4 Therapeutic and *therapeia* within Orthodox Christianity

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Significant scholarship has illustrated that the modern self-help and therapeutic ethos originates in Protestant Christianity (Illouz, 2008; Woodstock, 2005; Nehring, et al. 2016).¹ For instance, the prolific American self-help genre with its positive thinking can be traced back to late 19th century religious manuals, in which readers were encouraged to control and direct their thoughts so that they ‘mirrored’ the intentions of God (Woodstock, 2005: 157). In the 1950s, the self-help genre’s God was ‘generous’ and ‘full of sweetness’ only to disappear from 1990s self-help books altogether (Woodstock, 2005: 165, 175). Referring to the US context of the 1970s, Lasch famously noted that the American cultural climate was no longer religious but deeply therapeutic, producing self-centered and self-absorbed individuals unmindful of salvation (Lasch, 1991: 7). Some research on the Nordic context shows that self-help may also form a kind of alliance with Protestant religion to meet the needs of modern individuals (Madsen, 2012; Ratinen, 2017). Madsen argues that the therapeutic turn has altered Western Christianity, in which God is increasingly ascribed a supportive role of therapist and as a remedy for promoting people’s well-being (Madsen, 2012, 2014).

Yet there has been little research on other branches of Christianity with different historical and cultural trajectories and where therapy as a cure of soul and body has also been a vital component for centuries. What kind of therapeutic do we find there? Do we observe similar taming of religion by the therapeutic ethos or perhaps more complex interplay between traditional religious cure and the modern therapeutic (see also Lerner in this book). In this chapter, I explore this important yet under-researched theme by focusing on therapeutic knowledge and practices within Finnish Orthodoxy. Has Finnish Orthodoxy transformed in the face of the therapeutic turn, and if so, how?

I approach both religion and therapeutic knowledge and practices through the lens of *glocalization* that addresses ‘the ways in which homogenizing and heterogenizing tendencies are mutually implicative’ and historically constituted (Robertson, 1995: 27). Self-help worlds are shaped through the multidirectional processes, in which global and local cultural forms merge, interact and transform (Nehring et al., 2016). Similarly, Finnish Orthodoxy can be seen as a *glocal religion* that developed as a result of concrete historical processes involving

a fusion between religious universalism and local particularism (Roudometof, 2014). On the one hand, in its structure, rituals, and theology it is linked to global Orthodox space and histories, on the other hand, it evolved as a particular glocal version of Orthodox Christianity, which combines Finnish, Karelian, Russian, and Byzantine elements (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2017). It is a national church in Finland with a strong national identity, but it also generates a transnational space that incorporates migrants from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

I suggest that therapeutic knowledge and practices within Finnish Orthodoxy are best understood through the concept of *glocalized therapeutic assemblage*. This captures the glocal process whereby a diverse set of therapeutic and self-help discursive practices –irreducible to a singular logic –is assembled and entwined (Tiaynen-Qadir and Salmenniemi, 2017). This concept combines the glocalization perspective (as discussed above) with sociological theorizing on assemblages (Collier and Ong, 2005; Zigon, 2010, 2011). However, the sociological lens does not preclude the possibility, indeed the need, of understanding the importance of embodied practices of religion and material religion: sensations, feelings, rhythms, the unspoken, something that lies beyond the realm of cognition (Morgan, 2005; Meyer and Verrips, 2008; Opas and Haapalainen, 2017). Glocal therapeutic assemblage is produced and embedded in complex and historically situated interaction of human and non-human actors, in which the body emerges as the matrix of human experiences.

This chapter is an anthropological investigation of such an assemblage within Finnish Orthodoxy. It draws on my long-term ethnographic fieldwork in one of the parishes of the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF), which serves as a dynamic site of multicultural and multilingual interaction. The main argument presented here is that people's experiences and narratives paint a picture of the therapeutic as a glocalized assemblage that merges various elements together, but in which age-old Orthodox cure of soul and body, *therapeia*, continues to serve as a grounding and constitutive frame. Some practitioners activate psychologizing narratives to articulate some benefits of Orthodox practices for mental health. However, these are minor compared with the varieties of narration techniques, and poetic, spiritual, and religious terms used by individuals to talk about their lived and embodied experiences of religion. In these narratives, the therapeutic does not necessarily figure as the telos of religious practices, but rather, as one of my interlocutors puts it, as their 'by-product'. For Orthodox, therapeutic is more than merely psychologizing well-being discourse, and is closely intertwined with *therapeia*, which has long roots in this religious tradition.

Finnish Orthodoxy and therapeutic turn

Orthodoxy in Finland dates back to the eleventh century: it was indigenized in the region of Karelia under the influence of Novgorodians, who adopted this religion from the Byzantines through Kiev at the end of the 10th century (Martikainen and Laitila, 2014: 153). Throughout history, Orthodox Christianity remained a minority religion in Finland with culturally and historically dominant Lutheranism.

The histories of Finnish Orthodoxy embraced numerous people's dislocations, resettlements, enforced and voluntary moves, as well as alleged tensions between Karelian and Russian Orthodox identities (for detailed historical accounts of these histories see Martikainen and Laitila, 2014). After Finland gained independence from Russia in 1917, OCF became an autonomous Finnish Orthodox archdiocese of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1923.

As I have illustrated elsewhere, Finnish Orthodoxy can be seen as a glocal religion that incorporates national and transnational histories and elements (Tiaynen-Qadir, 2017). On the one hand, OCF went through intense nationalization in the 20th century, and has become a national church of a religious minority, amounting to approximately 1.1 per cent of the total population in Finland. On the other hand, starting from the 1990s it has gone through a dynamic process of transnationalization, incorporating migrants from the Eastern European heartlands of Orthodoxy, especially Russian-speakers. Although Finnish is the main liturgical language, church services are also held in Church Slavonic, Ancient Greek, Romanian, Serbian, and English. In its aesthetics – church architecture and interior, icons, and music – OCF variably integrates Byzantine, Russian, and Karelian features (Hanka, 2008; Husso, 2011; Seppälä, 2013; Virolainen, 2013). The Finnish liturgy continues to follow the Russian Orthodox tradition of multi-vocal choir singing, rather than the Byzantine single-voice. Hymns and chants sung during liturgy include old Valaam, Byzantine, and Slavic chants, as well as compositions by Finnish and Russian composers. In its glocal manifestation, OCF is rather unique in contrast to other Orthodox churches in the world, which are either organized as national or diasporic churches.

In many ways, the aesthetic side of Orthodox rites and materiality also stood for its growing popularity in the 'Romantic movement' starting in the 1970s that appreciated the Byzantine art of icons. The archaic beauty of Orthodoxy was acclaimed among some Finnish intellectuals and artists. At the same time, the church became more liberal in incorporating its members, and more active in ecumenical activity and cooperation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. OCF also started to emphasize more pronouncedly therapeutic sides of Orthodoxy, offering 'silence retreats', open to anyone whether a member of the church or not. The New Valaam Monastery in Heinävesi and the Sofia Cultural Center in Helsinki organize a variety of courses, ranging from 'icon clinics' to those that combine Orthodox mysticism, psychical exercises in nature, and 'personal spiritual guidance' (Ortodoksiviesti, 2016: 45). Some Finnish theologians emphasize the 'healing' qualities of the church (*parantava kirkko*) and church service (*parantava liturgia*), metaphorically equating the church with a 'spiritual clinic' (Hakkarainen, 2016). Others underline the therapeutic effect of divine beauty as the 'language of God' (Seppälä, 2010).

Such an articulated emphasis on the therapeutic within official church rhetoric and theology in Finland can doubtless be seen as a response to the therapeutic turn. It emerges as a reaction to the growing industry of happiness and self-help in Finland (Salmenniemi, 2016). Yet the glocal nature of this reaction is also evident in the frequent references of the Finnish theologians of the Orthodox

psychotherapy – Jarmo Hakkarainen and Pentti Hakkarainen – to the Greek Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, known for his formulation of Orthodox Christianity as ‘therapeutic method’ and ‘therapeutic science’ (Hierotheos, 1993; Hierotheos, 1994; see also Stanley and Kortelainen in this book).

However, this reaction is not so much about the integration of psychology into the modern Orthodox theology, but more about reviving *therapeia* (from Greek *θεραπεία*, healing and service to God), based on patristic tradition and texts. In Eastern Christianity, there is an age-old tradition of writing spiritual guidance texts. Many of them are still in use and read by contemporary practitioners, for instance Abba Dorotheos’s ‘Direction of Spiritual Teaching’. The healing powers and attributes of Jesus, ‘physician of our souls and bodies’, Mary, and many saints also figure in liturgical texts and daily prayers, which again originate in ancient texts. In fact, the very formulation of the Orthodox psychotherapeutic method can be interpreted as a reaction to the global legitimizing of professional psychology and the spread of popular psychology, and the emphasis on *therapeia* is an attempt to strengthen the Orthodox vision of the self, different from a ‘psychology without a soul’ (Hierotheos, 1993: 46). In this sense, Orthodox *therapeia* resonates with some self-help, esoteric, and New Age strands that challenge secular psychologies (Hanegraaf, 1999; Heelas, 2009; Stanley and Kortelainen in this book).

The metaphysics of the ontological architecture of the cosmos, and the symbolic architecture of the self in Orthodoxy are complex and theosophical in their nature. Unavoidably resorting to simplification, one can say that the triadic dimension of the self, which includes mind, body, and *soul*, lies at the core of the Orthodox understanding of the self. In Orthodox theology, the soul is created in the image of God, and the *nous* is ‘the eye of the soul’, its ‘essence’ and ‘heart’ (Hierotheos, 1994: 119–120). According to Orthodox psychotherapy, the illness of the soul is in the darkening of the *nous*, which was caused by the rebellion of reason against the *nous*, signifying the Fall of Man. This darkness can ultimately be cured by the reconnection with God or the attainment of *theosis*, identified with *theoria*, the vision of God (Hierotheos, 1993: 46). *Noetic hesychia*, translated as stillness and silence from Ancient Greek, is a ceaseless and contemplative prayer, a certain state of being and perceiving the world, and a practice that enables entering into *theoria*. Following 14th century Gregory Palamas, Mary is portrayed as an epitome of *hesychia*, who is in his words: ‘finds holy *hesychia* her guide: silencing the mind, the world standing still, things below forgotten, sharing of the secrets above, laying aside conceptual images for what is better’ (Hierotheos, 1994: 317).

Ethnography of the tacit

From the very beginning of my ethnographic fieldwork, I could see that instances of both modern therapy and traditional Orthodox cure of soul and body were variably present in my interlocutors’ narratives and experiences. However, articulating the interplay of such instances through a *glocal therapeutic assemblage* has required a great deal of time, immersion, analytical efforts, critical reflection, and

a continuous dialog between theory and practice (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007). However time-consuming, ethnography is best suited to articulate taken-for-granted aspects of thought and behavior, including spontaneous verbal, emotional, and bodily reactions that standard survey methods are unable to tap into (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). The embodied presence in the field enables ethnography of the tacit, something which is not or only spontaneously articulated in speech.

I conducted my fieldwork research between 2014 and 2017. My fieldwork included participation and non-participant observation in a church setting, including informal gatherings, clubs, church services, and choir practices. The church serves as the spiritual and social environment of a vibrant multicultural community within the parish in western Finland. Overall, I recorded ethnographic interviews with 24 practitioners, most of whom were women of Finnish, Russian, Ukrainian, and Greek origins. Most were teachers, university lecturers, accountants, researchers, and doctors, and had a university degree. I also recorded interviews with two men, but I have had numerous informal discussions with male practitioners and priesthood beyond the recorded mode. In addition, I have also read and used the periodicals issued by the OCF. My ethnographic practice has been improvisatory, interactive, and reflexive in its nature, and built on non-hierarchical and non-objectifying terms between the researcher and the researched (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007; Ingold, 2013).

Following standard research ethics, I have anonymized all the names, the location of the church, and refer primarily to recorded interviews. Thus, women's experiences have received more attention in this chapter. Although I rely mostly on interviews, the findings presented here should be seen as part of my long-term immersion in the field. In my broader engagement with Orthodox practitioners, participant observation, informal engagement, and unexpected encounters often yielded deep insights and understandings of the researched phenomena that help to contextualize and situate the recorded interviews. Similarly, my long-term participation in choir practices and church services was vital for understating and relating to the experiences that my interlocutors narrated. For instance, over these years, the Orthodox service has unfolded for me as an event that holistically summons the acts of seeing, hearing, singing, smelling, etc. Such bodily responses combine with cognitive apprehension for the perpetual production of the sacred in a multilayered process of never-ending unveiling. In this sense, the chapter represents my experiences of an opening on the social reality of Orthodox faithful rather than an attempt at its closure (as discussed generically by Ingold, 2013). Such an opening has enabled me to analytically weave very different and diverse aspects of my interlocutors' life stories and practices into an initial ethnographic exploration, focusing on therapeutic knowledge and practices within Orthodox Christianity.

Therapeutic and *therapeia* in Divine Liturgy

My ethnographic research shows how much importance people place on participating in a church service, especially the Divine Liturgy. Liturgy stands for

the recreation and celebration of the Kingdom of Heaven, as well as symbolic and actual reliving of the mystery of the Last Supper. It has been described as a ‘synthesis of arts’ that encompasses the art of fire or burning candles, choir singing, priestly conduct, church poetry, incense dissolved in the air, and the art of icons and frescos (Florensky, [1918] 2002). As I have discussed elsewhere, individual artistry is pertinent to unique experiences of this church art (Tiainen-Qadir, 2017).

Receiving the Holy Communion, or Eucharist, is the culmination of the liturgy and symbolizes the cleansing and sanctification of soul and body. Thus, upon receiving the Eucharist, participants of the liturgy greet each other by saying, ‘to the cure of soul and body’ (*sielun ja ruumiin parannukseksi*), to which the standard reply is, ‘in honor of God’ (*Jumalan kunniaksi*). The texts sung and recited during liturgy, including blessings of water at certain occasions, contain numerous references to the ‘health of soul and body’. These texts are mostly of ancient origins and draw on the two most frequently used liturgies developed by John Chrysostom and St. Basil the Great in late antiquity. In other words, discourses of cure and health of body and soul are age-old in the context of Eastern liturgy.

The persistence of age-old terms for cure and soul in liturgical texts does not automatically mean that practitioners perceive these words in the same way as participants of liturgy in 8th century Byzantium. Therapeutic ethos is a global phenomenon, and is increasingly bound to our modern condition (Illouz, 2008; Furedi, 2004). People globally conceive of themselves and seek to improve their lives in popular psychology terms and metaphors. Transnational therapeutic language of selfhood is circulated and reinforced by books, wellness and health style courses, TV counseling, yoga, New Age spiritualities, and a growing number of other channels, including in Finland (Woodstock, 2005; Salmenniemi, 2010, 2016; Rimke, 2000; Heelas, 2009; Lerner, 2011). Therapeutic selfhood has also affected how some of my interlocutors perceive liturgy.

For instance, some choir members pointed out that singing during liturgy helps them to keep a ‘balance’, that it is ‘satisfying’ and ‘rewarding’. They emphasized a ‘therapeutic’ and ‘calming’ effect of singing during liturgy. Such formulations are in dialog with ‘therapeutic’ and ‘cleansing’ effects of Orthodox singing that have been discussed in several articles of the OCF periodicals (Sjöberg, 2013; Kallio, 2018). Moreover, it was also noted that the purpose of ‘sacred songs’ is not to heal or cure, but to reach for the sacred (Sjöberg, 2013).

Some interlocutors also emphasized the benefits of singing for emotional and physical well-being. Roosa has been singing in a church for over 20 years. She regularly and devotedly participates in and sings during liturgy. Roosa recollects that the first time she came to the church was by accident. She was struck by the ‘beauty of singing’, and immediately asked if she could join the choir. She mentioned that singing in a choir was good for her ‘mental health’. At some point in her life she also attended yoga courses. In fact, she did not attend choir practices for about two years some time ago, having joined a meditation group instead. But she told me that it did not work for her in the same way, and she was eager to return to her singing in the church.

Another interlocutor, Alina, articulated quite clearly that for her ‘religion is therapy’. She humorously noted that she had traveled a long path from being a ‘militant atheist’ to becoming a practicing Orthodox Christian. In her early twenties, along with hundreds of people, Alina was kept as a hostage for three days in the ‘sadly famous’ Nord-Ost siege in the Moscow Dubrovka Theater in 2002. It was a ‘life-turning experience’ that made her realize that dying without faith must be dreadfully disturbing and uncomfortable. Afterward, Alina turned for help to a psychologist, but also sought more ground to meet her spiritual needs. She turned to Orthodox Christianity as a tradition culturally proximate to her that she had a sense of due to her grandmother. Alina told me that she thoroughly enjoyed singing in the church choir. In a light and laughing manner, typical of her, she likened her choir singing to ‘manna from heaven’ and said that she especially liked the physical sensation of ‘producing a sound out of her body’, especially in ‘company’ with other people.

The very use of the term ‘therapeutic’ in its functional and psychologizing sense points to the effect of the modern therapeutic discourses on how liturgy and singing are perceived. However, these examples, discussed previously, also show that ‘therapeutic’ means quite different things for different interlocutors. While some relate it to their emotional well-being, others use this term to refer to the effect of ‘sacred’ singing. However, as discussed here, these psychologizing narratives are combined with the diverse range of other narration techniques that people utilize to talk of their experiences of the liturgy.

My other interlocutor Vera, a psychiatrist by occupation, stressed that liturgy could be a ‘powerful support for psyche’, and ‘every second’ among her patients ‘probably needs faith’ to be cured. These were her personal reflections that she shared privately in a conversation with me; naturally she was not allowed to mention church or God to her patients. Yet that was the only time when she used the language of psychology to talk of liturgy. In contrast, when she wished to share her personal experiences of liturgy, she turned to more poetic terms and even seemed to be short of words:

Solemnity. Sometimes there is such moment in life, some kind of breakdown. Not like some kind of quarrel, but some serious stress. Somebody got sick or some problems, for instance, at a work place. And there is a feeling [*oshchushchenie*] of tearfulness, a feeling that it is bad. And then it is gone. And there is a peak of bliss. And tears stream down, I don’t know... I don’t know how to explain it as it is, well, difficult to do it. Well, you know, when you say that you are extremely deeply moved. There is this very feeling [*oshchushchenie*]...well, you know, it is actually overwhelming you, and there is a lump in the throat...I don’t know, it is difficult to explain.

On one hand, there are some elements of the functional therapeutic explanation in this extract as liturgy figures as a way of overcoming a ‘breakdown’ and problems at work. On the other hand, it also illustrates how Vera resorts to description of her sensations and such uncontrolled bodily reactions as ‘tears’

or a ‘lump in the throat’ to point to the overwhelmingly moving effect of liturgy. Although the language of psychology is easily accessible to Vera due to her professional training, she does not claim liturgy to have a therapeutic effect on her, but poetically refers to ‘solemnity’ and ‘a peak of bliss’. Vera applies the Russian word *oshchushchenie* that does not have any direct translation in English. This term is also frequently applied by other Russian-speaking interlocutors. Its use is important as this term implies a ‘subjective image’ of the world and encompasses the whole range of senses and sensations, tangible and emotional experiences and perceptions.

Many other women from different backgrounds utilize similar narration strategies. They describe their sensorial experiences of liturgy and unexpected bodily reactions in order to point to the importance of ‘reaching beyond’. Many stress that they like the smell in the church or that choir singing ‘touches the very soul’ or ‘moves one to tears’. They talk of the feeling of ‘trembling’ or ‘goose bumps’ on the body. Most women recounted moments when they were touched to tears during liturgy and other church services. Some men too, although more reserved verbally in their articulation of the sensorial, pointed out that sometimes liturgy is ‘especially touching’. For instance, Victor mentioned to me that one has to be ‘open’ during liturgy, and sometimes something else ‘opens’ up within the self. These uncontrolled bodily reactions were talked of in a very different way from publicly encouraged articulations of bodily signs of the presence of God in Pentecostalism (de Witte, 2017). In Orthodoxy, those reactions were not to be demonstrated, but rather kept to oneself.

When people were sharing those experiences with me, they would sometimes start speaking quieter, almost whispering. One does this usually when sharing something intimate and personal. I found this carefulness in articulating the ‘blessed tearfulness’ – as one of my interlocutors put it – to be very much in line with the apophatic approach in Orthodoxy. According to this approach, the mystical realm of God is inexpressible in human terms and verbal expressions, and, therefore, any attempts at articulating it inevitably leads to simplifications and human-bound rationalization. Yet this reality is bodily mediated (Lossky, [1957]1976). Consequently, when people somehow reach out to this perceived reality, these experiences are not normally talked of or over-emphasized. Similarly, my interlocutors were very careful in how they talked of their experiences of the divine, and especially if and how they mentioned God. If anything, God was not perceived as a therapist, but rather as incomprehensible and indescribable in human words, as belonging to an invisible realm that surpasses human understanding and experience.

Yet, people referred to moments or glimpses of the divine presence during liturgy. Some could point to specific prayers or hymns sung during liturgy that enabled some deeper insight and experience into the beyond. It could be the ancient Trisagion prayer (‘Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us’), which ‘reaches’ individuals through the medium of different languages and varying music arrangements. Some are ‘deeply moved’ when it is performed in Finnish as a ‘Slavic melody’ or as a Byzantine chant adopted for choral singing

in Finnish. Others point out that it ‘reaches to them’ when it is sung in Ancient Greek or Church Slavonic, and as a Byzantine chant. The glocal nature of liturgy in OCF enables these various experiences for people from different backgrounds.

Similarly, the famous ‘Cherubim Hymn, a song of the angels’ was mentioned as one that ‘moves beyond the self’. The singing choir ‘mystically represents the Cherubim’, and ‘chant the thrice-holy hymn to the Life-giving Trinity’. For instance, Victoria told me that at some point when the ‘Cherubim Hymn’ was sung during one of the liturgies, the text from the Revelation (New Testament) that describes John’s vision of the throne of God, ‘became alive’. Likewise, Johanna and Anfisa, who sing in the choir, pointed out that sometimes there is a feeling that the hymn is actually sung through you, and the body becomes a medium or an instrument. Both mentioned that they feel blessed and happy to be able to sing to ‘the glory of God’. However, the feeling of joy and happiness that they refer to seems to be quite different from psychologizing narratives of happiness:

There is kind of self-evident in the church that you are never ready, no perfect. And it is great in any case to sing to the glory of God... All services are different, spring, winter, it all matters...sometimes very often you sing the same verses, and you want to make them sound perfect...sometimes when the choir is not so big, then the feeling of calmness comes, and alongside this feeling, there is a sense as if there is a group that sings, and as if you are actually not in the choir, but listen to what this group sings. This feeling is very rare, but it also comes with a sense of silent ecstasy (Johanna).

These are the tears of happiness that you can be here. This is such a great blessing to be there, breathe that air, be able to sing to the glory of God. It is not possible to describe it. One has to really merely stand there and feel it. And there is always some trembling [in the body]. And when you leave the temple, and everything went well. And then you understand that it is not because of us, it is not our merits, that everything went well. But everything went fine, and there were less mistakes, and the sound was beautiful, and you feel it, and other people feel it...and then people come and thank you. But how can you explain people: “It is not me, understand me. It is not me. I am the instrument” (Anfisa).

Johanna came to the choir around 20 years ago, and seven years later had joined the Orthodox church upon realizing that ‘her knowledge of Orthodoxy will never be perfect’. Anfisa joined the church three years ago, after she had migrated to Finland, and then joined the choir around one year ago. Interestingly, despite the difference in these women’s life trajectories and the years of engagement with Orthodoxy, there is a great deal of convergence in how they narrate of their experiences of the divine presence during liturgy.

Their narratives of happiness, blessing, calmness, and silent ecstasy fall closely in line with Orthodox *therapeia*, in which the cure of the soul is associated with stillness of the soul, vision of God, and heavenly ecstasy (Hierotheos, 1994: 315). According to Orthodox tradition, some saints were indeed able to

attain such a vision, and maintained a state of being ‘cured’ through their prayers and hesychia more or less permanently. Yet, for most people, such a state is attainable only momentarily, when one can ‘touch the untouchable and blessed essence’ (Hierotheos, 1994: 145). I find that many of my interlocutors refer to exactly this kind of therapeutic effect of liturgy, which is associated with ‘joy’, ‘solemnity’, ‘serenity’, ‘calmness’ and ‘peace’, and the glimpses of the divine presence. In their narratives, moving beyond the self to reconnect with the divine has been an unpredictable outcome, but at the same time a telos and cure of liturgy.

Stories of miraculous intervention and recoveries

While my interlocutors have been generally reserved in how they verbalized the realm of the Trinitarian God, they seemed to have been a bit more at ease to talk about instances of miraculous intervention and recoveries either in their own lives or the lives of relatives, friends, and acquaintances. It is important to emphasize that stories of miraculous healing have been part of the Christian tradition for centuries, and the fact that people turn to such stories is not a new phenomenon in itself. Yet in some cases they would share a story, but asked me not to refer to it in my publications. In my understanding, this carefulness partly derived from the Orthodox apophatic approach, and partly from the personal experiences of living in a predominantly secular context where such stories are readily ridiculed (see also Andell et al. in this book). Some emphasized that I should understand that in Orthodoxy such stories are not usually shared, and must remain in the domain of unspoken and personal experiences of the sacred.

Thus, the stories that I was allowed to write about are only the tip of the iceberg and many remain untold. However, these stories told by modern practitioners are important as they allude to an important aspect of the therapeutic. This is connected to the Orthodox traditional understanding of cure and illness, and challenges the secular perception of reality and the self. These stories have been part of naturally occurring conversation between my interlocutors and I, and are classified here under the following two groups only for analytical purposes.

The first group includes stories of the women that told me how their infertility was cured or their children were healed due to divine intervention. In many stories, divine intervention is mediated through the Mother of God, as Mary is mainly referred to in Orthodoxy. In Orthodoxy, the Virgin is often seen as a perfection of humankind (Schmemmann, 1991). Her figure also serves as a source of identification for women: she is approached as the one who understands a mother’s pain, sorrow, worries, and joy, but also has invincible powers to intercede and cure (Vuola, 2010; Tiaynen-Qadir, 2016). For instance, Marja, a mother with a Finnish background, told me that once her son got seriously ill and she had to leave him in the hospital. He was six years old at that time. She came home with a heavy heart, and prayed devotedly to the Mother of God in front of an icon that Marja’s grandfather had painted for her birthday. The same day Marja received a call from the hospital that she could come and take her son home: he had recovered. She told me that she kept that story to herself, and did not share it with her

friends or colleagues, who would most probably not believe her or would ‘ridicule’ the story. Yet, for Marja it was a miracle, and a sign of divine help and the healing powers of the Virgin.

Miira, another woman of Finnish background, told me that 12 years ago she visited the Greek island of Rhodes and came to pray in front of the famous icon of the Virgin *Panaghia Tsambika*. In Greek, the Virgin is often referred to as *Panaghia*, which can be translated as ‘above all saints’. *Tsambika* derives from the local word *tsamba* that means ‘a flicker of light’ and has to do with the manner in which the icon was found on the peak of the mountain centuries ago. According to the tradition, this icon worked many miracles and most have to do with ‘barren women who beseech the Mother of God to grant them a child’. The best-known story is about the wife of a Turkish Pasha (when Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire), who miraculously conceived a child with the icon’s intervention.

Miira told me that she had to climb hundreds of stairs to get to the chapel where the icon was kept, and she ‘prayed, and prayed, and prayed’. Half a year earlier, she had been told by a doctor in Finland that she would not be able to conceive a child due to health problems. However, soon after her return from Rhodes, she got pregnant and gave birth to her daughter at the age of 42. Miira told me that she was ‘eternally grateful’ to the Mother of God for her daughter, whom she loves dearly. Not only does Miira’s story illustrate traditional Orthodox understanding of cure and healing, but it also points to the transnational nature of Orthodoxy and the transnational fame of some icons among Orthodox worldwide. In the course of my ethnographic fieldwork, I came to know that this icon is also familiar to some of my Russian interlocutors, who even arranged their family holidays in Rhodes to undertake pilgrimages to this icon.

In these stories of healing, the role of holy objects – icons, consecrated oils, holy water, myrrh-streaming relics – is vital. Significant research attests to the unique agency of ‘things’ in Orthodox practices (Weaver, 2011; Boylston, 2017). According to anthropologist Weaver, icons are not just symbols but agents, discursively the same as divine figures or saints they depict, and as such could act with the same authority: ‘holy in themselves, they could not be contested or discredited by formal authorities either’ (Weaver, 2011: 397). In Orthodox theology, icons are seen as ‘windows on eternity’, mediating the invisible beauty of God and God’s Kingdom (Munteanu, 2013: 28). Icons point to the dignity of matter, because of its ability to participate in and to irradiate the divine beauty. Any matter, whether it is a human body or an icon, becomes sanctified when absorbing the sacred essence of the divine. Marian icons are believed to convey the essence of Mary herself. Alongside ritualistic blessings, sanctifying matter also includes remembering, reconnecting, and telling the story (Boylston, 2017). Many Marian icons are surrounded by such stories, similar to the *Tsambika* one. These tales add to the living tradition of Mary, and strengthen her transcendental authority in healing.

The second group of stories refer to accounts of illness as opening the doors to Orthodoxy. For instance, Victoria mentioned that her father, who was raised as an atheist in Soviet Russia, was diagnosed with leukemia. He started praying,

changed his lifestyle, was eventually healed, and remained committed to his religious practices afterward. Vera told me about a similar transformation of her father, who got very ill, and for whom ‘God was the only hope’. She prayed on his behalf, he got baptized and started praying himself, and in the end recovered from his illness.

A Ukrainian couple, Inna and Dimitriy went through a similar experience when Dimitriy got seriously ill. They turned to the help of a healer when conventional medicine failed them. The healer told them that they both had to turn to God, start praying and fasting, and only then Dimitriy could be cured (which eventually happened). In these three examples, illness was talked of as a symptom of the lost connection with God, which had to be somehow restored in order for the recovery to take place. Orthodoxy is presented in these stories as a cure for modernity, a set of mind and perception of reality that is based on instrumental rationality, and assigns agency, control, and power to human actors only. Interestingly, in all cases, modern medicine reportedly failed to help the suffering, but the ‘traditional’ turn to prayer healed the body as well.

However, there were also many stories in which there was no contradiction between conventional medical knowledge and divine intervention. One of my interlocutors mentioned that in fact her Russian doctor, a renowned surgeon who conducted her heart surgery, gave her also some spiritual guidance to prepare her for the operation. Some of my interlocutors were doctors themselves, and in their understanding divine powers could intervene in various ways, including through conventional medical practices. Many referred to and prayed to the saints Panteleimonos, Cosmas, and Damian, who were physicians themselves according to tradition. From one Greek interlocutor, I found out about a saint, Luke of Simferopol and Crimea, who was a 20th century Soviet doctor of medicine and a professor. He used to start his surgeries with a sign of the cross, irrespective of whether the patient was Christian. This again gave me a sense of how global living of Orthodoxy in Finland is transnationally informed both in people’s understanding of religion and of the therapeutic.

Toward a conclusion

I set out in this chapter to explore healing practices and knowledge within Finnish Orthodoxy, and how Finnish Orthodoxy responded to the therapeutic turn. I illustrated that OCF has responded to the therapeutic turn by emphasizing the therapeutic effect of Orthodox practices, and representing its spiritual message as suited for everybody. However, therapeutic has existed in Orthodoxy for centuries as the old-age cure of soul and body, and continues to shape Orthodox practices of cure and healing today. The therapeutic turn seemed to trigger more awareness of such therapeutic within Orthodoxy, revived as *therapeia*, based on patristic tradition.

Some of my interlocutors regularly visit the New Valaam Monastery, and have attended icon-painting or singing courses. These courses are aimed at perfecting technical artistry, and are essentially based on patristic tradition as well. Likewise, ‘silent retreats’ revive the age-old monastic tradition of ‘hesychia’. Orthodox

members after such retreats still talk of the therapeutic in the same patristic and religious terms. Yet further research is needed to distinguish responses between Orthodox and non-Orthodox participants of such courses and retreats.

My ethnographic fieldwork among Orthodox practitioners illustrates that the traditional cure of soul and body constitutes the core of the therapeutic understanding for many of my interlocutors. They utilize a variety of narration techniques – description of sensorial and bodily reactions, poetic, spiritual, and religious terms to talk of their embodied experiences of liturgy that generates stillness and glimpses of the divine. Their stories of divine intervention, which is channeled through materiality of sound, archaic-origin texts, art of icons, and holy objects, point to the importance of the beyond in the spiritual and bodily healing. Again, the glocal and the transnational nature of these experiences is evident due to the transnational Orthodox exposures and connections of my interlocutors, but also due to the glocal nature of OCF. Some interlocutors also articulate the benefits of Orthodox practices for mental health, such as singing in a choir, and frame their narratives in psychologizing terms.

To conclude, my interlocutors' experiences paint a diverse picture of the therapeutic. This picture can be seen as a glocalized therapeutic assemblage that merges these various elements with age-old Orthodox traditions of health of soul and body. These findings call for reconsideration of the totalizing effects and normalizing power of a singular therapeutic culture, and open a space for discussing various cultural therapeutics, including those that challenge *secular* psychological narratives of the self. In contrast to the psychologizing therapeutic ethos that puts self-realization and self-transformation at the center of one's life, the telos of Orthodox practices is in reaching out to the divine, within and beyond the self.

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