all of God's creation, in the same way also the eye of the soul, which is the nous, acquires the experience of God. This is the way the powers of the soul operated before the Fall. Adam's nous saw God and his reason had the ability to formulate this experience. So we can say, keeping the analogies, that just as the Nous (Father) begets the Word (Christ), so also man's nous begets the word. If the nous is healthy, then the word is also healthy, and if the nous is ill, the word is also ill. The same applies to the spirit which is, as we said, the noetic love of the soul. If the nous is healthy, love is also healthy, because it turns to God and thus the "intoxication" of the spirit and the ecstasy of the mind is activated. If the nous is ill, we fall from true love, that is we experience the idol of love, which is called by the Fathers "impious love".

-What you have mentioned to us, said Fr. Philip, is important. I think this is what differentiates the Orthodox from the western tradition. We, Orthodox, consider the nous as the basis of theology, whereas the Westerners put reason at the centre of their theology. However this small presentation is not sufficient. Could you please continue and analyse, as much as possible, both the healthy and the sick state of the nous. Then we will be able to understand the difference between the Orthodox and the Western tradition.

## The Fall of man

-I agree with your observations. They are remarkable. Truly, it is exactly in this point that the difference between Orthodoxy and heresy lies. The Holy Fathers have an illumined nous, whereas the heretics usually have a darkened nous and a hypertrophic reason. We can see this in Adam before and after the Fall. Prior to the Fall Adam was at the illumination of the nous, which is the second stage of spiritual life. But after the Fall his nous was darkened and confined.(Footnote 1) Thus the blindness of the nous occurs; its darkening and confinement. What did actually happen? Reason tried to outflank man's nous. It rebelled against the nous; it tried, by means of the tempting action of the devil, to interpret how man will reach theosis, abolishing, that is, God's commandment. So we have nous' identification with reason. The nous, instead of governing the reason, is now identified with it. In fact, when we speak of the original Sin and its consequences, we mean three things: the malfunctioning of the nous, that is the nous ceased to function normally; the identification of nous with reason, which in a certain way caused the deification of reason; and finally nous' subjection to the passions, to anxiety and the conditions of the environment. This is man's real death; his total disintegration; his inner mortification. The nous was darkened. And just as when the eye of the body is harmed, the whole body is dark, similarly when the eye of the soul -which is the nous- is blinded, the entire spiritual organism becomes ill and falls into deep darkness. I think that the Lord refers to this when He says: "if therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"(Mat. 6,23). This, however, aside from the fact that has brought about the disruption of the whole inner functioning of the soul, simultaneously has resulted in man's external disruption as well. He now faces differently his fellow man, God, the world and the whole creation. The reason attempts to meet God since the nous is unable to commune with Him. Thus idols of God are created and all idolatric religions, as well as all heresies. Because the nous is unable to see man in a Godly manner, the reason sees him in a different way too, under the effect of the passions. Man exploits his fellow man for love of glory and greed. He considers his fellow man as instrument-object of pleasure, and idolises all creation. What the Apostle Paul says in his epistle to the Romans holds: "professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of

the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. 1,22-23).

Whilst speaking about these topics, which I believe are crucial for Orthodox theology, Basil, a person of conservative principles, with very limited theological knowledge, was wondering and at a great loss. I could see his state of mind. He also expressed it himself. He was trying to follow but in fact it seemed that he had great difficulty. He was in his own world. At this point of the conversation he made a question, which was actually a contradiction.

### **Locating the illness is a necessity**

-I have been following through your analysis. With all sincerity, I have not understood all these positions. What is more, to me there is no necessity of understanding them. What importance does it have for me to know what the soul is, into how many parts it is divided, what part of man is ill? Why is it significant for me to know what the original Sin is and its consequences for man's life? Besides, I have been taught differently concerning all these. You are saying now that Adam's Fall consists essentially, in the malfunctioning of the nous; its identification with the reason and its enslavement to the passions and anxiety. I confess, I cannot see a meaning in this analysis, or why things are presented so different from all I have learnt. I am satisfied to be a good person, go to Church, to confess; not to do any harm to anybody; not to hate my neighbour.

-I can understand your questions and also your contradictions. I do not justify them, but I can see their rationale. What I have presented up to this point seem, indeed, a novelty in relation to the theology we have been learning for so many years. However they are not a novelty for those who live within the Orthodox tradition. In any case your views can be summed up in two central points: firstly, why is all this analysis on the soul and man's fall taking place. Secondly, why does this analysis differ from what we learnt in the past.

Concerning the first point I can say the following. If one wishes to be an Orthodox theologian one must begin from the state of Adam as it was before the Fall, what happened with the Fall and how we can be

restored to our former state, even reach there where Adam did not. If a theology does not speak of man's fall; if it does not designate precisely what it is, and if it does not speak of man's resurrection, then what kind of theology is it? Surely, it is not Orthodox. In any case, we were saying earlier that Orthodoxy is a therapeutic treatment and science, and also that Theology is a therapeutic treatment. It cures man. Yet, if we do not examine where man's illness lies, how can we know what we should heal? If, regarding his body, man follows a wrong treatment he will never be cured. The same also happens with the soul. It must become clear to us that the darkness of nous is its illness and illumination is its cure. Mysteries and all the ascetic tradition of the Church are meant to lead us where Adam was before the Fall, that is, to the illumination of the nous, and from there to theosis, which is man's original destination. Therefore, it is very important for us to know exactly what the illness is. If we ignore our inner sickness our spiritual life ends up in an empty moralism, in a superficiality. Many people are against the social system. They blame society, family, the existing evil, etc. for their own problem. However the basic problem, man's real malady is the darkness of his nous. When one's nous is illumined one thus becomes free from slavery to everything in the environment, e.g. anxiety, insecurity, etc.

Concerning the second point, I would like to say that theology suffered, indeed, its Babylonian captivity in the past years. It accepted Western influences which distorted it. Looking back to the ages and examining the theology of the Fathers, we realise that they all have the correct methodology of therapy: purification of the heart, illumination of the nous and theosis. Whoever does not follow this methodology and relies only on his reason is led to heretical views and finds himself outside the tradition of our Fathers. Unfortunately, in the past we were dominated by Western theology, which is founded on the emotion and the will, aims simply at the formulation of man's character, his ethical propriety and his becoming a "good" person and a "good" citizen. Unfortunately, it is this mentality which has brought so much atheism. It has led many youths to revolt against God, because they did not want a God, like the One their teachers and parents passed on to them. A moral life based on abstract metaphysics cannot stand nowadays, since the foundations of metaphysics have been shaken even in the West. Today it is widely accepted that the liberation of Orthodox

theology from its captivity and the discovery of its real identity will make it Orthodox again and therefore able to help the despairing and tired man of our days. For this reason I believe that the analysis of the soul's illness is absolutely necessary.

- I also think, added Fr.Philip, that we must examine this side of Orthodox ascetic teaching, even if I have a few questions about it. From what I have read I have realised that the holy Fathers insist on this issue. When they speak of the soul, the nous and the heart, they do not simply do it to philosophise and theologize intellectually, but in order to locate the problem and cure man effectively. Even more, as a confessor I see daily that man's therapy lies in this inner cure. That is why I think that we must insist on these analyses. The youths today rebel against every sort of moralising. They want something genuine. Whenever I discussed with teenagers about these matters they were delighted. The Lord also refers to the same thing, when He says: "Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Math. 23,26). If we do not see this aspect of therapy, we are probably in a hypocritical condition. For this reason I invited Fr. Hierotheos here. Am I not speaking correctly?

-I think you expressed yourself successfully. Indeed when man's noetic faculty does not function properly, then many anomalies occur. All the passions revolt and man uses both God as well as his fellow man for the fortification of an individualistic security and happiness. He is continually in a state of anxiety. Christians often say: "if my fellow men behaved to me differently, if I had better children, if my spouse did not do this or the other, if...,if..., I could probably live a Christian life". We have the impression that the cessation of external problems would make us better. However many times I say that external problems will never cease. Now we have troubles with our studies and later we are full of anxiety about our career or marriage. Bringing up our children will raise new problems. Afterwards we will be concerned about the future of our children or even finally of our grandchildren... I leave all other problems caused by work and social dealings. Problems will never end. We must overcome them.

This means that we must find the real problem which bothers us and this is, definitely, an inner problem. And when I say inner problem, I

mean the darkness of the nous. For, when we are at a fallen state, we then blame everything, even the good periods of our life. When, though, man's nous is freed with the appropriate method and treatment, he feels that there are no serious problems. We must realise that we are closed into the prison of the world and of our senses, because our nous is ill. When we are imprisoned, no matter how good the conditions are, they cannot offer us effective help. The fact is that we are imprisoned. They may allow us to decorate our prison, they may give us better food, they may create for us the best and most favourable conditions, yet all these things are useless, since we are imprisoned -experiencing the dreadful atmosphere of prison. When the nous is darkened, deadened, the whole world is a horrible prison and therefore tormenting. When our nous is illumined and free, the entire world is a gift of God to us. We then see in all of nature the "causes of beings", as the Holy Fathers say. For, we believe that nature is not governed by natural laws, but by the "uncreated causes", that is the providential energy of God Who governs personally all creation. And wherever a repetition and a consistency exists this is not due to the existence of any natural law, but to the faithfulness of divine energy, in other words, this is how God always wishes to act.

The illumination of the nous, therefore enables us to see the love of God in both gladness and sorrow; in misfortune and in happiness; in afflictions and in comforts, within the so-called good and the so-called evil people, etc. Thus what the others probably consider misfortune we take it as a blessing and what the others may take as a blessing we consider it a misfortune. For, the illumined nous is able to make the distinction between the created and uncreated energies, and thus, it learns to theologize. Because theology is this distinction between uncreated and created energies. For this reason I say that man's basic problem is how to learn to see his internal malady, which is specifically the captivity and darkness of the nous.

## **The darkness of the nous-a consequence of the Fall**

-Please, Father, said Irene, could you continue analysing man's condition after the Fall? It is of great importance for us to know exactly how the nous is confused with the reason; how it is enslaved to everything in the environment and to the passions.

-I agree that we should see this subject thoroughly, from all aspects. St.Gregory Palamas in one of his homilies refers to the darkness of the nous which is a result of its departure from God. He mentions a classic passage which, of course, we find in other Fathers, such as St. Maximos. "Separated from God the nous becomes either in the way of the beast or in the way of the devil". When man's nous departs from God and is darkened, all the inner energies of the soul as well as of the body are distorted. St.Gregory says in the following that, since the nous has lost its movement according to nature and has gone astray from its natural course, it desires things belonging to others and his love of possessions finds no satiation. He indulges into sensual pleasures and knows no limit and measure of pleasure. By his works he disgraces his name, yet he desires to be honoured by all. He wishes to be flattered by all; he wants everybody to agree with him, to co-operate with him and when these do not happen, he is filled with wrath. His anger and aggressiveness against his fellow men make him like the Serpent. And, thus, created in the image and likeness of God, man becomes a "murderer" and resembles the homicide Devil. And as St.Gregory explains, this is due to one reason: to the fact that man's nous went astray from fear and remembrance of God and gave way to co-operation with the originator of evil. Nous' separation from God makes man either a devil or a beast.

Thus, because the nous malfunctions, passions both of the body and of the soul rage. The demons know this well, so they struggle "to darken our noetic faculty". They know that if they darken the nous, then they can easily push a person to do whatever they want. Man can reach a state of madness; being in this condition, we can assuredly say that man does not behave normally. He is antisocial. Moreover, a result of the Fall is the excitement of phantasy and of the demonic thoughts which dominate our memory.



## **Phantasy-another consequence of the Fall**

-In what way is phantasy a result of the Fall? What relation does phantasy have with man's fallen state?

-The holy Fathers teach that phantasy is a natural energy-power of the soul. Phantasy has been energised after the Fall, that is, it can be dominated by images or false ideas, which cause serious problems to man's spiritual organism. This is why the Fathers say that when a person is purified and attains to the theoria of God, he is delivered from phantasy. In other words, the energy of phantasy is inactive, free from any images. It is like a television set which can project images, but it does not operate. It is in this sense that the Church teaches that Christ assumed this specific power of the soul, yet it was not activated in Him in contrast to what happen in all men after the Fall. Phantasy is a post-Fall phenomenon. It is, that is, a result of man's fall. Angels also do not have phantasy. Therefore, only men and the demons have phantasy, and this is why the demons activate many images and pursue to arouse the imagination. So we can maintain that the so-called psychological problems are all the result of suspicions, thoughts, -"logismoi"- which are energised within the favourable clime of phantasy. The more man is spiritually ill, the more he is overwhelmed by many images which phantasy brings. Spiritual health requires the nullification of phantasy to the greatest degree possible. Indeed, when the nous is freed and illumined, then all the activities of phantasy cease. And for this reason the holy Fathers teach that theology is not associated with phantasy. When man with the grace of God, but also his own co-operation, is delivered from all images and forms which phantasy creates, then he becomes a theologian and from within his heart true Orthodox theology wells up.

-For the first time I am realising, continued Irene, that phantasy is a result of the Fall and that nous' cure is connected also with the cure of phantasy. This teaching is truly revealing for me.

-Indeed, this aspect of spiritual life is very important. The darkness of the nous activates phantasy, and within its illusionary world a person may create various idols of God. The more a man is psychologically ill, the more his imagination is stirred up. How do we realise that a person suffers psychological abnormalities and is certainly led to

schizophrenia? His illusions, delusions and all of his phantastic images reveal his condition. This psychological malfunction is, primarily, a spiritual illness which causes the death of the nous. I can say that when I see a spiritual child of mine dominated by suspicions, phantasies and other thoughts, I immediately realise that his nous is ill and needs help. In certain characteristic cases, I pointed out to them the danger they were running to become isolated within an illusionary world swamped with phantasies. Those who are alert spiritually do not reach this state. On the contrary, people who do not pay attention and do not struggle to be cured, may end up in dreadful conditions both of the soul and body. And allow me to say that you, women, are susceptible to this danger more than anyone else. Just as you are also vulnerable emotionally.

### **Emotion and how it is cured**

-Father what you have been saying has been a continuous surprise for me, from which I cannot yet recover. How can it be that emotion is also a result of the Fall, or rather that emotion itself is an ill condition?

-Emotion is mixed up with the passions of pleasure-loving. It is not completely identified with them, but is imbued by them to a great degree. A healthy man spiritually is a balanced man in all his manifestations. I said earlier that when man's nous is illumined -when man is at the illumination of the nous- he is not moved by God simply psychologically and emotionally, but has true communion with God. Moreover, he sees in all creation the "causes of beings" -the uncreated governing energy of God. He is not moved emotionally by nature and its beauty, but sees the energy of God in it. As St. Isaac the Syrian says, faith based on theoria -which man attains when he is at the illumination of the nous- "is a gate to the mysteries of God".

I will mention a simple example. St. Diadochos of Photiki says that the introductory joy is one thing and the perfecting joy is another. The first one, being strongly emotional, is mixed with phantasy, "is not devoid of fantasy", while perfecting joy is associated with humility. Between emotional joy and perfecting joy there is "god-loving sorrow and painless tears". Emotional joy, which is called introductory, is not

entirely rejected, yet we must be led to the perfecting joy. This perfection and cure is achieved through the cross. "By the cross gladness prevails to all world". Thus within the Church we struggle to transform all emotions as well as everything mundane. The transformation of emotions to genuine and authentic experiences is accomplished by repentance. Repentance leads us from a painful and tragic monologue to a dialogue with the living God. Through repentance, self-condemnation and humility, we transform emotions to spiritual experiences. In this case also holds true what we mentioned about phantasy. The more a person is emotionally ill, the more he reveals the death and darkness of his nous. And the more a person's emotions are transformed, the more his nous is illumined; he is at the state of illumination. Can you see that the movement of the nous is very important? Can you see that it plays an important role whether the nous follows the movement according to nature or contrary to nature?

-Allow me, continued Irene, to ask you to explain even further how the emotions are transformed to spiritual experiences.

-I think I referred to the basic points. But since you wish I can expand more on the subject. The Fathers say that in the woman's soul psychological experiences are connected more with spiritual ones. In other words, many women consider the so-called psychological conditions to be spiritual experiences. They may for example feel an emotional sweetness, while praying, and think that it is the coming of the grace of God. A lot of attention is needed, because at this point many images of phantasy intervene and create the preconditions for serious psychological anomalies.

I give you an example. A small girl expresses motherhood by playing with dolls. She feeds them, washes them, puts them to sleep, etc. When, however, she grows up and becomes a real mother, she does all these things undergoing pain. She feels pain to give birth to the child and pain and toil to bring it up. The little girl expresses motherhood, and, I could say, enjoys it emotionally, without pain and suffering, whereas becoming a mother for a woman is connected with pain and suffering; it is a "cross". It is in this way somehow that we distinguish emotional joy from spiritual joy, emotions from spiritual experiences. Only true and complete repentance can cleanse all these psychological

states and make them spiritual. And, naturally, it is our spiritual father who helps us with this; it is he who has the responsibility of distinguishing and curing this condition. In this way and with the help of our spiritual guide our nous is cured; it is led from the movement contrary to nature to that according to nature and, even more, above nature; the nous then is illumined and united with God and it is cured from phantasies and emotions. This is why the realisation of the real problem, and also the cure of the darkened nous are absolutely necessary.

### **The movement of the nous according to nature, contrary to nature and above nature**

-Can you tell us, said Fr. Philip, something about nous' movement according to nature, contrary to nature and above nature? I think that this will help us see even more clearly all the things you have mentioned up to this point.

-The holy Fathers have dealt with all these aspects of spiritual life. And since they considered that the subject of the nous is a dominant one for man's malady and cure they spoke about it. St. Mark the ascetic teaches that there are three movements-states of the nous: according to nature, contrary to nature and above nature. The nous moves contrary to nature when it does not see the righteousness and providence of God, but fights with men, believing that he is unjustly treated. In other words, when moving contrary to nature the nous leaves God and is dispersed in the creation through the senses. Then he blames the others for whatever evil exists around him. A person's nous moves according to nature when he does not blame other people, but considers himself responsible for his evil thoughts. In this case man knows the causes of his passions and confesses his sins to God; that is, instead of putting the blame on others, as Adam and Eve did, he blames himself and struggles to be cured. When man receives the fruits of the Most holy Spirit this nous moves above nature. In this state the nous is united with God and rejoices in His presence. When the nous is illumined and united with God, it becomes formless and shapeless, that is it is delivered from images, phantasies and demonic thoughts. It has good thoughts and thus it feels free from inner

restraints. For, as you understand, evil thoughts which turn against God, and against his fellow men are a result of the nous' illness. You can realise, therefore, of how great importance the nous and the heart are, concerning malady and cure of the soul; concerning, in general, spiritual life.

-I think that the time has come to pose anew the question which I had previously asked, said Basil, "what is cure and how do you understand it?" Then you told me that you would give an answer when the appropriate time would come. Do not you think that this appropriate time has come?

## **4. Knowledge of God**

-You are speaking of the knowledge of God and I take the opportunity to pose a question, said Athanasios. We have been taught from our early age that knowledge of God is studying and learning about God: the more books we study, the more knowledge of God we obtain. What do you say about this?

### **Natural and spiritual knowledge**

-We have already said in the beginning of the conversation that there are two kinds of faith. Faith based on hearing and faith based on theoria. This entails two kinds of knowledge also: natural knowledge which begins by studying, by contemplating nature, the various miracles and signs, by the acceptance of the Revelation of the Saints. There is, also, spiritual knowledge which is begotten by the communion with God. The first knowledge begets faith, the second one is begotten of faith, -of faith based on theoria. When we say that prayer grants us the knowledge of God, we mean, of course, spiritual knowledge which is the fruit of theoria. When one reaches the illumination of nous and unceasing noetic prayer wells up in his heart, one acquires the knowledge of God, which is communion and union with Him. St. Isaac the Syrian teaches that the knowledge which precedes faith is one thing and the knowledge which is begotten of faith is another. The former is called natural knowledge, whereas the latter is called spiritual.

-In your book "Orthodox Psychotherapy", said Fr.Philip, I recall that there is a whole chapter in which you develop the knowledge of God, according to the teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian and St.Gregory Palamas. Could you please mention here, also, certain distinctive views of theirs on this vital subject?

-There is, indeed, in my book a whole chapter, titled "orthodox gnosiology". And I have placed it at the end, because I believe that man acquires knowledge of God according to the extent of his cure and his spiritual state. A beginner in spiritual life experiences the knowledge of God differently from someone who is in the middle of

his spiritual path and moreover from someone who is advanced spiritually. Therefore, the knowledge of God which one obtains corresponds to his spiritual state. We should say a few things about the teaching of St. Isaac the Syrian first and then of St. Gregory Palamas.

### **The three kinds of knowledge according to St. Isaac the Syrian**

St. Isaac the Syrian teaches that there are three kinds of knowledge, which correspond to the division: body, soul and spirit. Naturally, this is not the so called tricomposite of man, because the spirit is not a particular energy of man, but it is the Holy Spirit. Just as the soul is the life of the body, so also the Holy Spirit is the life of the soul. Thus there is the bodily knowledge, the knowledge of the soul and the spiritual knowledge.

Bodily knowledge is closely connected with the study of human wisdom and knowledge; with the desire of the flesh, the satisfaction of the passions of pleasure-loving, greed and ambition. It is human knowledge, because it deals with the invention and cultivation of the arts, sciences and learning. It is the knowledge which characterises all of our education. St. Isaac emphasises that the partial cultivation of this knowledge creates fear and disturbance, sadness and despair, cowardice before men, dependence on reason and the human powers, fear of death and of the demons. It is a knowledge which makes man appear strong, in relation to his fellow-men, but essentially weak in relation to God and even to the devil. It is the knowledge which is also cultivated today and causes anxiety and insecurity, wickedness and obstinacy.

The knowledge of the soul is granted when man ceases giving great importance to reason and is engaged in the implementation of the commandments of Christ. Fasting, prayer, charity, the reading of the holy Scriptures, the acquisition of virtues, the fight and struggle against passions are all a result of this knowledge. The Holy Spirit perfects this knowledge, but the co-operation of man is also needed for his freedom to be manifest.

Spiritual knowledge is the state of spiritual theoria, when one sees invisibly and hears inaudibly and comprehends incomprehensibly the glory of God. Precisely then comprehension ceases and, what is more, he understands that he does not understand. Within the vision of the uncreated Light man also sees angels and Saints and, in general, he experiences communion with the angels and the Saints. He is then certain that resurrection exists. This is the spiritual knowledge which all the holy Prophets, the Apostles, Martyrs, ascetics and all the Saints of the Church had. The teachings of the Saints are an offspring of this spiritual knowledge. And, naturally, as we said earlier, spiritual knowledge is a fruit of the vision of God.

-You mentioned previously that St. Isaac distinguishes natural knowledge from spiritual knowledge. He accepts, therefore, two kinds of knowledge. A little while ago you analysed the three kinds of knowledge again according to St. Isaac. Do not you see a contradiction at this point?

-It is only a superficial contradiction. In fact there is no contradiction. For, when St. Isaac speaks of natural knowledge he means the knowledge of the soul which is the acceptance of the Revelation of the Saints and simultaneously the realisation of the works this acceptance entails, i.e. faith based on hearing. In other words, when man accepts the teaching of Christ and keeps it in his life, the knowledge of the soul is begotten. Spiritual knowledge however is associated with theoria. St. Isaac, then, simply adds the bodily knowledge to his second analysis concerning knowledge. Thus, his two distinctions of knowledge are connected and identified at their two points.

### **Knowledge according to St. Gregory Palamas**

-Now we can turn to the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas on this vital subject of knowledge, said Constantine.

-St. Gregory does not have a particular and different teaching than that of St. Isaac the Syrian, but speaking of the knowledge of God he means, primarily, spiritual knowledge, the knowledge based on theoria. The cause which made St. Gregory deal with the topic of knowledge was Barlaam. Barlaam adopted the western teaching on the



knowledge of God. He claimed that the knowledge of God is a development of the reason; a fruit of rational concepts about God; the evolution of philosophy. For this reason he taught that it was the philosophers who obtained the knowledge of God more than anybody else. Comparing philosophers with the Apostles and the Prophets, Barlaam said that the former are superior to the latter. Comparing philosophy with the vision of the uncreated Light, he argued that philosophy is superior to the vision of God. For, as he maintained, theoria of God is an external vision, whereas philosophy is an inner evolution, that is, a fruit of the intellect, which God gave us. There was a great danger for Orthodox theology to be secularised. The Church spoke then through its great Father, St. Gregory Palamas. St. Gregory had personal spiritual experience, and, therefore, he spoke with authenticity on these issues. He said that the uncreated Light is not inferior to the intellect, but incomparably superior. The Apostles were not inferior to the philosophers, but superior to them, because they accepted the truth through the Revelation of God and not through their reason. If it were otherwise, then the philosophers would be able to find the truth about God and the salvation of man, and Christ would not have to incarnate. Yet, precisely the opposite happens.

-What is the specific teaching of St. Gregory Palamas on the knowledge of God?

-Since we have began this subject we cannot close it abruptly. St. Gregory teaches that the vision of God -the theoria of God- does not occur outwardly, but inwardly. Man reaches the point of seeing the uncreated Light through theosis, and not simply through an external vision. Man sees the uncreated Light through his inner noetic sense, which has been already purified; he even sees it through his physical senses, which, however, have been transformed so as to be able to accept theoria. Thus, man sees God through theosis. Each Prophet attains to theosis and through theosis he beholds the uncreated Light. However a person's theosis is in fact his union and communion with God. Theosis is not an external power, but communion with God. It is participation in God and in the deifying communion. When man reaches to the union and communion with God, he acquires the knowledge of God. Again, knowledge of God is the fruit of man's union with God. And this knowledge of God is above any human knowledge. It surpasses not only human knowledge but also the

learning of the holy Scriptures. The vision of the uncreated Light is beyond sense and according to the sense, since, as we said before, the bodily senses are also transformed and, so, man is granted to see God. Not only is this knowledge beyond any human knowledge, but it is also above virtue. Thus, St. Gregory Palamas associates the knowledge of God with the vision of the uncreated Light, with man's theosis and his communion with God. All these are closely linked.

-You speak of the knowledge of God and I recall a troparion which is taken from the Old Testament in which God is called "God of knowledges," said Fr. Philip. Is the knowledge of God one or manifold?

-God is one, but man acquires the knowledge of God in analogy to his spiritual state. The more he is cleansed, illumined and deified, the more his spiritual knowledge is increased. For this reason we can say what the mother of the Prophet Samuel said: God is "the God of knowledges". God reveals Himself in accordance with man's spiritual state.

### **Theoria-vision of God**

-You said that the vision of God is a result of God's favour to him who has previously been purified and illumined, said Basil. How can it be explained that the Apostle Paul saw Christ whilst being at that time a persecutor of Christ?

-The case of the Apostle Paul needs particular attention. One must examine it carefully. If I may stress a few points, I would say the following. God is not prevented by anything from revealing Himself, even to His opponents. And, indeed, we see this in many cases, but mainly in the case of the Apostle Paul. God can make man a beholder of His uncreated glory even before his baptism.

-How can this happen prior to baptism?

-We have specific examples in the Holy Scriptures. The Most Holy Mother of God reached theosis before the visit of the angel and its greeting "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the

Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1,35). She attained to theosis, even before she received the Holy Spirit through Which she conceived the Word of God. Also the three Apostles, before they were yet baptised on the day of Pentecost, saw upon Tabor the glory of the Godhead. They heard the voice of the Father and saw the Holy Spirit - the brilliant cloud which overshadowed them. Thus they attained to theosis even before the Cross, the Resurrection of the Lord and Pentecost. The Prophets reached the vision of Christ before His incarnation.

-In other words, did theosis and theoria occur before the incarnation and the Resurrection of Christ?

-Yes, indeed. Vision-theoria of God presupposes man's theosis. But the theosis of the Prophets was temporal and death was not ontologically abolished, that is why they went to Hades. We have real theosis in the case of the three Apostles on Mount Tabor, because they saw the glory of God through theosis. Yet while they were seeing the uncreated Light through theosis, that is internally, they themselves were outside the Theanthropic Body of Christ. The Theanthropic Body, which is the source of the uncreated glory due to the hypostastic union, was outside the disciples. Later, on the day of Pentecost the disciples became Body of Christ -members of the Body of Christ- and thus they saw the glory of God internally, through theosis, but also within the Theanthropic Body. This is the difference between the theoria of the disciples before Pentecost and after Pentecost, and what St.Gregory Palamas teaches.

-What was the case with the Apostle Paul?

-He saw Christ in His glory and he was outside the Theanthropic Body. As St.Gregory the Theologian says, the Apostle Paul could not endure the glory of Christ and was blinded, precisely because he was still before baptism. It was a noetic but also a physical blindness. Moreover it must be observed that the Apostle Paul was not a persecutor out of impiety, but out of great piety. He had been taught that God is one, that is Yahweh who reveals Himself to the Prophets in the Old Testament. So, when he would hear Christ saying about Himself that He is the Son of God, and furthermore: "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob", he could not stand it, given the religious

and theological knowledge of his time. He considered it impiety. For this reason he fought Christ and the Christians. But Christ revealed Himself to him just outside Damascus saying: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9,4). The Apostle Paul received then the great Revelation that Yahweh of the Old Testament, who was manifested to the Prophets, is Christ. He identified the Revealed God of the Old Testament with Christ of the New Testament. In the Old Testament He was revealed without flesh, whereas in the New Testament He was manifested in the flesh. This was the great Revelation. That is why the Apostle Paul later confirmed that he was an Apostle of Jesus Christ and he identified Yahweh with Christ in his teaching. Also, in Damascus he received the great Revelation that Christ is the Head of the Church and the Church is the Body of Christ. For, while he was persecuting the Christians, Christ asked him: "why persecutest Thou me?" (Acts 9,4). Thus, the theology of the Apostle Paul that the Church is the blessed Body of Christ is a result of this great experience.

### **Degrees of theoria**

-A few days ago you mentioned that theoria has many degrees; noetic prayer is only one of its first stages and there is always an evolution. Can you analyse this more for us?

-St. Gregory Palamas distinguishes illumination, theoria-vision of God and constant theoria of God, which may last for a few hours, days or even weeks. St. Maximos the Confessor teaches that the knowledge of the causes of beings -which occurs at the stage of illumination consists in the theoria of the uncreated providential energy of God. Many Fathers, also, say that repentance is inspired by the Comforter. It is only through repentance that we are granted to see our spiritual desolation, our passions, and start struggling against them. At this point I would like to refer to the eight levels of spiritual theoria, according to St. Peter Damascene.

The 1<sup>st</sup> theoria is the knowledge of the afflictions and temptations of life. It is when man realises the beneficial presence of God and His blessedness in temptations. The 2<sup>nd</sup> theoria is the knowledge of the

benefactions of God and the awareness of our sins and passions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> theoria is the knowledge of the sufferings awaiting for us before and after death. The 4<sup>th</sup> theoria is the understanding of the life of Christ before the Passions and of the Resurrection as well as the real knowledge of the words and deeds of all the Saints and martyrs. The 5<sup>th</sup> theoria is the knowledge of the nature and flux of things. The 6<sup>th</sup> theoria is the theoria of beings. It is the knowledge of the uncreated providential energy of God which maintains and enlivens creatures. The 7<sup>th</sup> theoria is perceiving the angels which are the noetic creatures of God. Finally the eighth theoria is the theoria-vision of God, the knowledge of God which is called theology. St. Peter Damascene says that the first three theoriae are of the man of praxis (action), that is, of him who is at the stage of purification. The other five are theoriae of man who is at the illumination of the nous. The eighth is the theoria of the age to come and belongs actually to the age to come, but some people are granted to enjoy it in betrothal even in this life.

-Therefore, theoria develops. The more man progresses in his spiritual life, the more he ascends the stages of spiritual perfection, the more he obtains higher theoria of God and, consequently, knowledge of God, said Irene. Does this evolution ever cease?

-Spiritual life is not static, but dynamic. St. Maximos speaks of the "ever-moving cessation" and the "standing motion". St. Gregory of Nyssa teaches that virtue has no limit. And naturally, when he speaks of virtues he does not mean human deeds, which are natural virtues, but the fruits of the Most Holy Spirit, which are the result of man's communion with God. Perfection, says St. Gregory of Nyssa, has no boundaries. For virtue has only one condition, that it has no limits. Man is continually perfected and there is no end to this perfection. This will also continue in the life to come. There will be continuous progress for the man who has entered the stage of purification and illumination. St. Gregory of Nyssa points out that participation in the divine good becomes richer and fuller and it continually increases "him who is fed by it and this increase never ceases". St. Gregory the Sinaite says that in the age to come the angels and Saints "shall not ever cease advancing in grace". St. John the Sinaite teaches the same thing. He says that the good workers progress from the power of practical life (i.e. stage of purification) to the power of theoria and since love never ends its limit is unlimited. The progress of the good

workers shall never cease, "receiving Light upon Light". St.Gregory brings as an example the noetic angelic powers, who always receive glory upon glory and knowledge in addition to their knowledge. This ceaseless perfection takes place not only in the present life, but also in the age to come. Asking whether the Saints will infinitely advance in theoria in the future age, St.Gregory Palamas gives himself the answer: "It is obvious that they infinitely will". Thus, the people of God constantly develop. They grow in spiritual life. There is never an end to this development and theoria. Man can never reach the perfection of Christ. This is evident even in the terms which are used in the Holy Scripture: The term "in the image" signifies something static, whereas a continuous evolution is implied by the phrase "in the likeness". When we live in the Orthodox tradition, we cannot ever come to a stand still, because this leads us to pietism. The knowledge and experience of tradition begets humility, but also progress in spiritual life.

-However, why has all of this tradition, which you develop for us here, been lost? asked Basil. Why have we come to be unaware of essential elements in our Christian life? Why is this "maternal language" of our Church not spoken today? Why have we lost the living patristic word? I understand, as the time goes by and the conversation unfolds, that this is the real Orthodox life. Only in this way can we understand that the Church is not a religious organisation, but a living organism, which enlivens man and makes him a member of the Body of Christ. Thus we realise that Christ is the life of people. Christ is the life of the world and of people, because He heals man and helps him pass the stages of perfection. Why, I repeat, have we lost this tradition?

## 5. How the Orthodox Tradition changed

-Your question is critical and your observation very accurate. I am delighted with your conclusion, which you expressed in great pain. Indeed, we have lost our Orthodox tradition, which is specified as the therapeutic treatment or the stages of spiritual perfection: purification, illumination and theosis. Church is a Hospital. And just as in Hospitals there is a special treatment for every condition the same happens in the Church. Just as in the Hospital there are outpatient offices, intensive care wards and wards for convalescence period, so also in the Church. The parish-communities operate as outpatient offices, whereas Orthodox Monasteries are the intensive care units. Passing through the stage of purification, one completes his convalescence period and, finally, he attains cure when his nous is illumined. His cure continues until he reaches the vision-theoria of God and the constant theoria of God. We could say that this tradition often exists and operates as a substratum and background in many people. However, Western tradition has greatly affected our life. The Enlightenment of the West substituted moral life for purification and an intellectual catechism for the illumination of the nous, which is achieved through noetic prayer. Thus in Sunday Schools a rather Western Apologetics and, in general, a Western catechism is usually taught. We experience a wide secularisation nowadays. And I firmly believe that secularisation is not abstract. It is not simply expelling God to heaven, as many people teach today, but it is the loss of the therapeutic treatment of the Church; the loss of the three stages of spiritual life: of purification, of the illumination of the nous and of man's theosis. Even when we speak of these, we do it in a superficial way. We just think that we must become "good people". And when theosis is spoken of, we probably consider it as a communion and union with Christ but in an abstract way. Yet no one can attain to communion with Christ outside the ascetic life, which is purification, illumination and theosis. As we previously mentioned, the vision of God is Paradise for the purified, and Hell for the impure. Just as St. Gregory the Theologian says: "O holy Trinity venerable and long-suffering. O Trinity who will become known to all, to the ones by illumination, to the others by damnation". Christ is the fall and resurrection of many.

-How can it be explained that the ascetic method is traced as a background in our people's life? asked Fr.Philip.

### **Orthodox Monasticism -a manifestation of Orthodox Tradition**

-We must confess that this is due to the great power of our tradition, which is alive, and to the great beneficial effect of Orthodox monasticism. We know that Monasticism developed after the cessation of the persecutions. It would seem reasonable if it developed during the persecutions, when Christians would try to find refuge on the mountains. Yet, on the contrary, when Christianity gained its freedom, secularisation appeared. Then those who wanted to live the genuine life according to the Gospel fled from society. Thus, according to the teachings of the Saints of our Church, we can maintain that Monasticism is a result of the secularisation of ecclesiastical life and the loss of the Church's therapeutic treatment. For this reason the first monks used to ask the laymen who would visit them whether the Church still existed in the world. They did not mean whether there were Temples, or Shepherds of the Church, but whether the therapeutic treatment, and especially faith based on theoria was preserved.

It is observed nowadays as well that many people approach sanctified monks, who practise the therapeutic treatment of the Church, to ask them on matters of spiritual life. The people of our days feel that they must be healed of their passions. They live in the suffocating atmosphere of passions and want to be delivered from them. They are aware that a formal Church attendance is not enough. The appropriate method is also necessary. That is why monks are always the shepherds of the people in a indirect way, although they are not directly such. They do not substitute for the work of the shepherds, but they preserve and use the therapeutic treatment which has been lost in contemporary ecclesiastical life. Or, even if it is not lost, at least, it is replaced by a moral mode of life. However man's soul, which yearns for real communion with God, does not find rest in anthropocentric systems and humanistic methods of therapy. It seeks something genuine and authentic. Monks therefore are the theologians of the Church in the sense which we developed in this conversation. They know God and



can guide man unerringly to reach God. Furthermore they distinguish the uncreated from the created and thus they can guide in an Orthodox manner.

### **Life on the Holy Mountain as representing the Orthodox way of life**

-The significance of the Holy Mountain for Greece and the world is, indeed, great, said Fr.Philip. This is why many people visit it and leave comforted. There they see all the practical implementations of Christianity, such as property in common and holy poverty. They see the way in which our societies can be organised and function correctly. They are, thus, the hope of our salvation. For, if the truth exists, then we also have the certainty that we will find it some day.

-I agree with your opinion. The Holy Mountain is the hope of our people, but also of the entire mankind; of all those who belong or would like to belong to the people of God -to the Orthodox-independently of their nationality. Because, without abolishing the particular homelands, we surpass them through life in Christ. Thus the Holy Mountain manifests that Christianity is applicable even nowadays. It is not a utopia. It can give answers to the great contemporary questions of philosophy with its abstract searching; of psychology with its psychological interpretations of spiritual life; of sociology with its interpretations alienated from God. There, on the Holy Mountain one can find all these answers applied to perfection, but only within God and the Church. However the importance of the Holy Mountain is not exhausted only at this point. We also acknowledge that it preserves the way and method of man's spiritual cure. I believe that this is the prime and essential message that the Holy Mountain sends to all of us.

-Yes, but we, women, are treated unjustly. We are not allowed to visit the Holy Mountain and experience its life, said Irene.

-The Holy Mountain is not just a place, but a mode of life. We do not idolise places. Certainly, the environment and the quietness may give the possibility of a greater development of inner hesychia. But everyone who is a dwelling place of God the Trinity can be called a

"Holy Mountain". The Theotokos, who became the mother of Christ, is called holy and God-trodden Mountain. Thus every one who becomes "mother of Christ", who begets Christ, becomes also a "theotokos". Because, as saint Maximos says, the Word of God, although begotten once in the flesh, "is always begotten in spirit to those who wish" and becomes an infant, grows up and increases in age. Besides, there are many monasteries which live according to the way of life of the Holy Mountain. You can visit these monasteries and see this manner of life. Each Orthodox Monastery which lives in the Holy Spirit, grows in the Orthodox way and keeps the Orthodox tradition, applies the method of cure which our Church obtains.

-In other words, are the monastics today living the stages of spiritual perfection? asked Constantine.

### **Monasticism and the cure of the soul**

-Most certainly. If we examine monastic life, when, of course, it operates within the atmosphere of Orthodox tradition, we realise that the three stages of spiritual perfection do exist. Every monk passes through these stages. Entering monastic life the monk passes through purification. People who start their monastic life usually have unrestrained crying and deep repentance. They discover the ulcers of their soul and start repenting. Repentance occurs in the stage of the novitiate, yet it is completed throughout a monk's life. Along with it goes obedience to the Gerondas and unceasing prayer. It is in this way that the nous is separated from the reason, as we said a few days ago. I have met beginners in monastic life, novices, who have such a repentance, we cannot possibly conceive of. We cannot grasp the degree of their repentance. They experience the crying of the Apostle Peter. When they pass through the stage of the novitiate, which is associated with the stage of purification, they are tonsured and receive the great and angelic habit. During this service the priest reads in the prayer: "You are receiving a second baptism o brother, today". This second baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is the illumination of the nous. If in passing the former stage he was delivered from pleasure and pain, now in the stage of illumination he is freed from ignorance and forgetfulness of God. If in the previous stage the novice

departed from sin, now in the illumination of the nous sin flees from the monastic. He is delivered from the energies of the passions. The Apostle Paul writes: "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6,14). Interpreting this passage St.Gregory Palamas says: "by which the world has been crucified to me" reveals that the novice "crucifies" the world; he departs from the world and the causes that excite his passions. "And I to the world" shows that the monastic life is also "crucified" as regards the world. He acquires dispassion by grace. He is liberated from passions. In the monasteries and especially on the Holy Mountain there are cases of monks who reached the theoria of the uncreated Light. Thus, in the organised monasteries, which are based on the Orthodox tradition and express it, all three stages of spiritual life operate. Each monastery which functions within the Orthodox tradition is an organised apostolic community. For this reason Monasticism is also called apostolic life and the monks are called apostles and martyrs, because they have the apostolic and martyrical grace.

### **Apostolic communities**

-You say that every monastery which functions within the Orthodox tradition is an organised apostolic community. Do you suggest then that the apostolic communities lived monastically? asked Basil.

-Certainly, they did. If we read the first epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, we see clearly that in Corinth all classes of Christians existed. There were Prophets, who were the theologians, because prophecy is identified with theology and theology is identified with prophecy. There were people who had noetic prayer, that is, they had the gift of speaking tongues and there were also those people who had the gift of the discernment of spirits. The Apostle Paul, as it is obvious in this epistle, had both the gift of noetic prayer and the gift of theology. That is why we believe that when a parish lives according to the Orthodox tradition, there are people amongst its members who belong to all the stages of spiritual perfection. Therefore, organising a parish should not only involve social work or other gatherings but it

should primarily secure the therapeutic treatment of the Church and make it available to any person who seek it and is badly in need of it.

-Is it possible that one finds in the world such an organised parish, where this therapeutic method is being applied? asked Athanasios.

-This is the experience and teaching of ecclesiastical life. It is undoubtedly possible so long as there are people who express this teaching. Christian life is keeping the commandments of Christ, which refer to the purification of the heart, the illumination of the nous, to repentance in unceasing mourning, etc. Years ago there was a conference held on St. Demetrios. The subject was "Saint Demetrios and the monastic ideal". Certain people criticised this position. They could not see the relation St. Demetrios had with monastic life. Yet, they are mistaken in such a judgement. St. Gregory Palamas, speaking about St. Demetrios, presents him as a monastic. He praises the virtues of virginity, poverty and obedience to the commandment of Christ. Furthermore, if we read the epistles of the Apostle Paul, sent to the Churches which consisted of married people, we realise that he speaks of unceasing prayer, of theosis, etc.

### **Western and Orthodox Monasticism**

-You previously said that when monasticism follows the Orthodox tradition and when the monasteries are organised in the Orthodox manner, then they preserve the therapeutic method. In other words, are there also monasteries which do not function according to the Orthodox tradition? asked Fr. Philip.

-Yes, we also have such cases. The secularisation which exists nowadays among Christians can also be found in the monasteries. There is a clear difference between monasticism of the West and Orthodox monasticism. Western monasticism exhausts itself in social work and external worship, which is intellectual worship. Certainly, there are isolated cases of monks who live an inner life. But even they cannot be freed from a barren ethicology. In Orthodox monasticism a perfect therapeutic treatment exists -consisting of purification, illumination and theosis. Western monasticism was created in their attempt to regenerate the Church. Orthodox monastics are not

struggling to revive the Church or to save it, but they are struggling to be healed living within the Church. And this is the offer of Orthodox monasticism. Many people speak of the value of monasticism and the Holy Mountain which has preserved so many treasures and works of art and architecture for so many centuries. Indeed, we can also acknowledge the offer of monasticism at this level. But we consider as its greatest offer the preservation of the Church's therapeutic treatment. For, it is this which gives us hope and the possibility to find this therapeutic method when we need it. And when we reach total despair, hope is activated. We are grateful to the monastics and to the Holy Mountain, mainly for this reason. We are deeply indebted to these sanctified people, who protect the Orthodox tradition.

## **6. The Orthodox tradition**

-You have spoken a lot about the Orthodox tradition. I believe that the Orthodox tradition, is, primarily life and not an ideology. It is tradition and not conservatism, as you said. Now that we are almost at the end of these conversations, can you enlarge on this subject? said Fr. Philip.

### **The Orthodox Tradition is connected with cure**

-I think I became clear with what was mentioned previously. The word tradition means that which is handed down. And who hands down? The spiritual father. What does he hand down? Whatever he received and whatever was revealed to him. Thus, tradition is connected with Revelation. God reveals, man receives the Revelation from God and passes it on to his spiritual children. The Saint receives and passes on not an abstract teaching about God -of course, he may do this as well in the beginning- but, first and foremost, he passes on the way-method by which we attain to communion with God. I believe that the basic point which distinguishes Orthodox tradition from any other is the method through which man is cured. The background of the dogmas, of Orthodox arts, of social work, etc. is purification, illumination and theosis. When we reject this background, then we see the dogmas, the liturgical arts and all the external life of the Church, even the life of worship in a conservative way. The Councils which took place at the time of St. Gregory Palamas (1341-1351) demonstrate that hesychasm -which is basically a method of cure- is the foundation of all the dogmas of our faith. For the first time in Church history these Councils studied in depth under what presuppositions the Westerners and in general all the heretics theologize; and the presupposition based on which the holy Fathers theologize. For this reason, I repeat, they are basic and significant Councils. And it is in these Councils that we see the great value of St. Gregory Palamas, who championed in all of them. He proved that when we do not follow the therapeutic method of the Church, we shall be definitely led to heresy. Whereas when we lead our life according to the Orthodox tradition, we shall remain in the Church and we may attain to the vision of God and to theosis. Hesychasm is the backbone of Orthodox theology. The controversies which then took place were a blessing, because the

Orthodox people thrived on them under later grave circumstances. Hesychasm brought forth the Neomartyrs, who revealed the existence of the Church. And it is the revival of the hesychastic spirit experienced by many people nowadays which will protect us from future temptations. It is the hesychastic method which inscribes on our heart the seal of the Lamb of the Revelation.

-Yet, in what way are the therapeutic method and the stages of perfection the background of liturgical arts?

### **Liturgical arts and man's cure**

-This is a right question, because there is a trend nowadays to chant in a Byzantine way, to make icons in a Byzantine manner, to build churches according to Byzantine architecture, etc. This is good. Yet, it must be done in parallel with the effort to find and use the therapeutic treatment of the Church. For, liturgical arts as well as the entire teaching of the Church are the expression of this inner life. In other words, liturgical art was developed by sanctified people who had personal experience of the stages of spiritual perfection. In their attempt to create art they infused into their art all the experiences they had. The iconographer passed down in the Byzantine icon the therapeutic method and the way in which man reaches to theosis; he even imparted the state of theosis itself. When he paints the Saint in glory, he also renders the transfiguration of the human body. The same thing applies to the sacred hymns, the church building, the chanting. The healed person, he who has acquired the experience of noetic worship, knows how the intellectual worship must be expressed, so that it is attuned, as much as possible, with the inner state of the soul. I think that the revival of the liturgical arts which do not express and do not lead to purification, illumination and theosis is not Orthodox despite its external conformity. It is just a culture of the tradition and of art. The Apostle Paul, for example, lived the whole rabbinical tradition of his age, however he fought Christ. He had zeal for God but his zeal was not according to knowledge. The same thing may happen with us. Also, it is possible that a contemporary deified person may express tradition differently, concerning the liturgical arts, without naturally being estranged from the basic structure of the

Byzantine tradition. This occurs because the Saint obtains the tradition, he is a bearer of tradition and, therefore, he creates tradition.

### **Customs and how they are related with man's cure**

-There are many people today who pursue the revival of old, traditional customs. How do you see this?

-I cannot reject it. Man has realised that the invasion of the western spirit has mortified feelings and has broken off the interpersonal relationships. Thus, he attempts to revive old ways of life, which are more human. Yet, both the ethos and the customs of our people as much as the various objects which they used were not independent of the method of the Church, through which man is led to theosis. Of course, this is said with reservation, because many of these customs are products and remnants of idolatry as well as superstitions of the people. For, unfortunately, in old times just as nowadays, many superstitions prevailed. We feel the Church and God as Him who will help our businesses go well. Thus we do the holy water service so that we shall have a good harvest. And, indeed, we do not reject this too. But when this is detached from the whole method of the Church, from the stages of spiritual perfection -purification, illumination and theosis- they are dead forms incapable of helping man. They give a self-sufficiency and many illusions about therapy. They think that they will find beauty in life in this way and they are frustrated when they do not. On the contrary, I believe that the man who lives the hesychastic tradition of the Church -which, I repeat for another time, is concentrated on purification, illumination and theosis- can live the Orthodox tradition even in a flat, even in contemporary urban cities with the most unfavourable external conditions. Many new martyrs were servants of Turkish commanders. They externally served the Turkish empire, which fought Christianity. Evenso they preserved this tradition and reached to the vision of God, martyrdom and theosis. For, many neomartyrs, as we see in their biographies, had theoria of God prior to the martyrdom and this is why their martyrdom was the fruit of theoria.



## Conclusion

Thus I can conclude with what I said in the sermon at your Church a few days ago: "what makes man an Orthodox is not only the persistence on the external aspects of tradition, but the experience of its inner life, which is the ascetic method -purification, illumination and theosis. This method, these stages of spiritual life are the foundation of the dogmas, the basis of ecclesiastical art, but also the creative cause of the ethos and customs of our people, because this theology saturated our forefathers prior to our westernization. For this reason we must struggle to keep this inner aspect of tradition, the method of Orthodox piety, through which we are healed. Then we are really zealots of patristic traditions. For, even if we have good intentions, outside this ascetic therapeutic method we run the risk of becoming enemies and adversaries of Orthodoxy".

At this point the conversations ended. Just as simply as they began. Nevertheless, in simplicity they underline great truths. Truths which can make us simple in greatness, and great in simplicity. In any case, such is the Orthodox Church also. Poor, but having within it a fabulous treasure. Crucified, yet having the glory of the Resurrected Christ. Within the Church we can live eternal and unending glory in a seeming deadness. From within the tomb springs forth a whole life.