

The 'sedation' of the human brain in its struggle to find the objectivity of truth (Dr. Nikolaos Koios)

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For Elder Sophrony, the quest for truth through the exclusive use of human reason is doomed to eternal confusion. This is so because people turn to the search for the truth as if it were some sort of theoretical model or abstract idea. Because they assume that, if they come to know the desired truth they will somehow acquire a magic power and will make themselves the free authority over their being. So, enchanted by the role of reason, humanity is living in a state of 'sedation'. And the greatest problem is that this misleading approach is apparent not only in the natural sciences and philosophy, but in the religious life as well, with the inevitable result that people fall into a pantheistic world view.



The initial positions of Elder Sophrony regarding his critique of the restrictive nature of 'objective knowledge' and the abstract manner of philosophizing, seem to be close to those of William James (See 'The Pragmatism of William James and the Search for Truth, according to Elder Sophrony' published in Pemptousia in September). But there are radical differences in the way his argument works, both as regards his cognitive methodology and in the content of experience. The impersonal quest for truth on the religious plane leads James to a syncretist notion of empirical religiosity, which, for the Elder represents a pantheistic world view. This is so because, despite his acceptance of the value of empirical 'spiritual' knowledge, James 'interprets' religious experience through human categories of thought. Of course, he himself attempts to defend personal experience, claiming that it is of great value as incontestable knowledge of its object.

For the Elder, however, experience of the Divine cannot be restricted to personal religiosity. It involves the whole of the notion of people as neighbours. This is why people who are witnesses to this experience decide to reveal it, in the conviction that this might help even a single soul. This demonstrates that other people, too, to a greater or lesser extent, have had and continue to have similar experiences. This concept is not arbitrary or unconditional. Initially it arises from the unshakeable faith in the One and Only God which is active among people. In any case, the authenticity of the common experience is tested within the Church, which, as the

bearer of the Holy Spirit, is alone competent to oversee experiences. As will become apparent later, it is the Church which gives people the cognitive method of approach to God on the existential rather than the intellectual plane and which protects people from dangerous frivolity and misleading theorizing.

Any attempt to gain knowledge of the truth by applying the reason which is species specific to the human race is in vain. This effort should instead be linked to incontestable personal experience, which cannot be drawn from logical proofs.

The excerpts are from Nikolaos Koios' book Θεολογία και Εμπειρία κατά τον Γέροντα Σωφρόνιο, H.G.M. of Vatopaidi, the Holy Mountain, 2007