

[Christianity is not a religion. It is psychotherapeutic science](#)

## **Orthodoxy as therapy**

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If we wished to conventionally define Christianity, as Orthodoxy, we would say it is the experiencing of the presence of the Uncreated (=of God) throughout history, and the potential of creation (=mankind) becoming God "by Grace".

Given the perpetual presence of God in Christ, in historical reality, Christianity offers mankind the possibility of theosis, just as Medical Science offers mankind the possibility of preserving or restoring his health through a specific therapeutic procedure and a specific way of life.

The writer is in a position to appreciate the coincidence between the medical and ecclesiastic poematic sciences, because, as a diabetic and a Christian, he is aware that in both cases, he has to faithfully abide by the rules that have been set out, in order to attain both these two goals.

The unique and absolute goal of life in Christ is theosis, in other words, our union with God, so that man - through his participation in God's uncreated energy - may become "by the Grace of God" that which God is by nature (=without beginning and without end). This is what "salvation" means, in Christianity. It is not the moral improvement of man, but a re-creation, a re-construction in Christ, of man and of society, through an existing and an existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate

manifestation of God in History. This is what the Apostle Paul's words imply, in Corinthians II 5:17 : "If someone is in Christ, he is a new creation". Whoever is united with Christ is a new creation.

That is why - Christianically - the incarnation of God-Logos - this redemptory "intrusion" of the Eternal and the Beyond-time God into Historical time - represents the commencement of a new world, of a (literally) "New Age", which continues throughout the passing centuries, in the persons of authentic Christians: the Saints. The Church exists in this world, both as the "body of Christ" as well as "in Christ", in order to offer salvation, through one's embodiment in this regenerative procedure. This redemptory task of the Church is fulfilled by means of a specific therapeutic method, whereby throughout history, the Church essentially acts as a universal Infirmary. "Spiritual Infirmary" (spiritual hospital) is the characterization given to the Church by the blessed Chrysostom (†407).

Further along, we shall examine the answers given to the following questions:

**What is the sickness that Christian Orthodoxy cures?**

**What is the therapeutic method it implements?**

**What is the identity of authentic Christianity, which radically separates it from all of its heretic deviations, and from every other form of religion?**

**1.** The sickness of human nature is the fallen state of mankind, along with all of creation, which likewise suffers ("sighs and groans together" - Romans 8:22) together with mankind. This diagnosis applies to every single person (regardless whether they are Christian or not, or whether they believe or not), on account of the overall unity of mankind (ref. Acts 17:26). Christian Orthodoxy does not confine itself within the narrow boundaries of one religion

- which cares only for its own followers - but, just like God, “wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the realization of the truth” (Timothy I, 2:4), since God is “the Saviour of all persons” (Timothy I, 4:10). Thus, the sickness that Christianity refers to pertains to all of mankind; Romans 5:12: “death has come upon all people, since all of them have sinned (=they have veered from their path towards theosis). Just as the fall (i.e. sickness) is a panhuman issue, so is salvation-therapy directly dependent on the inner functions of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is (patristically) defined by the functioning inside him of three mnemonic systems; two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is something handled by poemantic therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, brain function, which regulates our association with our self and our environment. Both these systems are familiar to medical science, whose work it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the Saints is familiar with one other mnemonic system: that of the heart, or ‘noetic’ memory, which functions inside the heart. In Orthodox tradition, the heart does not only have a natural operation, as a mere pump that circulates the blood. Furthermore, according to patristic teaching, neither the brain nor the central nervous system is the center of our self-awareness; again, it is the heart, because, beyond its natural function, it also has a supernatural function. Under certain circumstances, it becomes the place of our communion with God, or, His uncreated energy. This is of course perceived through the experience of the Saints, and not through any logical function or through an intellectual theologizing.

Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (†1809), in recapitulating the overall patristic tradition in his work “Hortative Manual”, calls the heart a natural and supernatural center, but also a paranormal center,

whenever its supernatural faculty becomes idle on account of the heart being dominated by passions. The heart's supernatural faculty is the ultimate prerequisite for perfection, for man's fulfillment, in other words, his theosis, for a complete embodiment in the communion in Christ.

In its supernatural faculty, the heart becomes the space where the mind can be activated. In the Orthodox terminology codex, the mind (ΝΟΥΣ - appearing in the New Testament as 'the spirit of man' and 'the eye of the soul') is an energy of the soul, by means of which man can know God, and can reach the state of 'seeing' God. We must of course clarify that 'knowledge' of God does not imply knowledge of His incomprehensible and inapproachable divine essence. This distinction between 'essence' and 'energy' in God is the crucial difference between Orthodoxy and all other versions of Christianity. The energy of the mind inside the heart is called the 'noetic faculty' of the heart. We again stress that according to Orthodoxy, the Mind (ΝΟΥΣ) and Logic (ΛΟΓΙΚΗ) are not the same thing, because logic functions within the brain, whereas the mind functions within the heart.

The noetic faculty is manifested as the "incessant prayer" (ref. Thessalonians I, 5:17) of the Holy Spirit inside the heart (ref. Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:26, Thessalonians I 5:19) and is named by our Holy Fathers as "the memory of God". When man has in his heart the "memory of God", in other words, when he hears in his heart "the voice" (Corinthians I 14:2, Galatians 4:6, etc.), he can sense God "dwelling" inside him (Romans 8:11). Saint Basil the Great in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle says that the memory of God remains incessant when it is not interrupted by mundane cares, and the mind "departs" towards God; in other words, when it is in communion with God. But this does not mean that the faithful who has been activated by this divine energy withdraws from the needs of everyday life, by remaining motionless or in some kind of ecstasy; it

means that his Mind is liberated from these cares, which are items that preoccupy only his Logic. To use an example that we can relate to: A scientist, who has re-acquired his noetic faculty, will use his logic to tackle his problems, while his mind inside his heart will preserve the memory of God incessantly. The person who preserves all three mnemonic systems is the Saint. To Orthodoxy, he is a healthy (normal) person. This is why Orthodoxy's therapy is linked to man's course towards holiness.

The non-function or the below-par function of man's noetic faculty is the essence of his fall. The much-debated "ancestral sin" was precisely man's mishandling -from that very early moment of his historical presence- of the preservation of God's memory (=his communion with God) inside his heart. This is the morbid state that all of the ancestral descendants participate in; because it was no moral or personal sin, but a sickness of man's nature ("Our nature has become ill, of this sin", observes Saint Cyril of Alexandria - †444), which is transmitted from person to person, exactly like the sickness that a tree transmits to all the other trees that originate from it.

The inactivating of the noetic faculty or the memory of God, and confusing it with the function of the brain (which happens to all of us), subjugates man to stress and to the environment, and to the quest for bliss through individualism and an anti-social stance. While ill because of his fallen state, man uses God and his fellow man to secure his personal security and happiness. Personal use of God is found in "religion" (=the attempt to elicit strength from the divine), which can degenerate into a self-deification of man ("I became a self-idol" says Saint Andrew of Crete, in his 'Major Canon'). The use of fellow-man -and subsequently creation in general- is achieved by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure, by becoming fully incorporated in the "spiritual hospital" of the Church.

**2.** The purpose of the Church's presence in the world -as

a communion in Christ- is man's cure; the restoration of his heart-centred communion with God; in other words, of his noetic faculty. According to the professor fr. John Romanides, "the patristic tradition is neither a social philosophy, nor a system of morals, or a religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic method. In this context, it is very similar to Medicine and especially Psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul that prays mentally and incessantly inside the heart is a natural 'instrument', which everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy, nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this 'instrument'. This is why the incurable cases are not even aware of this instrument's existence."

The need for man to be cured is a panhuman issue, related firstly to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence, through the reactivation of the third mnemonic faculty. However, it also extends to man's social presence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest (which in the long run acts as self-love) must be transformed into selflessness (ref. Corinthians I, 13:8) "love...does not ask for reciprocation.."). Selfless love exists: it is the love of the Triadic God (Romans 5:8, John I 4:7), which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange. That is why Christian Orthodoxy's social ideal is not "common possessions", but the "lack of possessions", as a willed resignation from any sort of demand. Only then can justice be possible.

The therapeutic method that is offered by the Church is the spiritual life; the life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as an exercise (Ascesis) and a participation in the Uncreated Grace, through the Sacraments. Ascesis is the violation of our self-ruled and inanimate through sin nature, which is coursing headlong into a spiritual or eternal death, i.e. the eternal separation from the Grace of God. Ascesis aspires to victory over our passions, with the intention of conquering the inner subservience to those pestiferous focal points of man and participating in Christ's

## Cross and His Resurrection.

The Christian, who is practicing such restraint under the guidance of his Therapist-Spiritual Father, becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the sacramental life of the ecclesiastic corpus. There cannot be any un-exercising Christian, just as there cannot be a cured person who does not follow the therapeutic advice that the doctor prescribed for him.

**3.** The above lead us to certain constants, which verify the identity of Christian Orthodoxy:

(a) The Church -as the body of Christ- functions as a therapy Centre-hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a "Religion". The Clergy are initially selected by the cured, in order to function as therapists. The therapeutic function of the Church is preserved today, mostly in Monasteries which, having survived secularism, continue the Church of the Apostolic times.

(b) The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy are the already cured persons. Those who have not had the experience of therapy cannot be therapists. That is the essential difference between the poemantic therapeutic science and medical science. The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy (Fathers and Mothers) bring forth other Therapists, just as the Professors of Medicine bring forth their successors.

(c) The Church's confining itself to a simple forgiveness of sins so that a place in paradise may be secured constitutes alienation and is tantamount to medical science forgiving the patient, so that he might be healed after death! The Church cannot send someone to Paradise or to Hell. Besides, Paradise and Hell are not places, they are ways of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares the person so that he might eternally look upon Christ in His uncreated light as a view of Paradise, and not as a view of Hell, or as "an all-consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). And this of course concerns every single person, because ALL people shall look eternally upon Christ, as "the Judge" of the whole world.

(d) The validity of science is verified by the achievement of its goals (i.e., in Medicine, it is the curing of the patient). It is the way that authentic scientific medicine is distinguished from charlatantry. The criterion of poematic therapy by the Church is also the achievement of spiritual healing, by opening the way towards theosis. Therapy is not transferred to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here, in this world (*hinc et nunc*). This can be seen in the undeteriorated relics of the Saints that have overcome biological deterioration, such as the relics of the Eptanisos Saints: Spiridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios and Theodora Augusta. Undeteriorated relics are, in our tradition, the indisputable evidence of theosis, or in other words the fulfilment of the Church's ascetic therapy.

I would like to ask the Medical scientists of our country to pay special attention to the issue of the non-deterioration of holy relics, given that they haven't been scientifically interfered with, but, in them is manifest the energy of Divine Grace; because it has been observed that, at the moment when the cellular system should begin to disintegrate, it automatically ceases to, and instead of emanating any malodour of decay, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I limit this comment to the medical symptoms, and will not venture into the aspect of miraculous phenomena as evidence of theosis, because that aspect belongs to another sphere of discussion.

(e) Lastly, the divine texts of the Church (Holy Bible, Synodic and Patristic texts) do not constitute coding systems of any Christian ideology; they bear a therapeutic character and function in the same way that university dissertations function in medical science. The same applies to the liturgical texts, as for example the Benedictions. The simple reading of a Benediction (prayer), without the combined effort of the faithful in the therapeutic procedure of the Church, would be no different to the instance where a patient resorts to the doctor for his excruciating pains, and, instead of an immediate intervention by the doctor, he is limited to being placed on an operating table, and being read the chapter

that pertains to his specific ailment.

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It doesn't matter whether one accepts it or not. However, with regard to scientists, I have tried -as a colleague in science myself- to scientifically respond to the question: "What is Orthodoxy".

Any other version of Christianity constitutes a counterfeiting and a perversion of it, even if it aspires to presenting itself as something Orthodox.

### **Bibliographical Notes**

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### **Notes - Clarifications**

**1. The Uncreated = Something that has not been manufactured. This applies only to the Triadic God. The Created = Creation in general, with man at its apex. God is not a “universal” power, as designated by New Age terminology (“everything is one, everyone is God!”), because, as the Creator of all, He transcends the entire universe, given that in essence He is “Something” entirely different (Das ganz Andere). There is no analogous association between the created and the Uncreated. That is why the Uncreated makes Himself know, through His self-revelation.**

**2. A significant Christian text of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, “The Poemen (Shepherd) of Hermas”, says that in order for us to become members of the Body of Christ, we must be “squared” stones (=suitable for building) and not rounded ones!**

**3. According to fr. John Romanides, to whom we essentially owe the return to the “Philokalian” (=therapeutic-ascetic) view of our Faith, and in fact at an academic level; “Religion” implies every kind of “associating” of the uncreated and the created, as is done in idolatry. The “religious” person projects his “predudices” (=thoughts, meanings) into the divine realm, thus “manufacturing” his own God (this can also occur in the non-Patristic facet of “Orthodoxy”). The aim is “atonement”, “placation” of the “divine” and finally, the “utilizing” of God to one’s own advantage (the magic formula: do ut des). In our tradition however, our God does not need to be “placated”, because “He first loved us” (John I’ 4:19) Our God acts as “Love” (John I, 4:16) and selfless love at that. He gives us everything, and never asks for anything in return from His creations. This is why selflessness is the essence of Christian love, which goes far beyond the notion of a transaction.**

**4. This is expressed by the familiar and oft-repeated liturgical chant: “Ourselves and each other, and our entire life, let us appose unto Christ our Lord”.**

**Proper incorporation is normally found in Monasteries, wherever they function in the orthodox tradition of course. That is why Monasteries (for example those of the Holy Mountain) continue to be the model “parishes” of this “world”.**

**Translation by A. N.**

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