

## Humility

By Bishop George Khodr

Those who admire their own person are many. All of them find in themselves values which spring from their own reality. They always pride themselves composing themselves out of a series of merits, since they think that without these merits they are nothing and the human being does not opt for nothing. Thus, it is inevitable that most people make up an image for themselves and usually they think that nothing resembles them. The human being fears moral death before fearing the physical death. That is why through these beauties, which appear to the person, he/[she] lives. This is conceit, which is followed by pride, in which the human subject regards his/[her] own self as above all people. There is, therefore, a kind of worship of the self. There is always a kind of a polytheism concealed to the person him/[her]self. Pride in its culmination is contempt of the other and the realization and the laudation (whether spoken or non-spoken) of the self.

Arrogance might occur as the outcome of praise, and by praise pride is brought about, and the avidity for the first position in this or that domain. We read by St. John of the Ladder: "An old man once admonished spiritually a proud brother, who answered him, "Forgive me, father, but I am not proud." "My son," said the wise old man, "what better proof of your pride could you have given than to claim that you were not proud?"

Every person is the victim of illusion. And from this follows that the arrogant person despises the meek ones. The detestation of those is a detestation of the ones intimate to God, since God is meekness. Thus, our Fathers have not mistaken when they thought that pride is the greatest sin, since it denotes that in your conscience you think that no one is like you and that you are becoming like God, as Adam believed.

The problem of the arrogant person is that most of the times he/[she] does not know his/[her] self. In addition to that, whenever grace does not descend on the person from above, he/[she] becomes unable to differentiate in him/[her]self and thinks that only he/[she] is gifted, disregarding that he/[she] is inflated concerning his/[her] talents; while he/[she] would never think so. Hence, one needs some virtues, such as benevolence, so that one might improve oneself whenever one believes that benevolence is a divine inspiration. One might perform good deeds since those could increase his/[her] exaltation, unknowing that the ones toward whom he/[she] does a favor are generally better than him/[her]. The spiritual beauties should be founded on humility; otherwise they would become veiled frailties. One might consider that he/[she] does not commit adultery, does not steal, does not lie, nevertheless, these prohibitions are of no good whenever they strengthen one's pride. Those sanctified ones have taught us that whenever you

practice abstinence, yet you remain an unloving person, you would disgrace your chastity, thus you are nothing. Love alone strikes arrogance and tears it apart since it is an admission concerning the Other and this admission alone makes you. Our Bible shows us how to flee fornication and the other sins. Our Fathers have set laws to tear sin apart. However, sin continues to exist, whenever you think that you became virtuous because you practice abstinence. Abstinence is nothing whenever it is not clothed with love, through which hearts do not break.

Some might think that you are arrogant, because you might have a manner of handling things that they do not understand or like, or, because of your liveliness, they think you do not address them for you are bumptious. Examine yourself after every utterance. What matters is how God would see you on the Last Day, or before your passing away. However at the end you would not realize your conceit unless your conscience rebukes you for that, since arrogance would be finally broken in order that it might be replaced by love.

In contrast to this magnification of the self and the continuous life in illusion, humility seems to be an imaginative contraction of the self, even if the humble person is the greatest man on earth. He/[she] might find in him/[her]self natural virtues, such as beauty, intelligence and others, yet they remain within their [original] range since the person does not pride him/[her]self on them. All the natural virtues we have come with creation, or we inherit them from the righteous ones, who are oriented toward changing the universe. You thank for a possession or a privation. Though the way differs, yet, both are divine inclination.

The humble does not dwarf him/[her]self, since he/[she] does not deprive people from their rights and at the same time he/[she] does neither judge nor scourge him/[her]self. He/[she] receives with thankfulness and lacks with thankfulness. Concerning divine generosity no word is left for you other than what the tax-collector has said in the Gospel, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" [Luke 18: 13] The two states are true for you, that you are a sinner and that God is compassionate, and whenever you perceive God's compassion you are released from any guilt however great it was. Whenever the sinner perceives God's grace descending on him/[her], swallowing up completely his/[her] guilt, he/[she] perceives him/[her]self as nothing, while perceiving God's compassion as everything. This is the humble person.

For Christians Jesus is the prototype of the humble person, who said, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11: 29). Since years this verse has been challenging me. It raises in me the question: why had the Master referred only to these two virtues, while he has innumerable virtues. Maybe He perceived in humility the culmination, since it can advance to that which is above it, while you cannot reach at it unless you trample on all desires. And in the artistic domain humility is [represented] in the Orthodox

Church through the icon of Christ – the bridegroom, who is painted as descending to the tomb naked, in order that He might completely disappear in flesh and rise from the dead. Christ is the bridegroom (or Khatan in Syriac [which means the son-in-law]) since he abides by the will of God, not His human will and through His death He marries the whole humanity.

Here is what the great saint Isaac the Syriac, who was born in Qatar, maintained: “To speak of humility is to speak of God. It is the raiment of the Godhead. The Word who became human clothed himself in it, and he spoke to us in our body. Everyone who has been clothed with humility has truly been made like unto Him who came down from his own exaltedness and hid the splendor of his majesty and concealed his glory with humility.”

What does this statement mean for us? It means that God’s life is hidden within us and it “what we will be has not been revealed yet”. [1Jo 3: 2] At such hiddenness you cannot reveal God unless you hide yourself. God reveals Godself through you whenever you conceive the measure of hiddenness; I mean the measure of your considering yourself as nothing.

I had a great Syrian friend, settled in Switzerland. I had raised him in his youth on Orthodox faith and our youth had been flaming by the Spirit. Then, he became the friend of Arab leaders, from all different countries, and he had been hosting several of them at his residence. Once, after his death, one of his daughters has invited me at her table. She said to me, my father has been treating the servants at our home with the same politeness and respect that he used to treat the leaders of Arab countries.

Whether you were rich or great among the educated ones, remember what has been stated in Mary’s song according to the Gospel of Luke, “He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree.” (Luke 1: 52) If you say: I am an honorable person among my people, then, you would be making an attestation about your education or leadership. God alone raises you and whenever you consider yourself above another, then, you hurt him/[her]. That is why Jesus connected meekness [or gentleness] to humility, since meekness becomes in the Other an honey in his mouth, clearing all protrusions between you and Others, as it is the result of humility or the way for it. Who are your people? “Surely the people is grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever.” (Is. 40: 7-8)

The one who consider him/[her]self highly would say that he/[she] is speaking and the Other does not speak, since whoever speaks becomes something, while the Other, from the beginning, is nothing. Arrogance is a moral invalidation of the Other, i.e. a kind of extermination. [If] you are arrogant, you set for yourself a throne that you have not inherited it, or let us assume that you have inherited it. You remain on your earthly reality, your bones and flesh, and all of them are

perishable. Until, through repentance, your Lord raises you from the spiritual death here. Thus, you might know that you are inferior to all people.

In the fourteenth century, the prince of Moldavia had written to the crown prince (who was going to rule the emirate): “Do not covet to become a bishop, an abbot or a prince. Do not covet, since all this is the glory of the world.” On the Last Day you will be given glory, whenever you resolve to distance yourself from the glories of this world. And God might destroy the throne, which your imagination has constructed it for you, in order that you might become from those who have hunger. Yearn for God so that God might sit you on God’s heavenly throne.