Orthodoxy and Psychoanalysis

Dirge or Polychronion
to the Centuries-Old Tradition?
1. Introduction

“To the eternal memory of my spiritual father, Bishop Dorimedont (Chekan)

“Throughout the contemporary Christian world there is a thirst for spiritual guidance and at the same time a severe dearth of persons blessed by the Holy Spirit to serve as guides” (Ware 62). Only a few Orthodox theologians would doubt the value of these words, but many would not scruple to voice their dis- sension at the accompanying suggestions about how best meet this huge challenge. Following extensive discussions, Greek theologians have recently suggested utilizing the expertise and knowledge available in the fields of psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy. Grafting such expertise and counsels onto the body of knowledge and experience of the modern Orthodox priest would thereby equip him with additional knowledge of the human soul. Greater cooperation between ecclesiastical and secular knowledge promises to counter the “severe dearth of persons blessed by the Holy Spirit to serve as guides”, a dearth which threatens to depopulate the Church in the future. Such effectual cooperation promises to render spiritual counsel a singularly rewarding activity.¹

The seriousness of this issue urgently requires effective measures to address the pressing problem of an inscrutable Providence withholding spiritual favours from the ordained minister. Taking sides instead of preserving traditions that are held dearest represents a quandary for present day Orthodox theology. The predicament for the Orthodox mind is this: firstly, close cooperation between ecclesiastical and secular knowledge might imply that the Church, as the Body of Christ, lacks its own means to solve the problem of the priest’s spiritual immaturity and his concomitant incapacity to guide Christ’s people. The minister endowed with abundant spiritual qualities is replaced by the quasi-pastor who lacks knowledge of the human soul, and lacks the ability to discern spirits, to prophesize and to interpret. As a result, some in the Church resort to expertise which derives from the secular, a-theist realm rather than its own theocentric frame of reference. Additional problems arise within Orthodox anthropology when the immediate necessity for greater elaboration² impels the deliberate,

¹  Kornarakis says: “In the case that a pastor is not a spiritual father endowed with the gift of spiritual insight he must, nevertheless, being the instrument of the divine grace, resort to the use of human possibilities in order to collaborate creatively with divine grace; psychological knowledge is God’s indirect gift to the wise collaborator” (Ἐγχεριδίον 15).

²  Metropolitan Ware says: “Our theology of human personhood needs to be much more fully elaborated … Such elaboration is possibly the special task that will confront Orthodox theology in the coming century … Certainly what Florovsky used to say about our Orthodox ecclesiology - that it is ‘still im Werden, in the process of formation’ – is even more true of our Orthodox anthropology” (78).
functional and epigenetic interlacing of both anthropological frames of reference, secular and sacred, causing Orthodox anthropology to implode. Finally, the progressive depletion in knowledgeable, skilled spiritual shepherds is a matter that allows no delay, because the increasing commodification of spiritual care helps to legitimize and sustain the desacralisation of the Church.

The Very Reverend Basil Thermos is in the vanguard of attempts to obtain revealing insights into a possible dialogue between Orthodox pastoral theology and psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy. The decision to analyze and evaluate the tendency to rapprochement and interaction between theology and “anthropological (in the sense of the psychological and social behaviour of humans) sciences” by way of Thermos’s thought appears promising. Thermos is an accomplished theologian with a Th.D. degree earned for the study — Η Ιερατική κλίση ώς ψυχολογικό γεγονός (The Hieratic Vocation as Psychological Event) — and has received medical education in the field of psychiatry. In addition, he is the author of many books and articles which form a repository, on the basis of which meaningful dialogue between Orthodox theology and the psychological sciences could be established. Within this repository, Thermos is prepared to grapple seriously with the problem of spiritual immaturity among Christian ministers, an immaturity which makes such ministers ineffective and improper guides for their Orthodox congregations. The reason for some priests’ spiritual immaturity and consequent ineffectiveness can be attributed to a pastoral vocation problem. Some priests, although physiologically mature, evidence regrettable psychological immaturity. By means of the psychological sciences Thermos seeks to explain why these priests swerve from their initial intention to act according to the highest sense of their vocation.

In the context of this problem, it is important to ascertain precisely which paradigm of interaction between Orthodox pastoral theology and psychoanalysis Thermos suggests. How does he manage to maintain the necessary balance of mutual inviolability between the realms of theological and psychological knowledge? It seems also of key importance to determine what Thermos understands under Orthodox pastoral theology and psychoanalysis. Does he tolerate the scientific insufficiency of the psychoanalytic method? What arguments does

3 “… In the coming century the devotion to the traditional religion or the religion of revelation will play not a great role. Devotion is peculiar to the historical religions alone. What will count is the certain power of religion or its components to gratify the needs of individuals and small communities; among the needs of religiously active people it is the necessity of psychological and corporeal health that reigns supreme” (Mitrí 117-8). Augustidis claims something very consonant with Mitrí’s opinion. He says: “It will be very regrettable, if tomorrow we shall face a phenomenon, whereby the parish will be considered capable of gratifying religious needs alone, while devising solutions for personal and family problems will fall within the ambit of the municipal psychological health care centre business, because only the latter is able ostensibly to afford understanding and elimination of personal problems” (Αύγουστίδης 101).
he put forward in favour of interaction between psychoanalytic and theological knowledge? And does he raise counterarguments to this? Is it expedient for Orthodox theology to pursue a model of the human being obtained from a deterministic anthropological approach?

To answer these questions the present study will proceed from the following thesis statement: **Thermos presents a powerful and well-grounded argument for the interaction between Orthodox pastoral theology and psychoanalysis.**

The above statement rests on the following assertions:

I. The importance of the human component in pastoral vocation arises from the epistemology which psychoanalysis inhabits; however, this epistemology is not foundational to the ultimate destiny of the Orthodox priesthood.

II. Apart from the practice of the spiritual life, the effectiveness of the modern Christian priest is dependent on minimizing the influence of the unconscious and promoting self-knowledge.

III. Thermos strips the methodological insufficiencies and philosophical biases of psychoanalysis to their essentials, and constructs a standard Orthodox model of the human entity.

IV. It is necessary to encourage better interaction between Orthodox pastoral theology and psychoanalysis. Any divergence between the two can probably be attributed to the failure to acknowledge the mutual lack of expertise in each other’s respective fields rather than to an inherent incompatibility.

These assertions will be confirmed with the help of writings on the topic by a relatively large cross-section of theologians and thinkers: Thermos, Bendaly, Matsukas, Ricœur, Kornarakis, Tselengidis, Staniloae, Romanidis, Evmenius, Florovsky, Freud, Jung, Manzat, Jaspers, and Dansereau, to name a few. Selected translations of the Greek Fathers which are pertinent to this topic have also been undertaken. Importantly, neither English nor French academic texts quoted in Greek by Thermos have been checked against their original versions but rather directly translated from the Greek text, because it is Thermos’s entire model and not his academic reliability that is of most importance here. The present study follows the MLA referencing style (7th edition 2009 with small adaptations made to it by the University of Balamand Libraries, Style Manuals 6th edition 2011).

In terms of epistemological tools, translation, periphrasis, description, analysis, comparison, example and illustration should help build a better understanding of the subject.

The primary objectives of the study are:

I. To confirm whether Thermos advances an acceptable paradigm of interaction between Orthodox pastoral theology and psychoanalysis.

II. To determine the admissible limits of interaction between these two spheres of knowledge.
These two objectives should contribute to forming a rationale for the possibility and advisability of repairing to psychoanalysis in default of efficient solutions for pastoral problems within the Orthodox Church.

This study will develop an argument in support of the four assertions outlined above. It begins with a concise reconstruction of the pastoral vocation problem and Thermos’s suggested solution to this. The reconstruction adheres closely in argument and description to the tenets contained in Thermos’s text. After outlining this initial problem, that of pastoral vocation, the paper goes on to examine and explain the reasons for the many pastoral vocation problems present in ecclesiastical life not only by emphasizing the responsibility of the Church authorities but also by establishing the importance of the quality of the psychological atmosphere within the Christian family. The latter is essential to the initiation of future clergymen into a life of love and interpersonal solidarity in the Church. Next, the study suggests reasons for and the causes of the failures in effectiveness among established priests. The suggestion is made that the balance of responsibility should be shared by particular ecclesiastics and the Church authorities. Finally, the paper examines the theoretical underpinnings of Thermos’s paradigm, from the perspectives of psychoanalysis and Orthodox anthropology, with preliminary discussion focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of psychoanalytic discoveries for Orthodox pastoral theology.
2. The pastoral vocation problem and its solution according to Thermos

2.1. Introduction to the issue

In recasting the pastoral vocation problem in terms of psychoanalysis, the Very Reverend Thermos initiated the central paradigm of a new movement within the Orthodox Church. He wrote about the pressing problem of pastoral vocation in his study *Hieratic Vocation as Psychological Event*.

At the beginning of his study, Thermos notes that certain Orthodox theologians hold to the majority opinion that the pastoral vocation is exclusively theocentric in character. *C'est-a-dire*, God alone calls the candidate to the priesthood pursuant to the ancient precedent of the prophets and apostles who were called by God to the hieratic ministry (Θερμός, *Hieratic Vocation*). In Thermos’s account, the Divine vocation may certainly take a different, mediated form, cloaking its “pursuits” by acting either through competent ecclesiastics or the faithful within the bastion of the Church. However, as he claims, even in such instances, candidates to the priesthood acknowledge that, apart from an indirect or direct call to the Divine vocation, there is also the personal desire to become a priest (Θερμός, *Hieratic Vocation*). The importance of personal desire in the hieratic vocation can also be found in the age-old standpoint of the Church as revealed in the canonic warrant for a candidate’s aspiration: “my spiritual son came … asking to take the foremost rank of priesthood …” (Νικοδήμου Ἀγιορείτου 758). The message of this testimony is that the candidate at one and the same time seeks to become a priest and reveals the completion of an inward, though not always conscious, process during which his vocation matured (Θερμός, *Hieratic Vocation*).

Thermos claims that there are two terms in the Greek language which suggest two distinct strands in pastoral vocation: 1) κλήση (derived from the verb—καλώ), and 2) κλίση (from κλίνω). The first term refers to “vocation”, and implies the gracious providence of almighty God, who attracts the human person to His ministry. The second term denotes “inclination, bent of heart / mind to something”, and is applied to the idea of a propensity inside a particular person to become a servant of God (Θερμός, *Hieratic Vocation*).

It is obvious from the title of Thermos’s study that his primary aim is to investigate the vocation termed κλίση. In other words, he is concerned with a detailed analysis of the psychological dimensions of the hieratic vocation. Thermos underscores the fact that, as much as the division between divine and human strands is necessary, it is also certainly artificial, because to separate the inscrutable divine strand (κλήση) from a human inclination is inconceivable. In this respect, the last chapter of his study contains an interesting and detailed analysis of the dialogue concerning divine vocation which takes place between the individual and God. Ultimately, Thermos (Θερμός 39) draws on the psy-
chological dimension since his specific objective is to comprehend the human aspect of the sacerdotal vocation. Such comprehension should facilitate the called candidate’s effective cooperation with divine grace. The separate analysis of the psychological dimension should lead to a restoration of the necessary balance between both dimensions of the vocation. This is important because it is growing ever more apparent that candidates may consider their leanings toward hieratic ministry as evidence of divine vocation, whereas they are really “developing their own inclination for priesthood” (Θερμός, ‘Η Ιερατική 39). Thermos (‘Η Ιερατική 39) asserts that such self-delusion may lead to unfortunate consequences both for the candidates (or even priests) and their congregation.

Thermos seeks answers to the following concrete questions: what crucial psychological factors are at play in forming a vocation (κλίση)? What are the necessary psychological conditions for the emergence, development and increase or decrease of a sense of vocation? Does the proper or improper pursuit of a hieratic vocation cue the appropriate authorities to deliver impartial moral, and spiritual judgment only, or oblige them also to offer reasonable psychological interpretation? What are the strict psychological criteria for interpreting psychologically certain hieratic vocations? Should one conjecture that there are “sham” vocations (κλίση)? (Θερμός, ‘Η Ιερατική 40)

After establishing the reality and immanent force of the psychological dimension of a hieratic vocation, Thermos (‘Η Ιερατική 40) then discusses the questions: Is it possible to transform, improve and change the psychological risk factors so that the negative be rendered positive? What independent standpoint concerning the psychological dimension of the hieratic vocation should the Church adopt? At what point is direct intervention in the development of vocation by appropriate ecclesiastical authorities justified? How should the Church deal with harmful psychological misuse of the hieratic vocation and should it establish clear guidelines to manage such misuse?

Apart from drawing on the fullness of his intellectual and Orthodox theological knowledge, Thermos also refers to the findings of Protestant and Catholic studies. According to Thermos (‘Η Ιερατική 13), such an inter-confessional approach to the above problem should help repair the current Orthodox scientific hiatus in research into the psychological dimension of the hieratic vocation. For those who oppose or even demonize such scientific inter-confessional cross-studies, Thermos (‘Η Ιερατική 13), in considering the issues of the non-Orthodox experience being grafted into the Orthodox domain, states that this issue does not concern the realm of ecclesiology, but the ecclesiastical which addresses the faithful as individuals. In relation to the individual, Thermos (‘Η Ιερατική 13) avers that the sinfulness of human nature is ubiquitous. Hence there is no canonical obstacle to inter-confessional cross-research and studies which effectively tackle common anthropological issues.
It will be immediately noted that Thermos (Ἡ Ἱερατική 11) makes recourse not only to psychoanalysis, but to other currents in psychology as well: pastoral psychology, “ego” psychology, family psychology, occupational psychology, social psychology and the psychology of religion.

2.2. The Essence of Human Component (κλίση⁴)

In his discussion, Thermos attempts to define which psychological factors contribute to a sense of hieratic vocation.

In order to analyze and extrapolate these psychological factors, it will initially be necessary to present the psychological model of the individual which underlies Thermos’s conceptual schema. There is good reason to maintain that Thermos has adopted the psychological model constructed by Freud. Specifically, the Freudian notions of “ego”, “id”, “superego”, “mechanisms of defence” (“identification”, “repression”, and many others), “ideal ego”, and “narcissism” underpin Thermos’s model (Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 46-94).

2.2.1. “Ideal ego”, “mechanisms of identifications” and “formation of identity”

Thermos claims that there are three main psychological factors at play in forming the vocation: “ideal ego”, “mechanisms of identification” and “formation of identity” (Ἡ Ἱερατική 46-94).

Rycroft’s (40) psychoanalytic dictionary defines the notion “ideal ego” as follows: “individual’s self-perception in consort with his own expectative self-image” (qtd. Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 49). Blos (“The function” 95) affirms that “ideal ego” formulates the desired objective; with the fulfillment of this objective, the human soul proceeds to identify other new objectives (qtd. Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 49). Thermos (Ἦ Ἱερατική) states that the impetus toward lofty ambition for new objectives is the distinctive characteristic of true ideals. Kyriazis and Sakellaropulos (279) claim that “ideal ego is foundational to choosing a sphere of activity. As a consequence, the human person invests the energy of his libido into his activity, during which his self-sensation (narcissism) will be formed, depending on whether he is successful in it or not” (qtd. Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική). Thermos (Ἦ Ἱερατική) states that the realization of the “ideal ego” results in the pleasant sensation of satisfactions and a feeling of self-esteem, whereas failure to meet the demands of the “ideal ego” results in shame. According to Kohut (1966), development and education interact with each other in order to combine the “ego” of the individual with the ideal so that the “values of this ideal are harmonized with ‘ego’s’ psychical structure and are acceptable for this ‘ego’”

⁴ From here on, the word vocation will be used in the sense of the Greek term κλίση, i.e., the human component of pastoral vocation.
(qtd. Godin 70). According to Thermos, the coordination of the values of the “ideal ego” with the actual “ego” is a pressing matter, because many unattainable or sham ideals can often be espoused within an individual, and lead him to unsuccessful activity. Kyriazis and Sakellaropulos provide the following definition of identification:

Identification is a psychical process, during which the individual adopts a not-his-own streak in his character, in other words, standards of behaviour which belong to another human person. As a result, the individual changes himself partially or completely, actualizing the borrowed character. Identification is not only a mechanism of defence or mere imitation of others’ behaviour, but an independent, mainly unconscious, function promoting development and maturing of the human ego as well as the modeling of human behaviour. (Κωριαζή and Σακελλαροπούλου 70)

There are several kinds of identification: primary identification, secondary identification, projection and introjection. In his study, Thermos discusses only secondary identification and introjection.

The former is a process of identification with an object that is acknowledged by the individual himself as a distinct person (as opposed to primary identification in which there is no such acknowledgement). This sort of identification stands for a defence since it decreases the aggressiveness of the individual toward the object and grants him the possibility of separating from it (object). Introjection is a process of identification with everything assimilated by the individual. It is also a state in which the individual considers there to be another within himself, another who becomes part of the individual. (Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 58)

With the activation of introjection, the individual interpolates the external object and assimilates its features. From this, Thermos concludes that the “super ego” must be the result of introjection (Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 58).

Thermos’s idea of an external object harks back to psychoanalysis. Interestingly, Thermos does not completely explain the idea of external object. He says that “object” means person (Θερμός, Ἡ Ἱερατική 58). However, Freud intentionally designated “another person” as “object”, since he considered another person to be an object of instinctive powers, solely the work of the imagination (Freud, Psychopathologie 276-277). In this regard, Delacampagne articulates the following idea: “Freud’s meta-psychology, according to Lang’s remark, matters only at the individual level. It does not take into account such ideas as ‘thee’ and ‘ye’, in contrast to M. Buber, L. Feuerbach and Parkinson. This meta-psychology does not possess any means to express the meeting between ‘I’ and ‘he’”⁵ (52).

These forms of identification are the basis for identity formation. Rycroft (68) puts it as follows: “Self-identity is a sense of continuity within ‘ego’s’ syn-

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⁵ Author’s translation from the French