

DOROTHEUS OF GAZA AND BENEDICT OF NURSIA* NIKOLAUS EGENDER

At the founding of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches and its first General Assembly in Amsterdam in 1948, the first General Secretary, Pastor W. Wissert Hooft, expressed the following basic principle: “The more we draw near to Christ as communities and believers, the more we draw near to one another.” During the last fifty years this principle of the ecumenical method has spoken to religious communities in their significant role of striving for the unity of Christians and for their spiritual renewal.

In the sixth century a contemporary of Saint Benedict, Dorotheus of Gaza, held the same principle that he expressed by the comparison of a circle “that represented God as the center and the various ways of human life as the spokes. If the saints who desire to draw near to God move toward the center . . . they draw nearer to one another—one to the other—as they draw nearer to God. The more they approach God, the more they approach one another.”¹

“The more one is united with the neighbor the more one is united with God.”² These words are spoken in the context of brotherly love. But do they not affirm our experience today of the impact of the spiritual renewal on the way to the reunion of separated Christians? In an international Congress on the ecumenical Dimension of the Rule of Benedict (RB) a consideration of the Christian orient is essential. Accordingly, it seemed to me not without significance, to get to know better this contemporary of Saint Benedict, Dorotheus of Gaza. He influenced the monasticism of Mt. Sinai, John Climacus, and especially Theodore of Studium. In the eleventh-century, Paul Evergetinos took certain of his teachings, as did Nilus Sorski in fifteenth-century Russia, while in the West, the Jesuits came under his influence.³

1.

Dorotheus of Gaza lived in the time of Justinian, after a period of the unrest that followed upon the Council of Chalcedon and the Monophysites. It was a period when a monastic life could unfold in peace and *hesychia*. In the West, on the other hand, Rome fell into the hands of Totila, whom Benedict encountered. Dorotheus, at the threshold of the Arabic invasion, was the last representative known to us of a distinguished monasticism, while Benedict became the father of Western monasticism. Yet between both of them there existed a “spiritual affinity,”⁴ and “an unmistakably related atmosphere.”⁵

I would like to draw attention to this affinity and this relationship. We recall that Gaza like Athens and Alexandria, for a long time remained a bulwark of pagan culture. Justinian had closed the School of Rhetoric and Philosophy of Athens in the same year that Monte Cassino was founded. Gaza enjoyed the title *Philomusos*, ‘Friend of the Muses.’⁶ Gaza was famous still under Justinian because of the Christian Sophist School. From it came the Bishop Aeneas, the rhetor Chorikios, and especially Procopius (475–528). He was

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¹ Dorothee de Gaza, *Oeuvres spirituelles*. Introd., texte grec, trad. et notes, D. L. Regnault et D. J. de Preville, S Chr 92 (Paris: Cerf [1963]) 6:78. Henceforth: Instruction or Letter.

² Instruction 6:77.

³ Dorothee S Chr 92: 90–97.

⁴ Emmanuel Lanne, “Le forme della preghiera personale in San Benedetto e nella tradizione” *Atti del 70 Congresso internazionale di Studi sull’alto medioevo*, Spoleto, 1982, 449–76. Henceforth Lanne.

⁵ Michel van Parys, “Der heilige Benedikt und die W<stenveter”, *Erbe und Auftrag* 2 (1986): 332–45 (“S. Benoit et les Peres du desert,” *La Vie Spirituelle* 70 (1988): 314–33. See “L’acces B l’Orient monastique chez St. Benoit” *Irenikon* 47 (1974): 48–52. Henceforth L’acces.

⁶ F. M. Abel, O.P., “Gaza au VII^{me} siecle d’apes le Rheteur Chorikios,” *Revue Biblique* 40 (1931): 5–31.

a philosopher, theologian, exegete, and famous speaker whom such cities as Antioch, Beyruth, Tyre, and Caesarea sought to entice to come to them. Also a Sozomenos, who was the continuator of the Church History of Eusebius, was from Gaza. During the time of Justinian there were large Church complexes at Gaza, such as the Sergius basilica and the basilica of Stephen both of which were dedicated about the year 530.

Along with this cultural, philosophical, and theological tradition the region of Gaza produced a flourishing monasticism that we can trace from its inception until the Arabic conquest. The *Life of Hilarion* (291–371)⁷ written by Jerome around the year 390, presents Saint Hilarion as the father of Palestinian monasticism, and depicts him as a new Antony. In the fourth- and fifth-centuries the wadi Ghazze, Maiuma, and the Mediterranean coast were meeting places for those coming from north and south, often in preference to Jerusalem, who were seeking God. From Egypt and Sinai came Silvanus⁸ and his disciples, among them Zeno, the spiritual father of Peter the Iberian; from Scete came Isaias (+491) whose *Asketikon*⁹ is well-known; later in the cloister of Abbot Seridos the two recluses Barsanuph and John.¹⁰

From Antioch and Beyruth young intellectuals streamed here to become monks. The most famous of them, Severus, later patriarch of Antioch (512–518) was the most important of the Monophysite theologians. From Constantinople the two Georgian princes, Nabanugios and Mithriadates, who converted in Jerusalem with the names Peter (the Iberian) and John.

This monasticism of Gaza slipped away in the direction of Monophysitism because of mistrust of the Council of Chalcedon until the year 509 when through the efforts of the monk Nephaios¹¹ a pro-Chalcedon reaction entered in. The last of the known monks of Gaza, Barsanuphios, John, and Dorotheos stood in the line of the Council of 451. From this milieu there is conserved a writing whose meaning is enlightening. It was even assumed that the author of the Dionysian Corpus came from the Gaza area and the names of Peter the Iberian and Severus were proposed.¹² Still further, Dom Lucien Regnault,¹³ the prominently learned expert in Egyptian monasticism, pleads for the Palastinian, indeed the Gaza, origin of the great collection of the *Sayings of the Fathers*. In this milieu during the sixth-century the Sayings are cited very frequently. Dorotheos has forty references to the alphabetical series and fifteen to the anonymous collection.¹⁴

It is known that the RB (18:25 and 43:6) is the first document that cites the Latin translation of the *Sayings*—still in process—by the Roman deacon Pelagius and the sub deacon John, both of whom became Roman Popes shortly before Gregory the Great.¹⁵ This translation was made probably between 52 and 556. Pelagius had accompanied Pope Agapetus in 536 at the Council in Constantinople against Severus of Antioch and Origenism. Bishop Sabinus of Canossa, friend of Saint Benedict, took part in the Council and, just returned

⁷ PL 23:29–54

⁸ Michel van Parys, “Abba Silvain et ses disciples. Une famille monastique entre Scete et la Palestine B la fin du IVeme et dans la premiere moitie du Veme siecles”, *Irenikon* 61 (1988): 315–31, 41–80.

⁹ Abbe Isaie, Recueil ascetique. Itrod. Dom Lucien Regnault, trans. Dom Henri de Broc, *Spiritualite Orientale* 7 bis, Bellefontaine (1985).

¹⁰ *Barsanuphe et Jean, Correspondance*, Trans. Dom Lucien Regnault, Ph. Lemaire et B. Outtier, Solesmes, 1972. Henceforth Correspondance.

¹¹ L. Peronne, *La chiesa di Palestina e le Controversie cristologiche. Dal consiglio di Efeso (31) al secondo concilio di Constantinopoli (553)*, Brescia, (1980) 148–51; 234–40.

¹² J. Stiglmayr, *Scholastik* (1928): 1–27; 161–9; (1932)52–67; E. Honigmann, “Pierre l’Iberien et les ecrits du Pseudo-Denys l’Aeriopagite”, Bruxelles, 1952.

¹³ “Les Apophthegmes des Peres en Palastine au Veme–VIeme siecles,” *Irenikon* 54 (1981): 320. Henceforth Apophthegmes; See Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (1966).

¹⁴ Regnault Apophthegmes 324–25.

¹⁵ Pelagius I, from 556–61; John III, from 561–74. “L’authenticite de la Regula S. Benedicti,” *Stud Ans* 42 (957): 136. Henceforth L’authenticite.

from Constantinople, visited Monte Casino. A. Mundo believes “one can suppose that Sabinus, after his return from the Emperor’s court after 536, knowing his friend Benedict’s interest in monastic literature, [was loaned] the unfinished section of his translation from Pelagius.”¹⁶ Dom Michel van Parys rather inclines to the plausible view that Benedict was in direct contact with Pelagius.¹⁷ Pelagius was the *apocrisarius* in Constantinople. He came to Antioch, Jerusalem, and Gaza with the intent of gaining the support of Bishops, clerics, and monks for the anti-origenist and pro Chalcedon Synod of 536.

In 539 or 540 a synod was held in Gaza that the Patriarch Paul is said to have set up. Pelagius took part in it and one may suppose that he made contact with the monastic circles of the region. Had he met Barsanuphius and John in the monastery of Seridos where Dorotheus was? Did he bring, in fact, the *Sayings* from there to Italy?¹⁸ That is not unlikely and in his way could have given the fruit of his labor to Saint Benedict whose spiritual milieu was looking for written monastic sources.¹⁹

2.

The view has been expressed that the RB “intends to unfold a spirituality of the heart.”²⁰ In Dorotheus one often meets with the Scriptural saying “lean of me for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your soul (Mt 11:29).”²¹

“To create peace in the heart”²² is the aim of the monastic concern. The Letter sent to the brother who was asking for the recovered conference of Dorotheus, characterized him as “the follower of the one who is meek humble of heart, . . . who has shown him that the wholesome yoke of Christ is truly light”²³ We have the good fortune, thanks to the eighty-six Letters of the great Patriarch Barsanuphius and John the prophet,²⁴ who replied to the questions of Dorotheus, to get to know his spiritual fathers who assisted he novice on the way to renunciation. Both of them helped him to deny his self-will.²⁵ They showed him the way of obedience and humility. John taught him the sincerity and sensitivity of the heart.²⁶

These exchanges between Master and disciple, between father and spiritual son, allow us to sense what the practice of opening of the heart was that Benedict mentions in his ladder of humility (RN 7:5). We learn too what patience these two holy patriarchs showed to the disciple Dorotheus who plied them with so many questions.²⁷

The workplace where Dorotheus practiced the monastic virtues was the infirmary, that he was put in charge of very early. He was frequently tempted to flee into solitude but John held him back. “The pretext of solitude leads to pride, as long as the person has not mastered himself. . . . The genuine desert is to carry the cross. So if you help carry the suffering of your neighbor, you will obtain assistance.”²⁸

¹⁶ L’authenticite 136.

¹⁷ .54L’aces 54.

¹⁸ Lanne 453–55.

¹⁹ L’aces 54–58.

²⁰ G. Holzher, *Die Benediktusregel*, Einsiedeln (1982) 36.

²¹ Instruction 1.7.8; Letter 2:186.

²² Letter 2:186.

²³ Letter 1:23

²⁴ Correspondance 1.c, and Letters 252–338.

²⁵ Letter 288.

²⁶ Letters 288 and 323.

²⁷ Letter 330.

²⁸ Letter 314.

Accordingly, the service of the brothers the privileged place of his monastic formation, the test also for his life of prayer. Barsanuphius instructs him in constant prayer, especially in the Jesus prayer: “Jesus, come help me”²⁹ that is so much loved in the Gaza tradition.³⁰ *The Life of Dositheus* also displays this devotion. This sick young monk was entrusted to Dorotheus. “We, the weak, can only flee to the name of Jesus,” said the patriarch John.³¹ Dorotheus accompanied him as his servant. He showed the novice that his work in the infirmary and elsewhere could be united with constant prayer: “Brother, you remain with the memory of God the whole day and do you not know this? To keep and fulfill an order is to submit to the thought of God.”³² Is this not a good definition that characterizes the sons and daughters of Saint Benedict: “*Ora et labora*” (‘pray and work’).

The obligation of the spiritual father to the novice is so strong that the great patriarch Barsanuphius enters into a kind of treaty with Dorotheus, according to which he assures him of his constant intercession.³³ Such a monastic education must soon bear fruit.

3.

John the Prophet and Abbot Seridos were probably victims of the destructive plague that spread from Egypt in 541. Barsanuphius withdrew into a definitive silence. And so Dorotheus founded his own monastery that, according to John Moschus, lay between Gaza and Maiuma.³⁴ He was now capable of leading brothers and of being abbot. The Instructions and Letters that Dorotheus has left to us are occasional writings that recount many anecdotes and personal experiences. Nevertheless, they permit us to gain an overview of his spiritual teaching. I should like to set forth their most significant aspects and consider them in light of the RB.

“The spirituality of Dorotheus stand in the large perspectives of sacred history as it was recorded by Origen, Athanasius, and the Cappadocian Fathers Through the analysis of the liberating and saving act of Christ Dorotheus points out the basis of Christian and monastic asceticism.”³⁵ With him as with Benedict we encounter a synthesis of the various monastic traditions, the Egyptian, the Apophthegmata, and the coenobitism of Saint Basil whose *Asceticon*, Dorotheus assures us, he read.³⁶ He sees monastic renunciation in the grand perspective of redemption, reaching back as far as original sin that entered with the disobedience of Adam. The place of man in Paradise is a “natural state” (‘kata physin’), immortal, free, and adorned with all virtues.³⁷ The pace of man under sin is “against nature” (‘para physin’) Dorotheus finds himself here in the line of the anthropology of the Fathers which also appears in the Letters of Saint Antony and in his life written by Saint Athanasius.³⁸

Finally there is here an optimistic vision of man in that the “image of God” is not disfigured, only the “likeness”. For Dorotheus the image is the immortality and the freedom; the likeness is the virtues.³⁹ By disobedience and pride man lost the likeness to God. But the “good God” (‘ho agathos Theos’) had pity on

²⁹ Letters 266–271.

³⁰ F. Neyt, *La priere de Jesus*, Coll Cist 34 (1972): 211.

³¹ Letter 304.

³² Letter 328.

³³ Letters 305 and 306.

³⁴ *Spiritual Meadow* 166; PG 87:3033.

³⁵ Dom Lucien Regnault, “Theologie de la vie monastique selon Barsanuphe et Dorothee,” *Theologie de la vie monastique*, (Theologie 49) Paris, 1961, 316–17. Henceforth *Theologie*.

³⁶ Letters 318 and 319 to John the Prophet.

³⁷ Instruction 1.1.10.11.

³⁸ Letter 1 and *passim*. See the Letters of Saint Antony (*Spiritualite orientale* 19) 39ff. Saint Athanasius, *Vie de saint Antoine* 14.20 (*Spiritualite orientale* 28).

³⁹ Instruction 12, 134, according to the classic distinction between “eikon” and “homoiosis” in Gen 1.29..

his creature and gave him the law, the prescriptions, and the commandments that “made it possible not only to become cleansed from sin but also from the passions.”⁴⁰ Thus by observing “the holy commandments” that Christ taught to obey and which are the way of obedience and of humility, man finds his integrity, rest, and “complete apatheia.” Dorotheus dares to employ this word again; he cites often the name of Evagrius that for a good while might not be pronounced again. In the following of Christ we are “soldiers of Christ and must bear all the suffering that he has born for us.” Dorotheus here stands near to the Prologue of the RB.⁴¹

If we would be free we must learn to deny our own will, he says, . . . for nothing is so useful to man. One goes beyond every virtue, as it were. Like a traveler who finds a shortcut so is the one who goes along the way of denying one’s own will, for in this manner one arrives at detachment from everything and with the help of God to perfect apatheia.⁴²

Dorotheus gives ten examples of such self-denial. One of them: “A brother takes a stroll and sees something. The thought occurs to him: “take a look at that.” —“No; I won’t do that.” He denies his own will and does not look at it. He meets a brother who talks away. A thought advises him: ”You too say something.” He declines and says nothing. Another thought comes to him: “Go to the cook and ask him what he is preparing.” He does not go, but denies his own will.⁴³ We see that he speaks of petty matters. “Whatever happens to this bother he is always content, as if all comes from him.”

Dorotheus underlines the paradoxical character of renunciation: “Inasmuch as he no longer does his own will it comes to pass that he always does it . . . Whoever no longer has his own will always does what he wants.”⁴⁴ He who occupies himself with this, attains to inner freedom, to “amerimnia”, spiritual detachment, and to “anapausis”, ‘peace of heart’. This is the common teaching of the monastic fathers; the contribution of Dorotheus is that he gives prominence to the liberating character of renunciation and brings out its Easterly character.

On one occasion Dorotheus, in an hour of “intense and unbearable sadness” of discouragement and of oppression, had a vision of bishop who encouraged him with the words of a psalm: “I have not ceased to hope in the Lord. Then he leaned toward me and listened to my prayer. He took me out of the deadly pit, out of the mire and mud. He place my feet on the rock and made my footsteps firm” (Ps 39:2–4). Dorotheus describes what transpired within him: “Immediately my heart was filled with light, joy, consolation, and sweetness; I was no longer the same man. . . . From this hour on I no longer remember having been troubled by sadness and anxiety.”⁴⁵

Strengthened by this spiritual experience, Dorotheus had only one desire: to help his brothers on the way that he himself had traveled, the way of obedience and of humility. He knew the “adiakritos hypakoe.”⁴⁶ This ‘obedience that is not questioned’ was well known since the Pachomian tradition and corresponds to the “obedience without delay” of the RB. Repeatedly he recounts the its fruits: interior rest, freedom from worries, peace of heart, Hence the need for spiritual direction: “Nothing is worse than to wish to guide yourself.”⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Instruction 1.5.6.

⁴¹ Instruction 1.15. The context is the symbolism of the monastic habit, inspired by the Praktikos of Evagrius. See *Evagrius Ponticus: Praktikos and 153 Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John E. Bamberger, ocsso, CS 4 (Kalamazoo: Cistercian) 14.

⁴² Instruction 1.20.

⁴³ Instruction 1.20.

⁴⁴ Instruction 1.20; Letter 2, 187; 202, 12.

⁴⁵ Instruction 5.67.

⁴⁶ Instruction 1.25; 5.66–68.

⁴⁷ Instruction 5.66.

Dorotheus devotes his second Instruction to humility. In this context he does not use the image of the ladder like the RB, but rather he understands humility as the ascent from fear to love according to the word of John: “Perfect love drives out fear” (1Jn 4:18). He distinguishes between the “beginning fear”, fear of punishment, and “perfect fear”, that is pleasing to God: “He fears and he keeps the will of God, not because of blows or to avoid punishment, but rather because he has tasted how sweet it is to be with God, and fears to lose this sweetness. This perfect fear grows out of love and expels the beginning fear.”⁴⁸

He further describes this ascent: “He flees further from evil out of fear like a slave; he then performs what is good for the sake of reward like a hired-man. He remains by the help of God constant in virtue and attaches himself to it so that he tastes the true good. From doing so he has a certain experience and then he can no longer separate himself from it. As the apostle says “Who can separate him from the love of Christ (RB 8.35)?” He attains to the perfection of sonship, he loves the good for the sake of good itself and fears because he loves.”⁴⁹ In this context Dorotheus comments on Ps 33 as does the Prologue of RB: “Seek peace and pursue it eagerly.”⁵⁰

We have a real difficulty in understanding the sixth and seventh steps of the ladder of humility of the RB: to be content with the most common and worst things, to consider oneself in your heart as the lowest and least. A well-known Apophthegma says: “The more the saints approach God the more they see themselves as sinners.”⁵¹ Dorotheus cites it⁵² and explains it by examples.

A patrician of Gaza heard this saying of the fathers from us and was surprised by it: “How is this possible? —Honored sir, I replied to him, tell me what are you in your city. —An honored personage, the most important of the city. — Then if you go to Caesarea, how are you considered there? —Less than the important people of that city. — And in Antioch? —There I am viewed as a villager. —And in Constantinople, at the emperor’s court? —As a pitiable man— So is it, I replied, with the saints: the closer they come to God the more they see themselves as sinners.”⁵³

The saints take pains to explain their own attitude. Zozimus, a friend of Dorotheus and superior of a monastery at Caesarea provides an instance: “One day Abba Zozimus spoke on humility. A sophist was present, listened and wish to grasp the more precise meaning. “Tell me,” he asked, How can you consider yourself as a sinner? Do you not know that you are holy and are virtuous? Surely you see that you obey the commandments! How can you believe you are a sinner under these circumstances?” The old father found no answer; he only said: “I do not know what to say, but that is simply the way the matter stands.” The sophist at all costs wanted an explanation from him. But the old father still did not know what to say, and answered in his holy simplicity: “Stop bothering me; I just know that is how things stand. When I saw that the venerable father could find no reply, I said: “Is it not the same as with sophistic and wit medicine? If one learns these arts well and practices them, one gradually gains through this practice a certain habit in them. No one could say or explain how he has arrived at this habit. Gradually, all unconsciously has the soul appropriated the habit through practice of the art. Similarly one can suppose the same thing of humility, even though he is unable to explain it in words.” Upon hearing this Zozimus was filled with joy, embraced me and

⁴⁸ Instruction 4.47.

⁴⁹ Instruction 4.49.

⁵⁰ Instruction 4:50–51.

⁵¹ Apophthegma Matoes 2.

⁵² Instruction 2.33; Instruction 14.151.

⁵³ Instruction 2.34.

spoke: “You have found the explanation; it is as you have said. The sophist was content with this argument.”⁵⁴

The atmosphere in which humility can unfold is the “memory of God” (*mneme Theou*), continual prayer. It is the atmosphere of the presence of God that in Benedict forms the foothold for the ladder of humility. Dorotheus taught this continual prayer to the young Dositheus in the form that we call the Jesus prayer: “Continuously pray: ‘Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.’”⁵⁵ There is a correspondence between humility, prayer, and service of neighbor. “The humble man continually calls upon God that he have mercy on him. Humility moves him to prayer and prayer makes him humble. The more he does good, the more he humbles himself; and the more he humbles himself, the more he receive help and advances through humility.”⁵⁶ The memory of God, he adds, brings solace to the soul, as the Psalm puts it: “I remembered God and he filled me with joy (Ps 76.4).”⁵⁷

Dorotheus compares the spiritual ascent with the structure of a building. “The house of the soul that one constructs through the observance of prayer.”⁵⁸ The foundation is faith on which the skillful builder raises a well-structured edifice, all four walls of which are of equal height: “Is there occasion for obedience? Then lay the stone of obedience! Does a brother get angry at you? Then lay the stone of patience! . . . a stone of sympathy, of renunciation, of generosity.” The corner stones are perseverance and courage; the mortar is humility; the gift of discernment serves as the crossbeams. The roof is love, the fulfilling of the virtues. The ascent of the balcony is again: humility, the crown and defense of the virtues.”⁵⁹ It is important that the builder is clever and builds with knowledge (*en gnosi*), a frequently used expression.

Dorotheus explains what he means by this. It is a matter of proceeding with reason and continuity, in full knowledge of the plan of the building and its object; otherwise, for every stone put in place, one takes two away. Dorotheus has many examples. One can join humility with arrogance. That amounts to laying one stone and taking two away. One man practices silence but not with knowledge; he intends to perform an act of virtue but in fact achieves nothing of the sort. The person who practices true silence feels herself unworthy to speak.⁶⁰ Dorotheus ends this warning with the words: “He who acts with knowledge is a clever and experienced contractor who builds his house on firm ground in keeping with the Gospel saying: “The clever man builds his house on rock” (Mt 7:24), and nothing can shake it.”⁶¹

In this connection Dorotheus makes use of the image of two ladders: “We place two ladders in front of us, the one leads to haven, the other to hell. You stand on earth between the two ladders. Do not say to your self “How can I fly up from the earth at a single bound to the top of this ladder?” That is impossible, and God does not require that from you. Be careful at least that you do not go down. Give no offence to your neighbor, do not harm him, be free from malicious slander, do not insult or curse him. Then do a little good and encourage your brother by a word, show him your sympathy, give him what he stands in need of. In this way, rung by rung will you get to the top of the ladder by the help of God.”⁶²

Dorotheus has a deep feeling for brotherly love. The largest number of examples he gives in connection with sobriety (*nepsis*) and watchfulness of heart concern relations among brothers. He gives the impression that the whole of asceticism aims at brotherly love. The following statement, taken from the Apophthegmata,

⁵⁴ Instruction 2.36.

⁵⁵ The Life of Dositheus, 10.

⁵⁶ Instruction 2.38.

⁵⁷ Instruction 12. 126.

⁵⁸ Instruction 14.149.

⁵⁹ Instruction 14.150–51.

⁶⁰ Instruction 14.152–53.

⁶¹ Instruction 14.158.

⁶² Instruction 14.154.

indicates that he has a vivid consciousness of the unity of the great commandment, love of God and of neighbor: “When you see your neighbor, you see God.”⁶³

“Every virtue attains its perfection in love of neighbor.”⁶⁴ A word that frequently appears is the word sympathy. “Would that we might have love with sympathy.” Another often used is *philantropia*⁶⁵ and *eusplanchnia* (‘bowels of mercy’), or generosity. These are the characteristics of the God of the Bible that men should gain. For in the end “what characterizes God is mercy.” Neither in fasting or in poverty but in mercy do we sense God.”⁶⁶

Dorotheus speaks to cenobites: “What are coenobia? Are they not a single body with its members. . . . So we must have sympathy, one with another, for we are members as the apostle says (R 12:5). . . . The leaders (of the monastery) are the head, the servants of the word are the mouth, the ears are those who obey, the hands those who work, the feet are those in charge of affairs and who see to the services. Are you the head? Ten lead. The eye? Be watchful and alert. The mouth? Speak usefully. Are you the ear? then obey. The hand? Do your work. The foot? Hasten to your service. Let each according to his capacity work for the whole body. Strive always to help one another also through teaching. Place the word of God in the heart of your brother, whether by consoling him when he is being tried, or by lending a hand at work. In short, give attention to be at one, each according to his capacity, for the more a man is united with his neighbor, the more he is united with God.”⁶⁷

In this context we encounter the comparison with a circle. Dorotheus, as a disciple of Saint Basil, views brotherly love and the building of community as the test of the spiritual life: “The one who fears God and worships him is only useful to himself. Every virtues has its perfection in love”, he says, and makes the following comment on the Apophthegma of Poemen: “Three essential things are useful: to fear God, to pray, and to do good to your neighbor.”⁶⁸ What Dorotheus is striving for is a community of united brothers governed by attentive mutual esteem, respect, assistance, and fraternal tenderness. Clearly this appears in the recommendations that he gives to the superiors of the monastery:

If you are the superior support our brothers with a firm heart and feelings of mercy. Be a teacher in deeds and words, above all in deeds for example is the most efficacious.

Be an example also in manual labor is you are up to it; if you are too weak then supply for it by your kind disposition and with the fruits of the Spirit that the apostle lists: “Love, joy, peace, patience, friendliness, kindness, fidelity, meekness and self-control’ (Gal 5:22–23). If faults should arise, do not be too much vexed; rather, correct the evil without irritation. If you must make observations, assume a correct attitude and wait for the right moment. Do not be too severe over small faults like a sheriff. Do not rebuke repeatedly for that is unbearable and leads only to insensitivity and contempt.

When you give orders, do not act arrogantly but set out the matter humble before the brother. This manner is encouraging, persuasive, and makes for peace for your neighbor. If you oppose a brother and are upset at the time, guard your tongue so as to say nothing in anger, and do not let your heart hold anything against him. Remember he is your brother, a member of Christ and the image of God who I threatened by our common enemy. Your own weakness should move you to sympathy for your

⁶³ Letter 1.187; see Apoph. Apollo3.

⁶⁴ Letter 6.191.

⁶⁵ Instruction 6.76.

⁶⁶ Instruction 14.156.

⁶⁷ Instruction 6.77

⁶⁸ Letter 6.191; Poemen 160.

brother. Be grateful for the opportunity to be able to pardon, so that you also might obtain God's pardon of your sins that are worse and more numerous. For it is said: "Forgive, as we forgive" (Lk 6:37).

Do you fear to do harm to your brother through your patience? The apostle commands us to overcome evil by good (R 12:21), and not evil by evil. For their part the fathers say: 'if you rebuke and are upset by anger, you nourish your own passion.' No reasonable man tears down his own house in order to build a house for his neighbor. . . . By your peace you have given peace to his heart. Nothing should distance you from the holy teaching of Christ: 'Learn of me, I tell you, for I am meek and humble of heart.' (Mt 11:29).⁶⁹

At the end of this elucidation of some aspects of the teachings of Dorotheus we note how this traditional monastic teaching imparts light and beneficent freshness. Dorotheus has few references to liturgy and no Ordo of the Offices, unlike RB. But he has left us his commentary on two liturgical texts that are found in an Easter homily and in a homily on the Feast of Gregory Nazianzan. This Easter homily inspired the Canon of Easter matins of the Byzantine Office "Day of Resurrection". These homilies are two symbols in that the monastic life intends to be preparation for the Easter victory in the following of the Martyr: "An Easter that realizes the exodus from the spiritual Egypt, that is, from sin. . . . according to the word of Evagrius 'The Passover of the Lord is the exodus from evil'"⁷⁰

"Let us bring ourselves as the offering," says Gregory, as the apostle says: 'Bring yourself as a holy offering, pleasing to God (R12:1).'" Gregory continues: "Let us give back to the Image his likeness. Let us acknowledge our dignity and give honor to the Archetype. Let us understand the meaning of the mystery, and the reason why Christ died." Dorotheus comments: "We acknowledge the countless benefits that we have received and whose image we are . . . God, who has formed us according to his image was seized by compassion for his creature and his image. He became man for us and has suffered death for all to lead into life us who were dead . . . We were snatched from hell by the love of Christ, and it is in our power now to return to Paradise."⁷¹ This is the Christian adventure; it is also the monastic adventure.

Dorotheus of Gaza and Benedict of Nursia doubtless display a spiritual affinity, a related climate. As contemporaries at the threshold of a new age, they succeeded, each in his own manner, to realize what Dom Lucien Regnault writes concerning Dorotheus: "A harmonious and balanced synthesis in which the contemplative orientation in no way restricts the integral practice of the coenobitic form of life."⁷² In both, Dorotheus and Benedict, the Orient and the West meet. It is surprising where an astonishing convergence of all the Churches ascertains a common spirituality? We are increasingly conscious of this convergence today. It is a hopeful pledge for Christian unity that is being realized by the help of God.

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⁶⁹ Letter 2: 184–86.

⁷⁰ Instruction 16.166

⁷¹ Instruction 16. 171–72

⁷² Theologie 322