

On Pride and Humility (Abba Dorotheos)

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Excerpt from Instruction 1

What, then, is the cause and what's the cure for this arrogant and disdainful behaviour? Listen to what the Lord says: 'Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest [1] for your souls' [Matth. 11, 29]. Briefly, in a single sentence, He's shown us the root cause of all evils; and their antidote, the cause of all blessings. He's shown us that pride has overcome us and that we can't be free of it except through its opposite, which is humility. This is because pride begets arrogant and disdainful behaviour and catastrophic disobedience, precisely as humility begets obedience and the salvation of our soul. I mean, of course, real humility, not merely an expression or an outward show but the actual humble disposition which is cultivated in our heart and in our outlook. This is what He means when He says: 'I am gentle and humble in heart'.



Those who want their soul to find true rest should learn humility and they'll see that therein lies all joy, all glory and all respite, just as the opposites are to be found in pride. How did we come to all these sorrows? Why did we fall into such wretchedness? Was it not through our pride? Was it not through our own irrationality? Was it not because we accommodated our wicked intentions. Was it not because we wanted to impose our own petty will? But why? Were Adam and Eve not created in the midst of every comfort, every joy, every solace and every glory? Weren't they in Paradise? God told them: 'Don't do this', and they did it anyway. Do you see the pride? Do you see the stubbornness? Do you see the disobedience? When God saw this shameless lack of respect, He said: 'They're foolish. They don't appreciate what they have. Unless they suffer, they're going straight to perdition. Unless they learn what sorrow is, they'll never learn what respite is, either'. Then He gave them what they deserved and cast them out of Paradise. They were given over to their selfishness and desires so that their bones might be crushed and that they should learn not to depend on themselves but on God's command, and should be taught the suffering caused by disobedience and the satisfaction of being obedient. As the prophet says: 'Your apostasy will chastise you' [Jer. 2, 19].

As I've said many times, God's goodness didn't abandon that which He Himself had created: He urges and entreats us: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest'. It's as if He's saying: 'You're tired, worn out. Now

you've experienced the sufferings caused by your disobedience. Come back. Come and acknowledge your weakness and disdain, so that you can come into your rest and your glory. Come and live in humility, you who were slain by pride. Learn from me, who am gentle and humble in heart, and you'll find ease for your soul'.

1. The word in Greek is ἀνάπαυσις (anapafsi) and is very difficult to translate adequately. In fact, if you don't like the way I've translated it, a polite way of saying so, in Greek, would be: 'It brings me no rest', i.e. 'It isn't satisfactory'. It's primary meaning is, indeed, 'rest' or 'respite'; hence 'ease'; hence 'comfort'; hence 'solace'; hence 'contentment'; hence 'satisfaction'. This is why I've used a variety of words to convey the meaning, depending on the context [WJL].