

Dorotheos of Gaza

- Born at Antioch in Syria c. 506-508 in a fairly affluent family who valued education and may have extended patronage to monastic communities (his brother is later described as a friend of monks).
- Went from Antioch to Maiuma, the port of Gaza, probably to study rhetoric there with Procopius of Gaza, who
 - prepared commentaries on Scripture based on what he considered to be the best extant commentaries and also
 - wrote some letters which were admired for their rhetorical and literary style (some of these letters and further letters have recently been discovered).

See p. 164 on Dorotheos' love of reading and his study with a sophist (teacher of rhetoric).

What did Dorotheos read? What did he know?

- p. 165 n.6 =definition from the *Magna moralia* ascribed to Aristotle (though D. knows this through a work of Basil of Caesarea)
- p. 166 n.10=a definition from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (though D. may know this through some intermediate source [either a Christian writer or a doxography that gives selected opinions of major philosophical figures])
- Mostly cites Cappadocian Fathers,
 - esp. ascetical/monastic works and homilies/commentaries on biblical works by Basil of Caesarea and the orations of Gregory of Nazianzus.
 - Also cites from Basil's work on evil in p. 165: evil is *anhupostatos* (without independent existence, so a departure from the good and the introduction of disharmony into the original order; not a primal principle as the good is).
- Cites Evagrius' *Praktikos* and to a lesser extent *Eight Evil Thoughts* and *Sentences to Monks*.
- On p. 100 quotes material on *epistemai* (types of structured knowledge) that goes back to Plato's *Republic* but may be known through some intermediate work like Didymus the Blind's *Contra manichaeos*.

Probably taught rhetoric for a while before affiliating with monastery at Thawatha, 2 miles outside Gaza.

- Rhetorical skills and knowing how to handle judges may have come in handy when D. became a leader of a monastic community/monastic communities ("archimandrite"); see Wheeler, p. 26 (bottom).

Dorotheos had corresponded with Barsanuphius and John for years prior to entering the monastic life and became the personal secretary (for 9 years) to John when the person who had previously performed that function fell sick. While doing this, Dorotheos also held other positions of extensive responsibility (guest-master, chief infirmarian, etc.)

Dorotheos' leadership was opposed by monks who used to dump their trash outside his cell so that his cell was overrun with flies and biting insects.

Had bouts of serious illness.

After falling ill, he gave up his role in looking after the sick in the infirmary. When he had partially recovered, he served as guest-master (receiving and looking after visitors and providing orientation and oversight to new monks).

After Dorotheos' death, Gaza and surrounding region was probably sacked and destroyed by the Persians in 615 and then retaken by the Arab Muslim army in 634 with much bloodshed and the execution of Christian soldiers and inhabitants.

The *Discourses* appear to be monastic conferences, perhaps given to new initiates in his role as guest-master.

- p. 84: origin of counsels of perfection in p. 84 [middle], dealing with poverty and virginity as going beyond what was commanded to pursue further excellence
- p. 86: symbolism of monastic garb, adapted from Evagrius
- pp. 90-91: strong emphasis upon obedience—we need to become sufficiently humble that we become people who can be sent (cf. story on p. 91)

One much-quoted section of the work concerns the 2 types of pride and humility

- pride that leads one to despise one's fellow human beings will in time lead one to despise God also
- to hold others wiser than oneself as a cure for temptations to pride (2.4; p. 98)
- the nearer one gets to God, the more one sees oneself as a sinner (p. 98)
- interview with a sophist and discussion of the *epistemai* [structured forms of knowledge; here=humility) through experience derived from the practice of obedience, physical labor and prayer (p. 100), as opposed to the fallen, autonomous person's search for pleasure.

Another often quoted section (4.1; p. 109), commenting on the text in 1 Jn. that perfect love casts out fear:

- There are two types of fear, corresponding roughly to the Western distinction between attrition (fear of consequences; servile fear; called "preliminary fear") and contrition (one fears the Lord and when one sins, one fears being alienated from God out of love for God; this fear of God leads to respect for people out of love for God [115])

p. 118 on dealing with abuse by opponents

p. 123 taking counsel not from multiple persons but from one person who can be trusted, since evil is often mixed in with good, making discernment difficult.

Note on p. 123 (bottom) the *ekkope thelematos* (the cutting off of one's own will to turn away from self-will and regain the ability to do the will of God)

Note also the polemic against *idiorrythmia* in pp. 127-128 (freedom from anxiety/freedom from care plus danger of being one's own guide)

p. 132 dangers in moving from observed action to generalizations about character (the latter are static and unhelpful, not taking account of what can be achieved by grace).

- p. 133 (top): this is like taking to oneself sole responsibility for passing final judgment on another's life.
- Also cultivates hasty and impulsive judgments which are made too quickly and too forcefully (see pp. 157-158), so that unhealthy suspicions become the occasion of sin

p. 135 Moral luck → humility

p. 136-137 compassion for the erring (not also 139 where love for God is linked with love for neighbor and for the body of Christ in which one is linked with others)

p. 140ff., 151, 161 (bottom) this is supported by the practice of considering others' accusations and being will to take their criticisms serious and engage in self-accusation

p. 150: this functions as a version of the cutting off of one's own will, which is used to stop the advance of anger in the soul by not recalling/dwelling upon the other's offence and asking for the other's prayers.

- *Ekkope thelematos* (as a characteristic emphasis of the Gaza school and carried from Barsanuphius and John through Dorotheos to John Climacus and the Byzantine monastic tradition (Antiochus' *Pandects* [7th c.] and Theodore Studites [8th-9th c.]; see translated texts in handouts).
 - See also the stories in Zosimus' of Abba Moses' response to rejection and Chryssavgis, 139-143 and Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, 168-172.
- *Ekkope thelematos* is contrasted with *dikaioma* as self-justification, appealing to justice and to God and finally quoting Holy Scripture to defend the uninsightful sickness of the self.

p. 160 (compare 167 (bottom half) discussion of *dikaioma* (self-justification):

untruthfulness evidences a type of self-will that is associated with a lack of humility and straightforwardness and strengthens the drive toward defending oneself against criticism. Eventually (p. 161) it is not just one's word, but one's whole life that becomes a lie.