

3 Picturing the Soul: Revisioning Psychotherapy and Spiritual Direction

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This book is the outcome of Fr. Canisius CMI Endowment Lectures 2013-2014. The author of this third book of the Dharmaram Spirituality series is the reader in Pastoral Theology and Spirituality at St. Mary's University, Twickenham, London. He has written extensively on spirituality, psychology and mysticism and is a registered psychotherapist in London.

Dr. Saju Chackalackal CMI, President, DVK has blessed the readers with a foreword, "Leading by Hand beyond Boundaries," in which he shares with them his personal experiences with Fr. Canisius Thekkekara, and introduces the author. Jose Nandhikkara CMI provides a short biographical sketch on the life and holiness of Servant of God, which is entitled "Will of God, All of that and that alone."

In chapter I, Tyler under the title "Picturing the Soul," unveils the so called 'soul-language' in the psychotherapeutic and spiritual direction encounter as well as the theological or anthropological position. The author adopts a threefold approach from analytical philosophy, the Christian mystical tradition and depth psychology. He calls our attention to the mystical languages of 'unsaying'. According to him "*psyche - logos*, literally 'talk of the soul', is essentially a 'mystical choreography' between what is said and what is shown" (p.5). "Psychology and spirituality are two wings of the butterfly that are both necessary if the fragile creature of the soul is to fly" (p.7). Both of them engage with the essential unknown ability that lies at the heart of the soul or psyche. Very often the butterfly needs healing and liberation. For this the therapist and spiritual director should "sensitively observe the choreography of the psyche and spirit as they skate on the surface of the mysterious, the unknown." (p.15). They have to take the role of an artist and poet, rather than of the scientist or analytical investigator. This needs special tools and a particular mindset. Tyler tries to explore psychotherapy, counselling and spiritual direction from such a perspective.

Chapter II presents the beginnings of the lineage in the Christian tradition, namely the spirituality of the Desert Fathers. It was in the

harsh burning environment of the wilderness that God revealed himself to Moses. It was also in such inhospitable place where the Israelites were tested "as God played cat and mouse with their hopes, expectations and theological understandings, culminating in the revelations of God's nature and covenant" (p.23). During the exilic period the prophets "looked back nostalgically to their people's time in the desert and longed once again for God to lure and seduce them back to the wilderness where the Valley of Suffering would once again become the door of hope." (p.24). In the New Testament times John the Baptist emerged from the desert infuriating and challenging the lifestyle of the people. Jesus also began his ministry there. Thus desert occupies in Christianity a necessary stage in the spiritual journey, and becomes 'archetypal' for Christian spirituality of future times. As the terrain of the desert began to disappear the new religious orders tried to find the desert in the city. There emerged the desert spirituality, which invites all people "to move out of their comfort-zones and move to the places of loss, driven-ness, pain and grief" (p.26).

Next the author takes us to the world of the desert Fathers and Mothers. Desert traditions started with Antony, who defined the monks as those who fight demons, who stand for passions of lust, greed, jealousy, pride, violence and anger. According to Abba Poemen "everything that goes to excess comes from the demons". Thus even Christian pieties and practices such as fasting, prayer and vigils can become loveless and egoistical acts. We must always examine our motives for everything we do, not least our pious and penitential acts. "The aim of the desert fathers and mothers is not to seek penance for penance's sake but to engage in *ascesis* or training to enable us to come closer to God" (p.33). If one can stay with all the distractions and boredoms of the cell then great peace will be found. Silence (*hesychia*) of the heart plays a prime role in the desert spirituality. Spiritual direction also occupies a prime role in the desert spirituality. According to Tyler it "becomes choreography between what is said and what is unsaid" (p.42). When we disclose our inner thoughts and feelings to the elder (spiritual guide), we free ourselves from the tyranny of desire. Thus one may name "the need for discernment, humility, balance, silence and 'staying with' as the key elements of the desert's spirituality" (p.45). Chapter III is entitled "The Spanish School: Ignatius Loyola and John of the Cross." According to the author these two persons refined the insights of the desert fathers and mothers regarding the discernment of the passions of the soul. Ignatius Loyola in his Appendix to his "Spiritual Exercises" condenses the Christian teaching on Guidelines for the discernment of spirits. He divides his rules for discernment into two categories, for beginners

and for the advanced. These rules will help the individual to assess if a particular course of action or way of life leads to a building up of the self or to greater disintegration and fragmentation. Ignatius asks us to ponder on the different outcomes of our desires and to observe the effects on our feelings.

John of the Cross in his work *The Living Flame of Love* presents his spiritual anthropology. "We need to 'excavate the caverns of the heart' to allow God's Holy Spirit to act in us" (p.71). "If a person is seeking God, his Beloved is seeking him much more" (*Living Flame*, 3.28). "It is God who acts as a blind man's guide to lead us to the place we know not" (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 1.13.11). We are asked not to put any blocks in the way of the divine outpouring love. The spiritual directors must not put anything in the way, between the soul and God. The spiritual guide himself/herself should have the experience of pure spirit. God leads each one along different paths. The director needs to lead the soul to greater solitude, tranquility and freedom of spirit.

Tyler finds that John of the Cross and Ignatius have built their spirituality upon the desert tradition. They had experience of God in all creation. The important fact is to examine our own attitudes to nature and to see "how our craving and desire to seize matter is distorting our fundamental orientation as a being created in the image and likeness of God (p.77). Hence we need to redirect our appetites and transform our self. "We must strive in all our actions and habits to imitate Christ at all times ... Through love of Christ we must renounce any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honour and glory of God" (pp.83-84). This kind of recording of self will bring forth the eternal freedom and love that is life in peace with Christ.

In chapter IV Tyler studies Freud and Jung in order to find out whether psychological language may be interpreted as a form of mystical language. There is no room for the transcendent in Freud's vision. According to him the key aspect for good mental functioning is appropriate ego strength and an ability to be open to the 'unknown thing' with a listening ear to its demands. Thomas Merton has tried to integrate the findings of psychological analysis with spiritual insight. He uses the psychological tropes of Freud as a means of examining life as a 're-integration of the self in Christ' through the marriage of different poles of the self. In his analytical psychology Jung refers to transcendent as 'transpersonal'. Jung sees psychic development in human as taking the form of the basic choreography between the small rational 'I' and the wider archetypal 'Self'. One may call Jung's psychic topology mystical discourse. Tyler thus concludes: "We derive from Jung a deeper sense

of the nature of the psyche as reconnected with its roots in the deeper soil of the archetypal and primordial. There can be no psychic healing for Jung without a link with the transcendental. Following Jung, the spiritual director becomes the one who names the transcendent journey of the individual through symbol, dream and memory. They will offer a refuge to the seeker in a troubled world, a refuge open to anyone with an affinity to the infinite and a desire to embark on the great unending mystery of the transforming transcendent journey into Infinite Love” (pp.115-116).

In chapter V the author provides conclusions on picturing psychotherapeutic and spiritual direction. Both of them have common ground, as well as unique spheres of influence. Spiritual direction assumes a shared faith context between the director and directee. It has an important cathetical role as well as therapeutic role. Indeed the Holy Spirit is the true director in spiritual direction. It uses speech, silence, prayer and method such as discernment. Psychotherapy is first and foremost a clinical intervention. It uses as tools a whole battery of techniques and methods, refined and developed within each branch of therapy. While the spiritual direction emphasizes upon the spiritual and transpersonal elements of the self, counselling takes into account body, mind, heart and spirit. It wants to develop ‘life maps’ for steering and conceptualizing the process of individual development.

The basic argument of Tyler is “that spiritual direction and psychotherapeutic/counselling are two approaches, methodologies or entrances into the worlds of human psyche and spirit in us” (p.127). There is much in common between the two processes, helping cures. Yet there exists crucial divergences. A spiritual director should remember “that the action of God’s Holy Spirit can never be restricted to anyone particular consulting room with a particular registered person at a particular time slot on a particular week day. The spirit blows where it will and the true ‘spiritual elder’ must sniff the spirit where it blows: this may be in the spiritual direction consulting room, but it may equally turn out to be on the train, in the park, at the post office or in the pub (p.128). He prefers to see spiritual direction as a form of befriending which by its nature will sometimes have to transcend or transgress the firm boundaries of therapy/counselling. He cautions the psychologists that “the original rawness and strangeness of the Living Spirit of God is not lost as she becomes over-domesticated in the consulting room, hospital and clinic” (p.129).

Tyler has done a wonderful and useful job in revisioning psychotherapy and spiritual direction. That allows a critical engagement with both

whilst respecting their competing claims as legitimate pathways to the healing of the psyche. His approach is scientific, objective and at the same time inspiring and enthusing. The Indian Christian audience is very much indebted to the author for providing them a very useful tool in the field of spiritual direction.

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