

## **Destructive Criticism**

*By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

Tatiana Goricheva is a Russian philosopher who, along with some of her companions, came to the Orthodox faith after a long search and going astray. She came to the Orthodox faith with uncompromising strength and vigor. In one of her writings, she says that the Christian in (communist) Russia lives a personal, silent witness, as a kind of protest against the errors in society and the restrictions imposed on the Church. In other words, the Christian's direct reaction to the mistakes of others is to avoid them in his own behavior and life, and not by pointing them out to others.

Her readers are struck by the spiritual depth of her writings that makes them wonder why this depth is not found in all those who know Christ. Seeing a mistake in an area is a positive thing, as it motivates you to correct it, but to focus on a mistake in others while ignoring it in yourself is a dangerous thing that must be addressed. The Holy Scripture says, "Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not care about the speck in your own eye?" (Matthew 7:3).

There is constant chatter in church circles. Confusion about everything. Questioning every action and initiative. Endless criticism. Endless demands. The result is spiritual and moral decline, both individually and collectively. As the Proverb says, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking" (10:19). There is a big difference between destructive and constructive criticism.

Constructive criticism of something means that you are well aware of its dimensions, have a firm grasp of the situation, and see, with a keen eye, the areas of success and failure, strengths and weaknesses, aiming to correct the negative by improving the positive. Criticism in this sense is a scientific work, carried out by experts who seek a positive goal.

On the other hand, destructive criticism is the product of gossip and superficial talk that seeks to attack. It does not distinguish between the deed and the doer. In fact, the criticism is not so much about the work as it is about the person doing the work.

Destructive criticism leads to discouragement, frustration, despair, and demoralization of the person.

Constructive criticism focuses on a project, work, idea, or theory in order to correct, reform and enrich. Destructive criticism focuses all its energy and hatred on the person or persons involved.

The constructive critic is equipped with the necessary means to be helpful. He knows when, how, and where his criticism will bear good fruit. He chooses words wisely and finds the appropriate times to present better ideas. He knows all aspects of the matter, so his criticism leads to constructiveness. The destructive critic, on the other hand, is an ignorant person who seeks to attack, insult, destroy, spread pessimism, and prevent joy in the moment, highlighting the wrongdoings of others due to his own narrow-mindedness, selfishness, and negativity.

The constructive critic is driven by understanding, while the destructive critic is driven by anger. The constructive critic seeks to improve and foster initiatives out of goodwill and love, while the destructive critic kills every endeavor, spreading frustration because of his spiritual darkness.

You can be positive and constructive, contributing to and supporting all good work, perpetuating and expanding it; or you can be the complete opposite. If you consider yourself a true Christian, you are forced to be in the first category. Your faith, if it is alive, always pushes you in your striving for spiritual growth, virtues, self-knowledge, and purification. A true Christian demands improvement of himself first. He seeks to live his convictions, not to impose them on others through force. He understands the words of the gospel are directed at him, not reading them as a condemnation of others. This is why he does not dwell on pitfalls. By experiencing his own weakness, he sympathizes with the weakness of others and has mercy on them. He is a person who longs to actualize the Kingdom of God wherever he is, and realizes that the Kingdom of God is not just any place, but within him, first and foremost. He works on himself, and shares with others whatever he finds useful, and sees in himself the ability to contribute to it.

If someone else does a good deed, you rejoice in it, even if imperfect. If you are a faithful Christian, you extend a helping hand to him, forgive his shortcomings, without attacking or injuring him. If you are negligent and abstain from the work of love, without contributing even a grain of wheat to a destitute and hungry person, then you should be completely silent, and ashamed of yourself, if you raise your voice in destructive criticism or protest. Take care of your brethren before you ask them to take care of you. You have no right to demand help from anyone, but you have a duty to yourself to provide it. If you are a true Christian, you rejoice for your brother when you see him succeed.

How widespread and painful is the spiritual and moral decay in the heart of the people! There are those who toil and sacrifice their time, health, and money for the Church, despite the imperfections in their work and service. When you do not serve but rather limit yourself to attacking those who do as best as they can, then you are acting contrary to what your faith teaches you, and you are hurting yourself and others.

If you knew how much work so many people do voluntarily in your Church, then you would be ashamed of how little you may be doing in comparison and adopt a more positive and constructive attitude. God has given you great potential. If you have spiritual eyes, look within yourself and see it, silence your destructive criticism, become like the faithful over the little, and become worthy of our Lord's words: "I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:21).