



A JOURNAL OF ORTHODOX FAITH AND CULTURE

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# A FEELING FOR BEAUTY: THE AESTHETIC GROUND OF ORTHODOX ETHICS

An outpouring of requests for a follow-up to our 2013 interview, “The Opposite of War is Not Peace: Healing Trauma in *The Iliad* and in Orthodox Tradition,” prompts this second interview with Dr. Timothy Patitsas, Assistant Professor of Ethics at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts. In this sequel, Dr. Patitsas examines how the cosmology of Church Fathers such as St. Maximos the Confessor underlies the proven Orthodox program of soul-healing.

RTE: We’ve had many letters asking for a sequel to “The Opposite of War is Not Peace: Healing Trauma in *The Iliad* and in Orthodox Tradition,” with more insights into recovery after trauma. People are interested in how the return to wholeness occurs for all of us. Now adding aesthetics and beauty to the ethical consideration of trauma is even more intriguing. How would they fit into this discussion?

DR. PATITSAS: Thank you for the positive feedback; it has given me a lot of encouragement. Ethics, put very generally, is the contemplation of what it would be good to do in a particular situation—and of goodness itself, if pos-

*Opposite: Dr. Timothy Patitsas. Photo courtesy Jocelyn Mathewes.*

sible. Aesthetics is the examination of beauty; what rules and principles underlie its creation and appreciation? For me, Ethics is much more exciting when it is also resolving questions I've had all my life about healing the soul.

RTE: Can we begin then with an idea from the previous interview: the ethical concept of "moral luck"? How can we as Christians believe that luck could ever be central to moral life? Don't we instead trust in a Divine Providence that never permits us to be tempted beyond our strength?

DR. PATITSAS: Now regarding moral luck: This is a technical term, used in Ethics since about 1976, to describe what the Ancient Greeks called "tragedy." It is the idea that our moral status sometimes can be determined by what happens to us, by circumstance. Our human moral agency is not so strong that it can overcome every conceivable shock and influence. Sometimes, human character turns bad, owing to things beyond our control.

"Do not be deceived," St. Paul says, "bad company corrupts good morals." Two such examples of bad company could be being sent to the front lines of a shooting war, and growing up as the victim of neglect or abuse. Your moral life may suffer in these circumstances, and if that has been the case for you, the Orthodox Church is able to help. In fact, its whole life is geared to just this, to helping and healing.

RTE: How then do we relate these circumstances to Divine Providence, which Christians understand as innate to our tradition—unlike "luck," which seems purely pagan?

DR. PATITSAS: For me, Divine Providence has operated most beautifully in two relationships that are conveying a new way of thinking about the soul, the healing of the soul, and about my own moral responsibility in the face of circumstance. These two spiritual fathers have been a profound gift of God in my life.

But precisely because their help is so beyond what I could have done for myself, I struggle very hard to cooperate with it, to apply it, and not dishonor it. It isn't anything I could have imagined or come up with on my own. To me it's "out of left field," so to speak—completely unanticipated. It's God's grace, but to me it feels like pure luck: I'm quite sure I did nothing to deserve it.

RTE: So is moral luck just another way of saying Divine Providence?

DR. PATITSAS: Moral luck is Divine Providence, viewed through the eyes and experience of someone who, like me, is spiritually undeveloped. It is Divine Providence in hazy outline, before it has come into clear focus. But moral luck also includes things that God does not will for our life, but that He somehow permits in a fallen world—tragedies and disasters of various kinds. It also includes things that we may understand as part of God's Providence only once we have become sanctified—or even only once we have received the heavenly reward for our martyrdom.

In a sense, through our spiritual work, we ourselves help convert such disasters from bad luck or tragedy into Providence. Even the act of forgiving changes the moral status of what happened: Christ said to the sinful woman, "Is there no one left to accuse you? Then neither do I accuse you." In other words, how badly another person hurt me in my past is in part only discoverable in seeing whether or not I am able to recover spiritually from that injury later on.

Boys on the playground know this—it's one reason you shake off the injury you receive in play, because to collapse from it is to accuse the one who hurt you of something more serious than they perhaps intended. And thus my recovery is an element easing my tormentor's condemnation. By the same token, our refusal to recover may sometimes seem like our only recourse to justice, or this refusal is our revenge, or it is even our way of staying in solidarity with others who have suffered like us—including our "earlier selves," which we imagine ourselves protecting by not growing forward.

These are complex webs, and as we prepare for the Judgment we must beg one another for forgiveness. God forbid that any of us face the Judgment while still owing such unpayable debts on what we have done to others. But perhaps many of us are indeed not only trauma sufferers, but also trauma perpetrators, through our participation in the passions leading up to wars of every kind? Much prayer is needed.

For all of this, I prefer the technical ethical term "moral luck" rather than Divine Providence when discussing trauma. I don't want to give the impression that God is to blame for the evil in the world, nor accuse him of being capricious.

RTE: How do you then differentiate between bad moral luck that results from the chaos, ignorance, and folly that we find in the fallen world, and bad moral luck that comes from the action of the evil one?



DR. PATTSAS: You can look at moral luck from another perspective, as not a thing, but as just a description of the fact that we are weak, that we need the support of others, that human personhood does not flourish in isolation. Certain invisible powers are indeed relating to us with wholly malicious intent, and they even use accidents and the weakness of those around us to further their aim of destroying us. We call out to our Guardian Angels, the Saints, the Mother of God, to frustrate these attacks—to grant us good moral luck, so to speak.

More prosaically, we can all relate to the idea that two persons in life might take utterly divergent paths, seemingly with no otherworldly interference, merely because different things happened to them which were outside their control. And we can all relate that an utterly passive dependency on circumstance is something *that needs to be overcome*. As Orthodox Christians we acknowledge something like “luck” in a fallen, chaotic world, so that we can assimilate that chance into liturgy and render it meaningful, providential, and in some cases ultimately life-giving. We recover our human agency not through greater exertions of willpower, but through participation in Christ’s liturgy; although willpower figures as one element within liturgy, it alone is not sufficient.

“Luck,” in the sense of brute randomness, is just a sign that the world is still being created out of the watery deep of non-being and chaos—and bad moral luck reminds us viscerally that we are necessarily co-agents with God in that ongoing creation. That is, we’ve got to do something about it, or bad moral luck *will* drown us.

Ultimately, any kind of luck just says to us: Pray without ceasing, for chaos and malice are still around us, and only the liturgy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can master them and turn them into life. Liturgy is stronger than luck; it is stronger than trauma. Christ’s liturgy on the Cross was the stake in the heart of our subjection to bad moral circumstance.

The question is, how to assimilate Christ’s liturgy within the conditions you face, to overcome your own challenges. Those challenges will include, as you say, outright evil; “Deliver us from evil,” we pray many times every day in the Lord’s Prayer.

RTE: Wouldn’t believing in luck, like believing in fate, lead us to inaction and passivity?

*Opposite: “Storm on the Sea of Galilee,” 16th-century, Rembrandt van Rijn, location unknown. (Stolen from the Isabelle Stewart Gardner Museum Boston, 1990).*

DR. PATITSAS: I hope that knowing how “lucky” we are—how blessed in positive ways—if we do see it as “luck,” as unmerited—will make us tremendously vigilant, resilient, and decisive. We won’t let those good moments slip by, but rather will pounce on them like mountain lions. The best advice I ever got was from His Eminence Metropolitan Sotirios (Trambas) of Korea: “If you have a good thought, you must do it at once!” Because, ultimately, that good thought didn’t come from us—it was a theophany. Moral luck is another way to describe the centrality of synergy for our spiritual lives.

That’s why I thought to mention two of my spiritual teachers when you asked about Divine Providence. I don’t want even to sleep—I just want to run after the grace they share out so abundantly, because I remember what I was like before they came along!

In the case of bad moral luck, thinking of it as “luck” just says, “Well, these things happen. I’m not to blame for that. It doesn’t define the whole of me, to the very last farthing of my soul. It is what happened *to* me. Now let me run to Christ, and see what He has to say about it.” A child reacts this way to harm, running straight into the arms of his mother. But trauma is a bigger harm, sometimes even designed with ultimately evil intent to collapse any distance between you and what happened to you. We so belittle people for being “victims,” but let’s hold on. What they suffered may have been very cunningly designed to render them utterly passive, an object. Obviously it will take some art to heal from this, and our piling on with rejection makes us an accomplice in the evil inflicted upon them. Not to say we give up, but the distinction between holding out hope and blaming the victim takes rare (at least empirically we don’t always see it) spiritual skill.

RTE: Isn’t liturgical assimilation of luck almost natural for our souls, just as our bodies heal from physical wounds? I sometimes have a perverse sense of being robbed when someone refers to me as a “victim,” as if a door has been shut on my moving forward. Since calling someone a victim is an attempt to be empathetic, why would it ever feel wrong?

DR. PATITSAS: I suppose there are good and bad ways to be empathetic. A bad empathy skips a prior stage—the presentation of beauty, which would arouse hope and movement. Bad empathy goes straight to a moral consideration of what happened, and pronounces the victim blameless, even justified in not getting up. It is like what we said in our last interview, that an intellectual investigation of the morality of a particular war leaves untouched the

actual effect of being involved in that war. That bad empathy doesn’t begin with beauty, is its problem.

### Awakening Eros: Movement Toward a Moral Life

RTE: Can you tell us why you, personally, are concerned with the issue of moral luck, and trauma in general?

DR. PATITSAS: Well, because I’m an *American* Orthodox Christian, and thus I want to see more souls healed, more quickly (*laughs*). No, this actually is the case, which is obviously not totally positive. It’s great that we Americans are so Roman—we are determined to find a way, to solve the problem. But the wise and healthy soul is not a hamburger, to be mass-produced by the billions through the application of some efficient technique! This is part of my displeasure with our current American psychology.

Also, when I was in sixth grade in Kent, Ohio, and I first heard that there was a secular, socially revered, organization that centralized God and catalyzed profound human transformation—Alcoholics Anonymous—I was fascinated. I wanted to be an alcoholic, so that my spiritual life could also be real, deep, and socially admired—in a way I thought was not always true for ordinary religious people. I felt that traumatic experience was the key to authenticity. Fortunately, God did not grant my wish! Traumatic experience can be a key to authenticity when it is assimilated through Christ; outside of him, it can be just the opposite.

Christ is my focus now, anyway—not authenticity, nor even spirituality, *per se*. But my focus on Christ makes me also troubled about the lack of spiritual doctors in today’s world.

RTE: Since you brought it up, what are you? You are an American, but also Greek ...

DR. PATITSAS: ... and German, and very, very faintly Italian, and I want to be every other culture, too, but simply don’t have the time or strength—we all must live where God has placed us. When I was in high school I didn’t have the language of moral luck, but certainly felt my bad moral luck was not to have been born black. That seemed to me like the one American culture that had a cohesive identity, a proud experience of noble suffering, a music and a way of life that were coherent and compelling. I was too young yet to see that America itself is such a culture, such a way of life.



But I tell my undergraduates that you can't consider yourself educated, unless you at least once have longed to have been born wholly other culturally—to have been born in another time, language, country, whatever. For many people, it's reading the Tolkien epics that first give them that deep, erotic longing for a transcendent cultural otherness.

And thus Tolkien's current significance for education, for modern Civilization, is deep. Eros is the beginning of human moral life, and Beauty in art and literature are oftentimes more effective than religion in awakening eros within us. Religion can just seem like God coming down at us, scolding us, telling us to stay where we are, but just do better. But real Religion must awaken the movement in the other direction, to make us come out of ourselves and move towards him, fall in love with him. It's about beginning an adventure, becoming a pilgrim, an exile, a lover.

RTE: Why is eros the beginning of moral life? In our culture the erotic is something sensual and often depraved.

DR. PATITSAS: By eros we mean the love that makes us forget ourselves entirely and run towards the other without any regard for ourselves. Allan Bloom described eros as "love's mad self-forgetting." Eros is the beginning for us, because in fact religion doesn't begin with us; it begins with God. God's initiative is primary. The Gospel begins with his call, not our search, and what He calls us to do is to fall in love with him first of all. Once we do, then the rest begins to fall into place. All that I have to say today is contained in this sequence, this "typicon."

### Hubris, Human Agency, and the Cross

DR. PATITSAS: But let me go back to Greek tragedy, and to the play in particular that helps us best understand the centrality of eros for moral life. In the process, we may be able to say something more about your readers' real question, the healing of trauma.

RTE: Oedipus Rex? You've spoken before about Oedipus in connection with the Bridegroom Matins of Holy Week.

DR. PATITSAS: Yes. Oedipus was the victim of bad moral luck. Events beyond

*Opposite: Blind Oedipus and his daughter Antigone.*

his control—his fate—meant that the very attempt to be moral and to act morally went awry. Alcoholics can relate to this, when they discover that the more they exercise willpower, the deeper their addiction becomes. Many times, starting with goodness—with the attempt to be good and to stop sinning—is a recipe for moral disaster, as we shall see.

At Oedipus' birth the prophecy foretold that he would kill his father; a later prophecy added that he would also marry his mother. Despite the effort to avoid all this by leaving him to die as an infant, and later, when he is a man, by fleeing the couple he thinks are his parents, the natural unfolding of his life meant that the prophecy would be fulfilled.

At the root of bad moral luck, for the Greeks, was *hubris*, a kind of pride by which we forget our place in the world. The tragedians warned that we imagine that we can overcome our dependency on the gods and master our fate, but we cannot. Our human agency is limited, circumscribed within the bounds set for it. To attempt to rise above this is to provoke the gods, and we then receive a just punishment. For that civilization, bad moral luck *always* implies that a person had somehow, through *hubris*, provoked the gods.

While *The Iliad* was lumped in dismissively with the other tragedies by Plato, in fact on one point *The Iliad* and the philosophers are in alliance against the tragedians. For both, man must be liberated from the passions of the gods. Plato attempted this liberation through reason and recourse to a more rational God; Odysseus attempted it through a clever subversion of pagan liturgy with the Trojan Horse; Homer *achieves* it (he has to do more than attempt, if he is to heal actual combat trauma, since trauma usually lives parasitically upon our passions) by simply stating the human condition more clearly than the philosophers: We are trapped in a fate that is less than fitting for human dignity. Simone Weil saw that *The Iliad* was the theophany, in dark relief, of a God who was dispassionate, empathetic, true; such a God could heal trauma.

The tragic plays seem to say the opposite at times—that we had best not transgress the limits set by these capricious gods, that we cannot fight our luck. Only the proud man challenges his fate. But Odysseus challenges it and eventually *does* arrive home—is freed from the trauma of the war, in other words.

RTE: Yet Plato was opposed to the Greek tragedians, and even to Homer, on the issue of human moral freedom.

DR. PATITSAS: Exactly. Ethicists owe this argument to Martha Nussbaum's *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*.

Nussbaum locates the most important fault-line within classical civilization here, regarding the question of human moral freedom, or agency. Could our moral status be determined by things that happen to us outside of our control? Or, would sufficient information and moral willpower be in every case sufficient to help us choose the good? If we aren't completely capable of determining our own choices, do we really have "moral agency"; that is, are we free, are we ultimately responsible and accountable?

Writing more than 2600 years ago, Homer gives the best argument that, in practice, we are heavily dependent on others and on circumstance for our moral state. The tragedians expand on this point, which is why Plato calls Homer, "the first of the tragedians." But the philosophers push back and argue that the intellectual life can save us from the gods in a different way than just by avoiding the intellectual mistake of *hubris*. The intellect can be rightly trained and ordered through philosophy to master the passions and achieve a liberated life wholly independent of these absurd "gods."

RTE: What do we as Orthodox Christians believe? Is our moral status really dependent on outside forces? Or are we ultimately responsible for all of our actions?

DR. PATITSAS: Well, we want to throw off "the weight of sin that clings so closely." But, tragically, we can't. It turns out that we aren't fully responsible, even for our most free-willed choices and actions; our passions run so very deep. We wish we could be more responsible, so that we could embrace Christ, overcome circumstance, and help others—so that we would no longer deny him, not even a little bit. Thus, for us the problem is how to become more responsible.

Christ shows us a miraculous way forward. He alone shows us the path to become "free indeed." That path is the Cross, which is the real conquest of tragedy; philosophy cannot equal the Cross for restoring human agency, although it has its role in response to the Cross.

RTE: So, the problem is put on its head? Rather than trying to avoid responsibility—"It was my bad childhood that made me do it"—as Orthodox Chris-



tians we want to become more responsible? But wouldn't that make us more guilty, too? Why, then, would we want to be more responsible?

DR. PATITSAS: A rock is passive. A plant has some power to react, but within careful limits. An animal reacts, but only instinctively. We want to be human, to acquire the agency which "the gods," "the fates," the human passions, and other spiritual opponents all wish to deny us.

Better to be free and guilty—and thus weep, than innocent and sub-human. Our "fate" is to be free; this may be a paradox, but it is still reality. Christ shows us how to use the freedom we have, or after a lifetime of sin, still have left, in order to become freer still—and more innocent, too.

But this becomes harder when, on the way to adulthood, or within young adulthood, trauma intervenes.

RTE: Before we go on, can you say more about how the Cross restores human agency?

DR. PATITSAS: The simple Orthodox answer to moral luck is that we are subject to moral circumstance, in particular through the sinful influences of those around us; thus, we lack perfect and complete agency. But this must logically mean that others are sinning because of mistakes that we have made. Could it then follow that sometimes the ones making us sin are themselves falling because of *our* sins of commission and omission?

If we are willing to repent of the sins committed *by others*—since they also possess a limited moral agency, and we are in part (perhaps in many cases the decisive part?) responsible for their sins, then we can be free.

To be clearer about this, although I may not have contributed directly to the sin of the person hurting me, I probably *have* contributed to the general world atmosphere of sin, which in turn affected this person. Of course, they are still free in some ultimate sense—but we only really see the full extent of their freedom, when we take out all the negative influence upon them put there by us and other outsiders. Thus, it may be only at the Last Judgment that we see our freedom clearly, and what exactly we have made with it.

Do others cause us to sin? Yes, but let us repent of the sin in us, that caused them to cause us to sin. That way, we become free both of our own sin, and of the sin caused in us by others.

*Opposite: Golgotha, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.*



The path to our freedom is responsibility for the sins of others. There is no other path that actually works. In taking the sins of the entire world upon ourselves, we are freed from all circumstance. And this is precisely what the saints do. They have repented so completely of all the lovelessness and harm in the world, that they attain a deified agency; they can calm storms, heal the sick, stop wars, freeze criminals in their tracks. A passionless saint is a saint who no longer is determined by passionate states in himself or in others—nor by natural chaos or “luck.”

### “Have Mercy on Me, the Sinner”

DR. PATITSAS: This is why, in the Jesus Prayer—“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner”, we pronounce ourselves “the sinner.”

RTE: Some traditional variations of the Jesus Prayer don’t include “the sinner”, perhaps because that reference can seem like a recursion to self after the first expansive reaching up to Christ. Often we think of pure prayer as a way of getting out of or forgetting ourselves, but the full version you present seems to be how we take on the burdens of others and become free.

DR. PATITSAS: That is why Elder Sophrony said that the Jesus Prayer fulfills *both* of the two greatest commandments. In it, we love the Lord our God with all that we have *and* we love our neighbor as our self. The second commandment is fulfilled when we pronounce ourselves “the chief of sinners.” Or rather, when we willingly identify ourselves with him who “became sin” for the life of the world.

This is why our religious lives are so weak. We proclaim Christ as King and Savior, but we aren’t willing to join him as the very thing He became for us: The Sinner.

When we don’t make ourselves lower than the worst, we are denying Christ, denying him at the precise moment when such a denial would be most hurtful to him, the point when his anointing as Christ was the most costly and the most perfectly, if concealedly, revealed.

In a Calvinist religion like our American religion, terming oneself a sinner might imply total depravity, guilt, perhaps worthlessness. It’s destructive. No, we are “the sinner” because “my brother is my life.” I *want* to take the fall for him, because I love him. That’s all; calling ourselves “the Sinner” has very little to do with how sinful we’ve actually been. After all, Christ did it best!

Oh, and one more thing. This all stems from the Cross of Christ, who became sin for the life of the world. Notice that *He* didn’t call us sinners, but instead said that we were innocent, even as we crucified him. “Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.” There is only one “Sinner” in his universe; Christ is “the sinner” of the Jesus Prayer. You call yourself “the Sinner” because you cling to him, even there, on the Cross.

When you recite the Jesus prayer, you unite yourself to him who became sin for the life of the world. You join yourself to his Person, by uniting yourself with his act of self-emptying love for the entire world. This uniting is fulfilled when you call yourself by his “assumed name”—the sinner. Don’t shy away from this part of the prayer—it’s the answer to the first part, the calling upon Christ for mercy. We receive the mercy we ask of him—we share in his anointing by the Father in the Holy Spirit—when we are willing to do what He did with that anointing, which is to empty himself to the farthest extreme out of love for others. We receive that mercy when we join with him who received it on the Cross. The Cross and the Resurrection are inseparable; this is St. Paul’s whole emphasis.

We think it’s called the “Jesus Prayer” because it has the name of Jesus in it. But the real reason is that it is a fractal of the Son’s own primordial prayer to the Father—the “moment” when He received the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father in order to rest upon the Son, and the Son poured himself out for the creation of the cosmos, and later for its restoration. For St. Maximos the Confessor this describes the way the world was created.

### Christ’s Reversal of Oedipus Rex

RTE: Before we go on to St. Maximos’ teaching on creation, can we catch an earlier thread? What does Oedipus teach us about Christ?

DR. PATITSAS: Oedipus killed his father and married his mother. Christ reverses this so exactly that you can see *Oedipus Rex* as a prophecy of the Messiah whose Gospel would liberate the classical world from the gods!

Christ kept his mother ever in virginity, and even in childbirth preserved her wholeness. Then, He accepted death when it was the will of his Father. He did not jealously react to his Father’s pre-eminence as Oedipus did to that of his own father; rather, Christ was the Father’s obedient regent.



Fr. Michael Meerson, a priest who emigrated to the US from Russia after working against communist power in the 1970's, once told me that when Christ quotes the opening of Psalm 22, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?," He is expressing the theological meaning of the entire psalm: Even though I suffer unjustly, nevertheless, God is justified. So at the moment of his deepest darkness, Christ isn't blaming the Father, but rather exonerating him.

Oedipus's name even means "swollen foot," for his father maimed his legs at birth, as a preparation for killing him and thus protecting his own kingship. But Scripture stresses that Christ's legs were untouched at his death, and that his death was as beloved son of his Father, not as victim of his Father's jealousy.

RTE: Would a Greek have seen Christ in this way, as a clear reversal of Oedipus?

DR. PATITSAS: Not quite, because Christ reverses Oedipus in a second way, also. And this is where things get really interesting, and we begin to see the deeper pattern in the Orthodox way. Here is where we will see why a primarily cognitive approach to healing trauma not only doesn't work, but *can't* work. In fact, it can't work as the primary tool for *any* meaningful soul-transformation, which is even more of a bomb to drop in our culture—a culture which is so classically Greek, in the sense of being overly dependent on intellect, that we Greek Orthodox can barely comprehend it.

To the Greek tragedians, Oedipus's mistake—the human person's mistake—begins in the mind, in the intellect; his *hubris* undid him. Next, Oedipus encountered his father along the road, of course not knowing him; the two argued, and he slew his father. Finally, he journeys to his real home, and unwittingly marries his mother.

Thus, all of his mistakes seem traceable to two intellectual primary mistakes, pride and ignorance. Since pride is a form of ignorance, the Greek tragedians aren't so different than Plato in this respect; they both make it seem as if the intellectual life would be the place where sufficient awareness and intelligence will safeguard your soul. After that, for Oedipus, came sins in the realm of anger, and finally in the realm of desire.

*Opposite: Brother at prayer. Valaam Monastery, Russia.*

## About Face: Reversing the Order of Battle

RTE: Don't we agree? Surely the Orthodox Church gives first place to the humility of her saints?

DR. PATITSAS: Lars Thunberg writes in *Microcosm and Mediator*, his book about St. Maximus the Confessor's theology and anthropology, that we Orthodox don't agree. In fact, he says that very early on, by the fourth or fifth century, Western and Eastern monasticism differed exactly on this point. In the West, the intellectual sins like pride were taken as primary, and as the first line of spiritual defense. In the East, the sensual sins were taken as primary; the battle should be fought and won there.

The Tradition of the Church often makes use of the idea that the soul is tripartite—has three distinct sets of powers: the rational or intellectual, by which we apprehend truth; the spirited or incensive powers with which we hate evil and fight for the good; and the desiring or appetitive powers with which we desire what is good for us because it is beautiful.

These powers can go wrong, can become fixated on the world as an end in itself, and then we term them passions. Incensive, fighting, powers gone wrong are then known as irascible passions; appetitive powers gone wrong are known as concupiscent passions.

Well, Oedipus fell into intellectual passions, then irascible ones, and finally concupiscent ones. And this is held by many to show us the order of battle today.

RTE: Well, it seems pretty logical. We all struggle with pride, and “pride goeth before a fall.”

DR. PATITSAS: I thought it logical, too, but once a student pointed out to me Thunberg's remark about this essential difference between Orthodoxy and the West, I started asking around and looking around.

Our Savior followed the path that we follow in the Orthodox Church. First, He was born in virginity, preserved his Mother from the moment of his conception ever in virginity, and himself lived a virginal life. Thus, He defeated the concupiscent passions, the temptation to sensuality. Next, He faced the temptation to kingship, the wrath of kings, and the sentencing to death. By bearing his death without wrath, He conquers the irascible passions completely and utterly.

It is only at the very end, in the grave, that we depict Christ when we describe his “extreme humility.” Victory over the passion of pride comes last. First we fast; then we give alms or are otherwise reconciled with our enemies; and finally we are prepared to pray in all perfection, to humble our minds in receiving the perfect vision of God's glory.

RTE: And when you looked around, did you find that Orthodox Christians knew about this “order of battle”?

DR. PATITSAS: I discovered that in general we don't know what Thunberg is talking about, when he says that in Orthodoxy you fight the sensual sins first. “Wait, isn't it the Roman Catholics who think sex is evil, while we are all about humility?” We either think Thunberg is exactly backwards, or that he simply doesn't make sense. I *should have* understood, based on everything I'd been taught in seminary, but I certainly didn't.

So I went to a monastery and asked the abbot. Not only did he know what Thunberg meant, he said that Thunberg's point is a life or death distinction for Orthodox. I felt an immediate rush of gratitude, knowing that we live in a Church where the inside knowledge of the fourth century is still the most important knowledge of the twenty-first.

What the abbot said is that the purpose of a monk is to keep the mind in the heart, focused on the name of Jesus. When he attempts to do so, the great temptation will be from images and sensations. Any of us, when we try to pray, find that pictures come into our minds, even holy ones, to distract us from prayer. Feelings arise and take hold of us. Or, we are too hungry or tired or cold to pray. In one way or another our first battle is with sensations and images.

But the Christian who stands fast in devotion to the name of Christ will find that he has conquered self-love, which itself is known as the “mother of the passions.” “As for pride,” the abbot said, “it is a passion like the other passions. You can't give it any particular significance.” Well, I know now that you can't fight any of the passions head on, but must rather cut off their source, self-love, by falling in love with Christ. You begin with chaste devotion to him. The Old Testament prophets had a lot to say about our eros for God being disrupted by adulterous attachments to many other things. Unfortunately for puritan mis-interpreters of this tradition, who think you can cure bad eros through a kind of anorexia, the only real cure for bad eros is good eros, and plenty of it.



And incidentally, this is why you can't be the only referent of "the sinner" in the Jesus Prayer; in that case, the Prayer would reinforce your focus on self, rather than promote your union with Christ.

RTE: So the abbot's short answer sufficed to open the door?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, because I saw at once, even before the abbot finished speaking, that his answer puts the story of Adam and Eve in a universal light. Eve represents the concupiscent passions, and desired the attractiveness of the fruit more than company with Christ. Don't I do the same thing, many times a day? Next, Adam represents irascible passions, seeking to cut himself off from Eve and God to save his own life after the bitter taste of sensuality. This is what happens when he says, "The woman whom you gave me, caused me to eat." He sacrifices God and Eve to save himself, says St. Silouan! And isn't this what I do, when I am filled with hatred for myself and for my own body, and even blame God, after I have fallen into concupiscent sins?

Finally, to prevent Adam and Eve from living forever in their passionate state and growing irredeemably proud, God expels them into the world outside paradise.

If the abbot was right, then this is a drama we each repeat many times a day. We are all always taken away from focus on Christ by sensuality, come to war with ourselves and others as a result, and then are only spared from a demonic pride and total spiritual destruction when God allows us to suffer—and accepts our repentance.

Or, look at the Epistle of James. "Why is there war among you? Because of the passions of the flesh."

St. Silouan even says that if Adam had not tried to sacrifice Eve and God to save himself, then the Fall would have been averted! So, if we fall into the concupiscent passions, our next backstop is the irascible ones—at least don't blame God and others, lash out at others, grow resentful, nurse rage, reject your very self, lose all peace. But if you do even this, then allow the intellectual powers to be the backstop of that. At once humiliate yourself and run to your confessor, and say what you have done.

This is our Orthodox way, and however often we fall, we cannot attack pride directly as our first priority. Rather, we return to the front lines: our simple devotion to Christ, our fasting, our chastity, and the sacred beauty

*Opposite: "Adam and Eve Cast Out of the Garden," 12th-century frieze, Porta das Praterias, Santiago de Compostela, Spain.*

of the icons. This is always the first order of business, once the dust settles on the last spiritual battle. Your spiritual father, the Saints, Christ himself and his All-holy Mother will move mountains for you—only don't neglect your daily struggle with images in prayer, your fasts, the many simple adventures in chastity. We think those are the least of our obligations, but they are where the battle will be won or lost.

RTE: I like this very much, because this calmness in the midst of spiritual storms is what I see among the pious in Orthodox countries. But what if we don't have the time or energy left to fight our passions—like the thief on the Cross? How did he become the first to enter Paradise?

DR. PATITSAS: First, he was somehow able to fall in love with Christ, renouncing the outer appearance or image of things, rejecting all the sensual evidence that obscured Christ's glory. Instead, he glimpsed Christ's perfection and fell in love with him. Thus, he became able to defend Christ from the unjust judgment of the bad thief, to stand up for Christ, to "fight" or contest for him. The thief is so firmly anchored in Goodness at this moment that he speaks with the perfect authority of a lawgiver about his own state, that of his brother thief, that of Christ, and about the fittingness of the punishment he endures. In fact, the thief speaks for all of sinful humanity in pronouncing himself worthy of punishment. He was able to see the truth about goodness in the world and he enacted this goodness by confessing Christ openly. And finally, he was willing to humble himself utterly, asking a dying "criminal" for mercy.

The world today is going with a version of the classical Greek approach, which cannot work for the spiritual life. Society tells us, first humble yourself by renouncing your claim to an intellectual hold on absolute truth. In other words, embrace relativism. Second, work for world peace—which should be easy, once no one any longer holds passionately to their own ideas about truth, the logic goes. Or at least *imagine* you are working for world peace, perhaps by hating those who seem not to be. As for the pleasures, the world says you can have as many as you like, so long as you continue the prior renunciations of truth/exclusivity and of self-defense/jealousy.

In other words, be a relativist; have a vague commitment to passivity and peace; but above all don't get involved in a long-term Christian marriage in which things like chastity and exclusivity are worth fighting for; then, the world will be happy with you.

Our young people feel the pressure of this inversion very strongly when they attempt to be chaste and virginal. "Why? Do you think you are better than us?" That is, the young person is accused of pride, an intellectual passion. "Are you rejecting us by not joining in our hopeless fun? Are you separating yourself from us?" In other words, the young Christian is accused of enmity, an irascible passion. "Besides," they say, "concupiscent passions are the least important of the three, and in fact are a good thing . . ."

Such an approach is poison. We must spit it out at once.

### St. Maximos and Christ's Beauty in Creation

RTE: How does this approach to spiritual warfare reflect the cosmology you spoke of earlier?

DR. PATITSAS: We have already hinted at it. It started with the original "Jesus Prayer." "When" (we cannot use words for time in these mysteries) the Father caused his Spirit to proceed and rest upon his only begotten Son, the Son "at once" became willing to share out his Life with the world—a world which was then roused into existence through this very shining out, this self-emptying of Christ in the Holy Spirit, in obedience to the Father.

To put it another way, St. Maximos says that God was so good that his goodness could not be contained within himself. It poured forth "outside" himself in a cosmic Theophany over against the face of darkness. The appearing of this ultimate Beauty caused non-being itself to forget itself, to renounce itself, to leave behind its own "self"—non-being—and come to be. All of creation is thus marked by this eros, this movement of doxology, liturgy, love, and repentance out of chaos and into the light of existence. Creation is repenting from its first moment, *for repentance does not require the prerequisite of sin*. It simply means to put our attention still more deeply upon Christ, to love him much, much more than we have before. Of course, compared to that "more deeply," the prior state looks like sin—but this is partly relative for us.

Thus, first comes the battle with concupiscent passions, which we win by fasting—in other words, by falling in love with Beauty itself, and not with false beauty. But what is this real Beauty, but Christ himself in a moment of self-emptying love? And so through Beauty we learn the Goodness of the Cross—that is to say, Ethics—and we ourselves long to pour out our life for



our brothers, sisters, enemies, and all of creation. To contemplate this goodness, to be illumined, we must give alms. We are then illumined in both senses—we contemplate correctly, and our light “shines before men.”

Thus, we arrive at the knowledge of Truth, and at a union with the Truth, the Logos of the Father. Here, we become our true self. We participate in Truth by our very being, each according to his own unique calling. We are genuine. There is no longer any “falseness” in us. This is what it means to arrive at Truth, although various insights will surely follow, as well.

Only in this three-fold movement do we come to be, for St. Maximos says that every existing thing is created according to its own particular logos, its own unique sharing in the ultimate Logos, the Truth who is the Son.

RTE: And this movement toward Christ is why you said that eros is the beginning of moral life?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, and that was actually my point in bringing up Tolkien, and the importance of falling in love with other cultures and civilizations, or with something beautiful that can make us forget ourselves. Our lives only begin, our moral struggle only commences, once we’ve loved something enough to want to leave ourselves behind. That can be painful—but ideally it’s never worse than bittersweet.

Incidentally, a wise educator always trades in Beauty and Goodness, before Truth.

### The Gates of Truth—The Tomb of Christ

RTE: Are we ready to speak about trauma now? It seems that everything you’ve mentioned could be a help.

DR. PATITSAS: All I can really tell you about trauma is how I as an Orthodox ethicist read Jonathan Shay, our culture’s best expert on trauma.<sup>1</sup> I am an ethicist, not a psychiatrist with daily experience in treating trauma. It may

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Shay serves as Visiting Scholar-at-Large at the U.S. Naval War College and holds the Chair of Ethics, Leadership, and Personnel Policy in the Office of the U.S. Army, Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel. In 2007, he received the MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellowship to further support his work with trauma victims. Shay is the author of *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* and *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming*.

*Opposite: Tomb of Christ, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.*

turn out that I don't know anything about how to heal trauma, and on that point I'll let you and the reader judge for yourselves.

In fact, if the reports coming back from the field of mental health were positive; if a MacArthur Genius Award-recipient like Shay were not reporting that in fact we don't know how to heal trauma; if a recent issue of *The New Yorker* magazine hadn't spelled out what an utter chaos of treatment approaches—many of them already debunked in their approach by Shay, none of them empirically verified—are being currently employed across the Veterans Administration to heal PTSD; if I couldn't see with my own eyes how wrong we as a culture can go when it comes to comforting the broken-hearted victims of bad circumstance—if all this were not the case, then I would leave this to the experts.

But since it is, I will share what Orthodoxy, in my limited understanding, says about trauma. What is crucial is the “order of battle” in the spiritual life, the way that we conduct ourselves in the spiritual struggle, according to Orthodoxy. This is an order that flows from the unique and almost unknown (even among Orthodox) account of how the world was created that we just now mentioned. Our anthropology of soul-healing is inseparable from our account of creation. Since few enough know the second, the first can easily go astray, without our noticing.

RTE: People found the first interview not only helpful, but providential. So we accept your disclaimer, and promise to prayerfully judge for ourselves.

DR. PATITSAS: Thank you. Elder Porphyrios, who as of this very day has been canonized and acclaimed a saint by the Holy Synod of Constantinople, said it best. “No one ever became holy by fighting evil. We only become holy by falling in love with Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

We said so much in our last interview about trauma, but let's focus on what we said near the end. We talked about war in general, and trauma, as an anti-liturgy. Whereas liturgy knits our individual character together and integrates us; whereas liturgy promotes communion and deepens our connection to others and God and the whole of nature; and whereas liturgy teaches us the profound truth of who God really is, and thus who we are and who the world is—well, war and trauma reverse all this. They unravel our

character by breaking our connection to beauty; drive us from close communion with others so that we don't have the opportunity to be good; and teach us lies about God, others, the world, and ourselves.

The healing of the soul begins with noticing God's many theophanies, and with falling in love with them. In other words, it begins with Beauty. In renewing our love for authentic Beauty, we slowly are cleansed of the ugly images of trauma and the false images of worldly pleasures. Our character, unraveled by what we experienced, begins to be knit together, to become whole again. We begin to be “created” again.

After this we can discuss Goodness. By embracing what we find within authentic Beauty—the crucified Savior and the Cross—we attain Goodness and become good, and find our communion to others restored. We do this in practice through almsgiving, or empathy. We contemplate Goodness through action as well as thought, and are able to see any and all culpability we have for the state of the world, but now in a spirit ready to embrace that culpability through repentance. With time we come to wish that we could be still more culpable, so that we could do something about it all. In other words, the empathy that Shay so emphasized comes more and more into play in this second stage.

Finally, through these two steps we are brought to the gates of Truth, which is to say, to the tomb of Christ. And here we bow down, and accept our own humiliation in a spirit of surrender, finding ourselves resurrected and renewed. We begin to receive our crown for what we have suffered, already from this life. We are, that is, engraced.

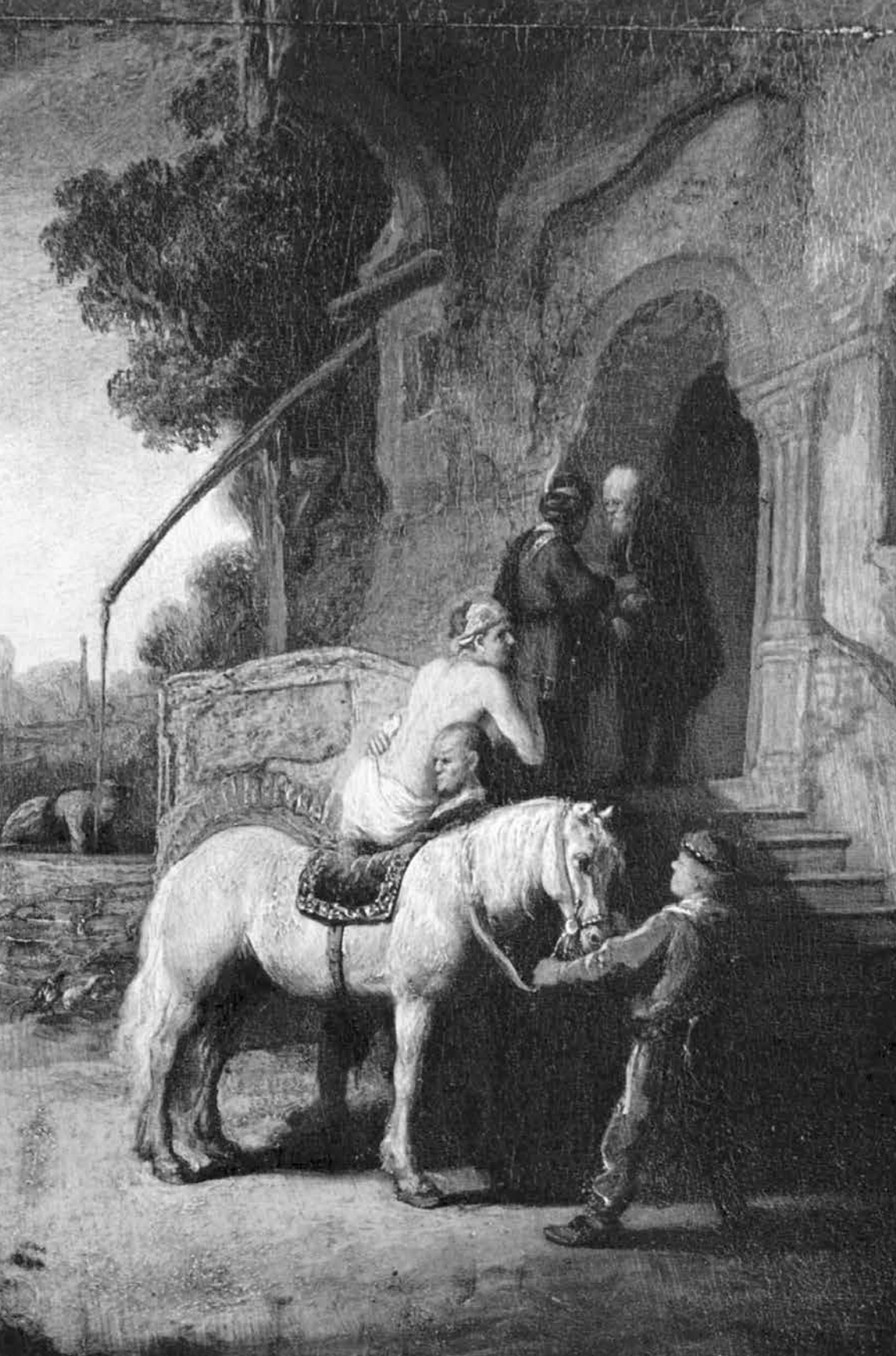
RTE: How then will this “order of battle” help the trauma victim?

DR. PATITSAS: I think it shows why the classical Greek approaches contained in Tragedy, Philosophy, and our contemporary too-cognitive psychotherapy, will not be sufficient; truth is not the first order of business for the soul. Especially not when it is not the truth of the self, but simply the truth about certain events or impressions. Nor can an addict begin with goodness; that attempt to do the right thing is also doomed for the addict, which is what makes their disease distinctive.

Trauma represents a kind of paralysis within the irascible passions; addiction, a paralysis within the concupiscent passions, usually with a corresponding trauma wound, perhaps self-inflicted as in the case of resentment.

But trauma signifies being trapped in this defensive crouch. It is important

<sup>2</sup> St. Porphyrios (Bairaktaris) of Kapsokalyvia and Athens (1906–1991), canonized on November 27, 2013. The great contemporary saint of “beauty first,” St. Porphyrios' discerning spiritual counsel can be read in *Wounded by Love: The Life and Wisdom of Elder Porphyrios*, Denise Harvey (Publisher) 2005.



to remember that it is not by any means yet the ultimate step of pride and spiritual death. From that, it is light years away in fact.

Rather, for the trauma sufferer, a concupiscent attachment to something, something perceived as irrevocably lost, has resulted in the irascible event of a narrowing of all attachment, a war against all, including finally the self. Even the berserk state, which we mentioned in the last interview, is not yet the prideful state, although it mimics it. But I assure you it is not. There is still so much hope there—the berserker is still so very far from damnation.

So this freezing within the irascible passions must be addressed.

First, the Beautiful: Shay says we begin when we take the trauma victim out of the ugly circumstances inflicting the trauma. We bring them to good patterns of life, to friendships, to self-care. All of this represents the return of Beauty to the life. Good Patterns—in the Christopher Alexander sense of Patterns in Architecture,<sup>3</sup> but applicable to Patterns of action and self-care and relating—are really nothing less than the Platonic Forms, the direct presence of Divine Beauty in our lives. These must be cultivated first.

Can we then see the Goodness within this Beauty? Do we see the care being shown us by others as pure Goodness in our life, as good moral luck, as a precious empathy coming at someone else's expense? This is what I emphasized in the last interview. Some people know how to heal trauma, and if we meet them we will see that they are the very opposite of a person inflicting trauma. In fact, what they do is accept our abuse out of love for us. But they are only able to mimic Christ so completely because they are so practiced at giving everything to Christ. It is He who is carrying you through them. Such living saints are simultaneously afflicted yet free.

Shay knew that *The Iliad* was the crucial text; so did Simone Weil. I love the way that it combines beauty and goodness, art with empathy. In it, in its profound hearing, brother soldiers came together for a week or so, to listen to a beauty that made them forget themselves, in a safe context of hospitality and unity. Within that Beauty was Goodness, the empathic love. As we said last time, there are no enemies in *The Iliad*, only noble soldiers, trapped in war on both sides. Before such a monument of Beauty and Empathy, we can safely weep, practicing empathy for others—and by extension for ourselves.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Alexander is Professor Emeritus of the University of California at Berkeley. An architect noted for his remarkable theories of design, Alexander is the author of *The Timeless Way of Building*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1979, and *A Pattern Language*, Oxford Univ. Press, 1977.

Opposite: "The Good Samaritan," Rembrandt van Rijn, 1630. The Wallace Collection, London.



You know, Truth isn't really a "third moment." If you have Beauty and Goodness, Truth is right there, inside them both. That weeping in the hearing of *The Iliad* is one of the moments that you are most alive—most true.

The hell of the Trojan War, we must remember, was put down by Odysseus's willingness to die upon the wood—the wood of the Trojan Horse, I mean, for had he been discovered inside, he would have been killed; the Hellenes were very close to Christ. That was their suffering—to have been so close, and yet still so far away. Thank God for St. Paul!

RTE: You are using "truth" more in the sense of "genuineness," than in the customary sense of knowing the truth about things.

DR. PATITSAS: Yes! That genuineness is the real meat of Truth. Truths "about" things, and about people and ourselves, can foster that killing isolation we spoke of last time.

But as we heal we do arrive at certain truths about our selves, our enemies, our torturers, God, life. These are manifold and not to be treated lightly; let me just mention one. We come to find that when we replay trauma tapes in our heads, we are actually inflicting damage upon ourselves. We are getting the mental tires stuck more deeply in the mud. We are hurting ourselves. This cannot be known at first; we initially experience the flashback as a continuation of the attack, as something external, and in many senses it is. But with time we learn to master this response, to develop some space between the impulse response, and our cooperation with it. With time a person can even stop playing the tapes.

But that doesn't mean you can intellectually talk someone out of this replaying, before having done the work of Beauty and Empathy and Genuineness; heavens, no. In some cases such a rushed, cold, coercive, forced approach is the approach of a sociopath; it can be a soul crime.

Anyway, a person who has advanced so far is still not "cured" of trauma. So then why does it matter? Because he or she can then return to square one—focusing on more beauty, more empathy, more truth, without the distraction of these ugly tapes running on the mind's view screen. At that point, time begins to flow again; time is on your side; you see more vividly what was hidden though present before: Hope.

At times, we will not be able to follow this order of battle. A person may have an attack of pride, or seek moral guidance about a pressing question. We respond where we have to, where the crisis hits us. But we always re-

start with Beauty, with the spiritual senses, with chastity and eros, because that is where it all began.

### Faith, the Memory of Theophany

RTE: In your last interview you emphasized more the role of others: of relatives, friends, and spiritual fathers.

DR. PATITSAS: What the existence of moral luck shows, in the end, is that we don't make sense morally until we receive a kind of *ultimate* anointing by God's grace—we need mercy, we need perfect mercy in every possible dimension of our life, before it will become clear who we really are. On our own, before we've been "chosen," it's all a bit chaotic, isn't it? In a perfect world, we would all have that perfect anointing, feel ourselves at every moment to be the apple of God's eye. But then, there would be less wiggle room when we fell; there would be no excuse.

And in fact, at the Last Judgment we all will have that much love from God. Which is why only then can we be really and accurately judged. There alone is God's share of the synergy totally revealed to you in all its splendor—and you find out whether or not you have cooperated, even a little.

When you encounter something beautiful, even if it's in a third-hand re-telling of the cosmology and battle plan of the Fathers of the Church, it means your luck has changed, ever so slightly, for the better. If this account strikes you as beautiful, it's a re-starting.

The ideal situation would be to confess, to be baptized, chrismated, to commune the Body and Blood of Christ, and to have a spiritual father who is a saint—as well as to have whatever help medicine and doctors can provide. The saint can give you back a space between you and the trauma you are suffering. They do this by invisibly absorbing your trauma and showing you Beauty, by showing you God. This "arouses" you, gets you moving forward and thus away from the frozen state, and is the beginning of hope. It redeems you.

RTE: How important is this particular "good luck"? What if a trauma sufferer can't find the dreamed-for spiritual father? Is there no hope?

DR. PATITSAS: Anything that tells you that there is no hope is the returning presence of the evil force that initially traumatized you. Like wolves, they are returning to hunt the wounded while they are weak, to finish them off; the



other side wants you to renounce hope and die. Don't give them the pleasure. I am asking you personally: Don't dishonor the nobility of your own suffering—even if it looks like your life is a disaster, a hell, a void of meaninglessness, a failure to achieve anything. Forget it. Believe me, that is all to your glory, and in time this will be revealed. The only ones who should be ashamed of the wreckage that your post-trauma life has become, are the ones who inflicted the trauma upon you in the first place—or perhaps the forces behind them. You just run to Christ. He will get you in order. The disorder is probably not as bad as you think.

Anything that says that a long delay in healing, the absence of the longed-for saintly spiritual guide, is unbearable and a reason for the madness of despair—well, this panic on top of panic is flowing from your passions. Don't listen to it. All kinds of things are going on invisibly within us when we pray, though outwardly nothing has changed and we feel only the same. Although you mean everything to God, and He welcomes your urgent cries, sometimes He may be arranging things with your long-term interest in mind. And in the meantime, when you are being crucified by the trauma flashbacks, know that you are with God; you are his icon. But your strength is also limited, and He will descend.

RTE: Some final words?

DR. PATITSAS: You know, I used to accept the whole faith vs. reason conflict, the idea that some things you can figure out, and others you just accept. What I see now is so much different; not necessarily completely opposed, but completely different.

Beginning with Beauty means beginning with feeling—not with passionate emotions or opinions, but purified feeling. I mean a theological sensing, the innate ability we have to recognize theophany even in its hidden manifestations. In relying on that intuition, or in recognizing that within the Beautiful story of Christ is goodness, and therefore almost certainly truth—we fall in love with beauty and step out in faith toward it.

Is faith any different than eros? Abraham stepped out of his land and onto a journey of exile not because he worked it out intellectually, but because he had received a theophany! Perhaps faith is just the memory of theophany, the continuing to launch out towards that divine supernova when it seems to have gone dark?

*Opposite: Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.*

And when we find within Beauty the miracle of empathy, and contemplate this Goodness by imitating it, we see that the first feeling is not left behind. Rather, it is amplified and becomes contemplation, a feeling that includes discursive thought—a faith that is expressed as reason. And finally our sense of truth is but an amplification of our sense of Beauty and our sense of Goodness or morality. The three are just one clear channel, one pure stream—from feeling to contemplation to knowing Truth directly. This is why Orthodox theology looks the way it does, so pure and free, so elegant and aesthetically satisfying—rather than cold, logical, and hard.

My first teacher in the doctoral program at Catholic University, Prof. Eric Perl, was, I think, trying to teach me all this twenty years ago, but only recently have I understood him a bit better.<sup>4</sup> In his book *Theophany*, he says that our aesthetic sense, our contemplative sense or reason, and our mystical insight are the same power in us, but along a “continuum of cognition.” Your sense of the beautiful is already an intellectual power, and your final knowing of truth will still be a falling in love with the beautiful through feeling.

This is why Orthodox ascetic struggle, and Orthodox theology and ethics, do *not* begin with intellect and truth, nor with the intellect investigating goodness. Or, they may temporarily begin there if challenged to do so, but they will always return to their real beginning, which is Beauty, followed by Goodness, then the appropriation of the self-revelation of God. We begin with theophany, then add correct praxis, and finally we investigate dogma.

Imagine an ethics that was nothing more than Truth investigating Goodness, with no thought for Beauty? Who would even care about what it discovered? But isn't this exactly how we define Ethics today?

Or, imagine a psychotherapy in which Truth investigates Truth, asking only whether what we feel is true, always seeming to denigrate concern for Beauty and Empathy in the form of its very practice? Can there even be a Truth without Goodness and Beauty? Well, this is just what we call “objectivity,” and it is just a kind of hell.

RTE: What you are saying sounds like the purification, illumination, deification sequence. How does that relate?

DR. PATITSAS: Yes, that is an ancient name for the Beauty-Goodness-Truth

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Eric Perl, Professor of Philosophy at Loyola/Marymount University in Los Angeles, is the author of several works on classical and Christian philosophy and metaphysics including *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, State Univ. of New York Press, 2008.

progression, although we must always beware of sequences if they are too discrete, with each stage too separate from the others. And moreover, Purification comes not from moral struggle, but from ascetic struggle—the attempt to fall in love with Christ and him alone, to be chaste, to energize our eros. And Illumination is a contemplation not yet of theological truths, but of goodness, of the empathy and compassion at the heart of beauty. Thus to purify our reasoning, we emphasize not logic, but the giving of alms; only this will clarify our judgment about goodness and render us Illumined.

Deification is not separate from the others. To attain Eros (Beauty; the first commandment of Christ's two greatest commandments) and Agape (Goodness; the second of these two commandments) is *already* to be Deified. Or, we must see that even the first rays of Beauty in our lives, represent the onset, incipient but real, of our deification.

We know the theologian to be deified because when he speaks, it is God speaking with him, with one voice human and divine. He is *theologos* because he has found his own logos in the Logos who is *Theos*. This could be anyone.

RTE: A final example to bring it all home?

DR. PATITSAS: We must not discount the role of doctors and medicine in healing trauma. But even they cannot succeed in defiance of the ancient order. Beauty, including a life based on good patterns of self-care; Goodness, and the steady practice of empathy; Truth, but truth primarily in the sense of being just who we were made to be. Re-telling of the traumatic events should be done very gingerly, and never out of proportion to our progress in the other two realms.

We all go wrong from this progression in different ways, and a self-defeating response to trauma is one example of that.

But we all can go right, too. We might fall in love with a soul mate; see in that person their powerful compassion for us, and begin to imitate that compassion toward them and towards all; and finally, become willing to accept the truths necessary—and just those truths, not rushing too fast in a cognitive way—that we need in order to *be* true, to be our *true selves*. We will then look back upon that first vision of that person's beauty, as the moment when our lives started, when we “came to be” out of a kind of nothing. We will know for ourselves what it means to be created *ex nihilo*, and we will weep.



It doesn't have to be marriage we are describing here. And it doesn't have to be a spiritual friend or spiritual director. But perhaps it will be someone in whom, for us, Christ becomes the Great Physician.

I asked a spiritual healer once, an Orthodox priest with the gift of confessing thousands, "How do you do it? How do you take on so many burdens and not become crushed?" And in fact, he is the freest person I know. He answered very simply, "Everything is to be given to God." Have I seemed in our interview strident, rather than ardent? But to fall in love with Beauty is really just the opposite of a straining for health, for clarity, for truth. It is rather an intoxication, a liberation. I wish that genuine Orthodox Christian spirit to all of you—and to me, too, some day! ✦

*Opposite: Anointing Stone, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem.*