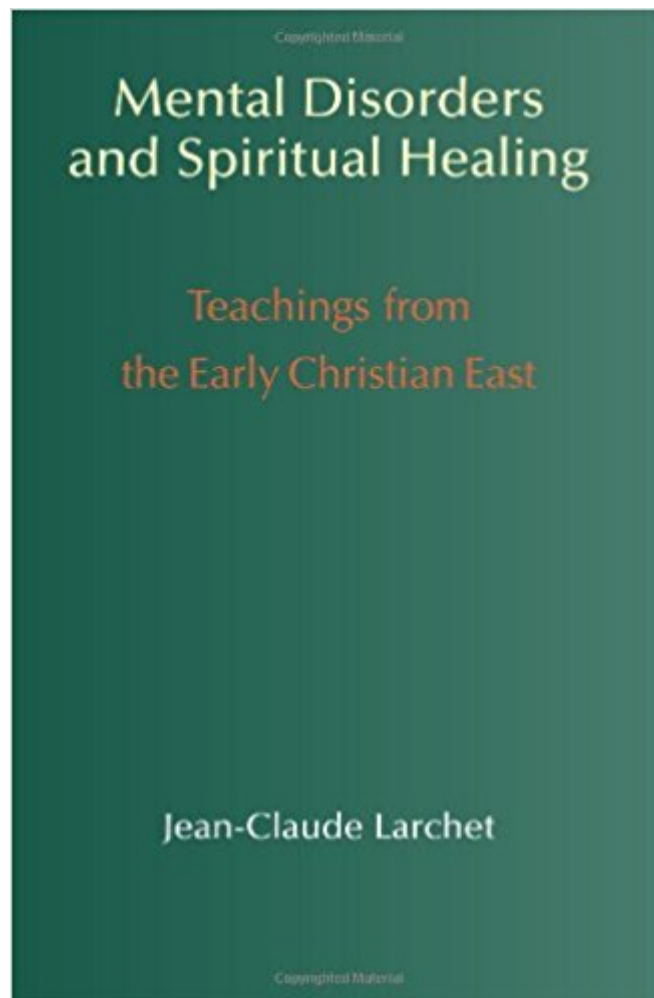




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# **Mental Disorders & Spiritual Healing: Teachings From The Early Christian East**



## Synopsis

This work, the third panel of a triptych dedicated by the author to the notion of illness derived from the patristic and hagiographic texts of the Christian East from the first to the fourteenth centuries, makes an essential contribution to the history of mental illnesses and their therapies in a domain very little studied until now. Confronted by the numerous problems still posed today in understanding these illnesses, their treatment, and their relationship to those who are sick, he shows the importance offered for reflection and current practice by early Christian thought and experience. After indicating how the Fathers understood the psyche and its relationship with body and spirit, the author gives a detailed analysis of the different causes they attribute to mental illness and the various treatments recommended. At the same time he shows how, relying on fundamental Christian values, they manifest a constant solicitude and respect for the sick, and how they are at pains to integrate them into community life and have them participate in their own healing, foreshadowing in this way the needs and aspirations of our own time. The last part discloses the deep significance of one of the strangest and most fascinating forms of asceticism the Christian East has known: 'folly for the sake of Christ', a madness feigned with the goal of attaining a high degree of humility, but also a way well-suited, through a close experience of their condition, to help those who are often among, today as in the past, the most destitute. Jean-Claude Larchet is docteur d'État s lettres et sciences humaines, docteur en théologie, and docteur d'État en philosophie. The author of *Thérapeutique des maladies spirituelles* (Paris: Editions de l'Ancre, 1991) and *The Theology of Illness* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), he is a specialist in questions of health, sickness, and healing. He is today one of the foremost St Maximus the Confessor specialists.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This 2005 translation of 'Therapeutique des maladies mentales' (1992, Les Editions du Cerf) offers access to the well-heeled research of the author. Jean-Claude Larchet has built a steady foundation of criticism concerning so-called scientific approaches to treat mental and spiritual diseases. His thesis advances the view that ancient Fathers of the Church offer insights to treating mental and spiritual maladies, which contemporary theories of psychiatry either ignore or rebuff. Moreover, while acknowledging the gaps in source material from the Fathers, he identifies the explanatory gaps in psychiatric theories and treatment modalities all the same. Theological anthropology, derived from the Fathers, constitutes the general theme of the first chapter. The author devotes a chapter to each grouped domain of causes for mental illness according to the Fathers: a) insanity due to somatic origins, b) insanity due to demonic origin, and c) insanity of spiritual origin. Of particular note are 24 pages devoted to acedia -- its nosology, and treatment of sadness and acedia. The capstone of the text is a study of the fool for Christ. The goal of life in Christ is not only to be free of mental illness, but also to achieve harmony among body, mind, and spirit. Such harmony is represented by the fool for Christ, who is motivated by humility, detachment from the world, and charity. I offer an enthusiastic recommendation to consider this text as essential reading for spiritual formation in Christ, comprehensive treatment of sadness and acedia, and reappraisal of conventional medical modalities for treatment of mental illnesses. The text appeals to scholars and many others who share interests in etiology and management of mental illnesses. There are sufficient references in the bibliography to enhance additional exploration in themes addressed by the text.

Jean-Claude Larchet writes the basic facts about ancient Eastern Christian views on mental illness in 171 pages. His style of writing or better yet his translation of by Rama Coomaraswamy & G. John Champoux makes a fast easy read for the general public while expressing the basics for the professional scholar. The chapter headings are as follows: 1. Anthropological Background: The Human Composite 2. Insanity Due To Somatic Problems 3. Insanity Of Demonic Origin 4. Insanity Of Spiritual Origin 5. A Most Singular Kind Of Folly - The Fool For Christ Each chapter goes through the fast basics with defining the meanings, forms & causes, & treatment to each type of cause. The Fool

for Christ might turn a couple of modern heads but is a historical practice of some Saints to confound the wise of the world. A good read & highly recommend

This is an excellent tool to locate within the writings of ancient Church writers their notations regarding psychological conditions. However it should be understood their works were written with a slant towards conditions found in the pious person or one trying to attain piety in the first millennium. A very different human being than one found in the Western world today. Apparently the 19th and 20th century psychologists didn't find anything new, they just had to put new names on considerations and disturbances that a more comfortable society submits to. The ancients had a natural bent for understanding of the primacy of the invisible over the visible. Our society does not. It is therefore tremendous difficult to draw out comparisons between the sweet conditions observed in modern times against those of the ancients who were dealing with the "noonday devils". If the reader is to appreciate this book it helps to be trained in modern psychology, and to be pious as well. Not a big readership I daresay.

It's a little murky, but well worth the read. I'm working on it. I was really wanting to read Life After Death According to the Orthodox Tradition by the same author, but have some family with mental illness, and thus thought I could be enlightened by this book. It is indeed helpful, especially if you read it after being trained in mental health and counseling concepts according to being "in the world."

Thank God for this book. For a long time I have been looking for a book to give me insight into how the church has perceived mental illness. This was a great summary of how the church fathers in the Eastern Christianity saw mental illness and how they dealt with it. Very helpful!

Thanks

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