

Meekness and Humility

By Bishop George Khodr

In Orthodox mysticism, freedom from desires is called tranquility, at which the Spirit of the Lord is active and you are a receptive. That is to say that another finds humility within you. When John Climacus, the author of the Ladder of virtues and the great ascetic of the Sinai desert, wrote about tranquility, he said that it is the lack of caprices. He defined this in terms of perfection, which imitates God and the earthly heaven and the resurrection of the soul, before the general resurrection. No word might be said after this word, since whenever you attain such transcendence, you would not need any linguistic expression.

St. John Climacus explains, in the eighth article, that humility lies in the quietness of the soul and its acceptance of offences and favors similarly. Then, he elucidates in describing the contrary vice, which is according to him anger, and as he defines humility by tranquility, he defines anger by perplexity. At the time of insult, you keep silence. This is a first level of goodness. The second level, you get saddened for the one insulting you, and the highest level is when you can think of the hurt that insulting has caused in the insulter, and you cry for his/[her] sin warmly.

Maybe the most important of our virtues is the recognition of the Other. Humility is a Trinitarian virtue, par excellence, since you do not meet the Other as the Other, unless because of your recognition that God has made you because God has made the Other. [To say that] God has made the Other, means that God has made his/[her] character. And you, in your turn, preserve this character, since God wants it in that way. You dwell in tenderness, i.e., in that abandonment of conflict, about which you would not regret unless because of your upheaval.

Anger, and its kinds, is seemingly of dual opposition, while in reality it is of a unity of extermination. As for tenderness, it is your abandoning of your 'I', in order that the Other might exist, not in his/[her] 'I', but before, God who makes him/[her] through God's grace, on one hand, and the tenderness that grace has poured upon him/[her], on the other.

Tenderness is not merely the recognition of the Other, rather, it is the willingness of the configuration of the Other, since harshness would exterminate him/[her]. Whenever tenderness becomes evangelical humility it refutes violence in the soul. However, it does not imply a promise concerning the inevitable salvation of the Other, since the humble ones are being killed. They are viable to death in a way or another, because they are the messiahs of God. At any rate they are to fall into utter oblivion, since holiness does not write history, it rather writes the Kingdom. The evil ones write the times, until, at the end, God dwells in the Kingdom of humility.

In our daily lives there is nothing like tenderness which unites the generations. You might be complaining about your son, who is crying. Let him cry, and be happy for his growth. Once, a mother complained to me about her baby's breaking the plates. I said to her, this is how your son grows. Tell your husband to set apart a share of his budget to buy whatever your son breaks. Further, nothing like tenderness unites the couples, who frequently yell [at each other]. Whenever you feel oppressed because of yelling, it would be difficult to return to union, or else, it would be a frail union.

The quick-tempered person would be out of mind, since he creates a world, other than the beautiful world which is the atmosphere of our normal living. This state of being out of mind lies in your living in a world of your creation. And whenever you acquire tranquility, you must pray for that which arouses in you pure prayer, as John Climacus [of the Ladder] maintains. In this way you habituate yourself to have patience, purification of the soul and forgiveness. Thus, pray for those who infuriate you, in order that they might be brought to reason. On this Isaiah said, "this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit" [Is. 66: 2]

Whenever you go to meet a person, who is meek, you know beforehand that he/[she] will not prey upon you, that you are accepted from the very beginning, and that your chance of convincing the person is good, or strong, since the Other will listen to you. If all people were meek, then the whole humanity would be one person, since nothing breaks the human unity other than anger. The call for unity implies unity in purity and trust, since love trusts. The countries write treaties, because they do not trust each other. And because of sin, the debtor writes an official document to the creditor, to be acquired by the court, i.e., by the fear of power. That is because the society needs compulsory arrangements, whenever tenderness is lost. This meditation brings us to another meditation, prescribed for us through Christ's saying, "learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart". (Matt. 11: 29) Why is this correlation [between gentleness (or meekness, as in KJ version) and humility]? It seems to me that what brings the two words together is that both tenderness and humility imply the death of the self. Paul's saying supports this: "For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, [he deceives himself.]" (Gal. 6: 3) Humility is that you descend to the underside of existence, or even you consider yourself as non-existing, and that whatever good you have done, it is God who has done it in you and through you. God passes through you in order that you might reach the Other, and you do not reach the Other unless you rub out the 'I' within you. On this Paul said, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are". (1Cor.1: 27-28) The meaning of

the last statement, as I understand it, is that God chose whoever has thought of him/[her]self as non-existing, in order that whoever thinks of him/[her]self as existing might be abolished.

You do not exist unless when you rub out yourself before God and before Others. Thus, we read in the Gospel of Luke, “[God] has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree”. (Luke 1: 53) [In this verse] the “mighty” are those who think of themselves that they are so. Those [mighty ones], God removes them from God’s presence, and sees only those who do not think of themselves as great, and hence, they exist before God. In this vein, one of Moldavia’s princes had written, in the fourteenth century, 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.” For the glory of God is within you, i.e. the virtues. The glory of God is the only glory. You do not perceive it, but your Lord reveals it. During our journey to the Kingdom, God abolishes whatever was vain glory. This is so, since darkness (i.e. the vain glory) and light (i.e. the glory of God) do not meet in the contemporary person.

Yes, you should be aware of the grace that has descended upon you, as St. Symeon the New Theologian commands us. However, you should refer this grace to God and know that it passes through you, without you being its originator. You are only a path, in order that you might deliver it to others. The Saint does not acknowledge him/[her]self as a saint, and his/[her] ignorance of that raises him/[her] to the rank of sainthood. This happens to whomever thinks of him/[her]self as a servant, who is entrusted with the grace, while he/[she] is not its owner, since God alone is the owner of existence, and grace is the radiation of God alone.

Tenderness first and then humility, both converge in order that they make together an upright person. This is possible for the poor and the rich, the satisfied and the hungry, for the regular citizen and the one who represents him/[her] in the government. At no human condition tenderness is impossible and with it humility. Sublimity is given only to those upon whom meekness and humility have descended, since they are alone the people of God.