

CHAPTER 4

The Concept of Love in Diadochus of Photiki

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All spiritual contemplation, brothers, should be guided by faith, hope and love, but above all by love (Gnostic Chapters 1).

Abstract: Diadochus was born in the early 5th century and died around 487. He was bishop of Photiki in the Roman province of Epirus, in northern Greece. In this paper I will discuss the concept of love (*agapē*) in his writings. I consider the concept mainly in relation to spiritual progress, the role of the heart, and bodily experience and senses, as well as in relation to contemplation and prayer. Spiritual progress starts with baptism and it is a process from divine image to divine likeness. Diadochus emphasizes the role of the heart as significant in man's relationship with God, where man's love for God is presupposed in God's love for man. The most frequent word used by Diadochus to express love is *agapē*; however he also uses *eros*.

Keywords: progress, image, likeness, heart, experience, *agape*, *eros*

Introduction

In this paper I will discuss the concept of love (*agapē*) in the writings of the fifth-century Greek ascetic writer Diadochus of Photiki. The concept occupies a central place in his spiritual theology, designating the movement of love from God to the human being, and vice versa, the human being's love for God. I shall consider the concept mainly in relation to man's spiritual progress, the role of the heart, body and senses, as well as in relation to contemplation and prayer.

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Diadochus of Photiki (ca. 400–ca. 487)

Diadochus lived sometime between 400 and 487 as bishop of Photiki in the Roman province of Epirus,¹ in northern Greece. Although he was the most important ascetical writer of his century, solid data on him is scarce. One reason for this may be that at his time Epirus was rather isolated from the great ecclesiastical centres of East and West, as well as being a fairly small town.

The writings of Diadochus that have survived are a treatise on the spiritual life, *One Hundred Gnostic Chapters*, a sermon on the Ascension, and a work called the *Vision of St Diadochus*, which takes the form of a series of questions and answers.² His main work, *One Hundred Gnostic Chapters*, presents a way to Christian perfection as well as a comprehensive Christian anthropology. It enjoyed great popularity and was very influential in the Greek East, proof of which is the number of manuscripts that have come down (Quasten, 1960, p. 511). It was translated into Latin and was, moreover, printed in the *Philocalia* of Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain.³ He is also quoted or mentioned as an authority by a long series of monastic authors between the sixth and eighteenth century, among others Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662) and Symeon the New Theologian (949–1022).

Though very little is known of his life, one may from his writings suggest some aspects. It is evident that his main work, *One Hundred Gnostic Chapters*, was intended primarily for a male audience of monks. He begins it by addressing his audience as “brothers” (*adelfoi*), he refers specifically to the situation of both cenobites (monks living in a community) and solitaries,⁴ and he appeals to the “accustomed rule” (*kanōn*) followed in monasticism.⁵ It has therefore been suggested that Diadochus himself was a monk and even the superior of a religious community,

1 The site of Photiki was found about 1890, in Liboni of Threspotia, four kilometers south-west of Paramythia.

2 I have used the Greek text of des Places (1977), which contains all the surviving works of Diadochus.

3 *Philocalia* is a collection of spiritual texts from the East Orthodox tradition, written between the 4th and 15th centuries.

4 *Gnostic Chapters* 53.

5 *Gnostic Chapters* 100.

before his consecration to the episcopate (Polyzogopoulos, 1984, p. 772; Ware, 1985, p. 558).

The Anthropology of Diadochus: the Human Being as God's Image and Likeness

The Biblical teaching on man's creation according to the image and likeness of God (1 Mos 1:26) has been the central point in the history of Christian anthropology. In fact, however, the terms are not often used in the Bible and the Bible never gives us any kind of clear understanding about human beings as the image or likeness of God. In the Greek translation of the Hebrew bible, the *Septuagint*, the Greek words *eikōn* (image) and *homoioōsis* (likeness) are used. In patristic literature, however, the distinction between image and likeness is known from the second and third century, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria.

Diadochus, using the *Septuagint* text, makes the same distinction between image and likeness as Clement does. Thus the human being has the "image" from the start – or rather, from the moment of baptism, but the "likeness" still lies in the future and is the result of a process. All human beings are made in God's image, but to be in his likeness is something given only to those who have brought their freedom into subjection to God.⁶

Baptism plays a major role in Diadochus's spirituality; two gifts are given in baptism. In the first place, the sin that was caused by the Fall, making the human being corrupt, is cast out through baptism. It brings about a full and entire cleansing of both soul and body; the baptismal grace is something that is permanent and objective and does not depend upon any subjective attitude on man's part. It is the restoration according to the image of God.⁷ The second gift, which surpasses the first, is restoration according to the likeness of God; this is not given at once, but depends upon our cooperation:

6 *Gnostic Chapters* 4.

7 *Gnostic Chapters* 78; 79.

Through the generation of baptism holy grace obtains two benefits for us, one of which infinitely surpasses the other. It grants us the first immediately ... making evident which is “the image” ... The other part, which is “the likeness”, he hopes to bring about with our cooperation.⁸

More than a doctrine, Diadochus’s theology presents us with a relationship in process, a process that begins at the moment of baptism.

In this process, from divine image to divine likeness, the love for God is the driving force. Diadochus writes: “All of us are made according to the image of God; but only those who through great love have enslaved their own freedom to God are in his likeness”.⁹ Growth in spiritual life is, then, represented by Diadochus as an ascent from the image to the likeness, as a recovery through the acquisition of humanity’s original unity, as well as closeness to God (Hester, 1989, p. 49).¹⁰ The likeness is not, however, an essential likeness between the divine and human nature, because he believes that God is immaterial and did not have a defined shape or form. Only Jesus is the real image of God.¹¹ Diadochus describes the process through a simile: the difference between the image and the likeness resembles the difference between a sketch and a finished portrait. First the artist draws an outline in a single colour; this is the image. Then he/she paints with many colours, so that little by little the painting will resemble the model, “reflecting even the model’s hair faithfully”;¹² this is the likeness. This happens, Diadochus claims, “when the mind begins to taste the goodness of the Holy Spirit with profound sentiments”.¹³ Through the distinction between the two terms, then, Diadochus defines the human being not as a static and perfected being, but as a dynamic person who is in continuous progress.

Thus, the fall did not completely destroy the image of God in the human being, it was only obscured. God’s grace that is given in baptism restores the image, and man’s cooperation is then required for attaining the likeness. It is not an easy thing and it may take a long time to

8 *Gnostic Chapters* 89.

9 *Gnostic Chapters* 4.

10 Hester claims that fundamental to Diadochus’s understanding of the human being is his conviction that man was intended by God to be a unity.

11 *Vision* 12.

12 *Gnostic Chapters* 89.

13 *Gnostic Chapters* 89.

achieve this, through the development of the virtues, and, above all, by surrendering one's will to God. The human person can only realise itself by the renunciation of its own will; only when a person does not belong to himself/herself does he become like God. This happens through love. Diadochus writes: "When we no longer belong to ourselves, then we are similar to him who has reconciled us to himself through love".¹⁴

The return to authentic humanity through arrival at a restored likeness to God is not, however, the end of the spiritual journey. Rather, it is the final preparation for a mystical union with God, a union between God and the human bride. Diadochus describes, it seems, this love-union from his own experience although he writes as if it were something told him by another (Ermatinger, 2010, p. 58):

Someone from among those who love the Lord with unyielding resolve once told me the following: "Because I longed for conscious knowledge of the love of God, he who is Goodness itself granted me it; and ever since I have experienced the action of this sense with full certainty to such a degree that my soul was spurned on with joyful desire and ineffable love so that it quit my body to go with the Lord¹⁵ – to the point of almost losing all awareness of this passing life".¹⁶

Similarly to Paul, as well as to other mystics in the Christian tradition, Diadochus describes his experiences in radical terms. More than simply a description of the tension of wanting to be with the Lord, it is a description of mystical death. He includes the body as a participant in this experience, which points to the eschatological dimension of it; it anticipates what is to come, as he writes: "The joy that is actually produced in the soul and the body is a reliable reminder of incorruptible life".¹⁷

The Role of the Heart

The idea of love is central in all Christian theology. Diadochus builds upon the Christian biblical thinking that man's love for God is presupposed in

¹⁴ *Gnostic Chapters* 4.

¹⁵ See 2 Cor 12:2.

¹⁶ *Gnostic Chapters* 91.

¹⁷ *Gnostic Chapters* 25.

God's love for man – we see an example of this thinking in the First Epistle of John: “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Diadochus echoes this when he writes: “for one comes to live in love for God to the same extent that one receives the love of God”.¹⁸ Man has no love for God if he/she has not already received it from above.

The concept used by Diadochus pertaining to love is primarily *agapē*, which is also the most commonly used word for “love” in the New Testament. A few times, however, he also employs the concept of *erōs*, a word that is more commonly used when one speaks about love and affection between humans.¹⁹ It is a word never used in the New Testament, but frequently found in Plato and the Platonic tradition.²⁰ In Diadochus it is also used to describe man's intense desire, or yearning, for God. *Erōs* for God is the way to purity of heart: “It is a characteristic of a clean soul”, he writes, to have “a ceaseless yearning (*erōs apaustōs*) for the Lord of Glory”.²¹ He also uses it in relation to God's words, when you let yourself “be drawn by the ardent love of God's words” (*to erōti tōn theiōn logiōn*),²² or when you are yearning for the peace of God.²³ Indeed, the person who has experienced this intense love of God in his heart, is wholly transformed, described as a state of holy bliss, or ecstasy: “Once he has transcended (*hōs ekstas*) his self-love through love for God, his heart becomes consumed in the fire of love and clings to God with unyielding desire (*tini pothou*)”.²⁴ For Diadochus the area of this direct sensation of God is within the heart. God's presence makes itself felt “in the sense of the heart” (*en aisthēsei kardias*).²⁵ Here he differs from the church fathers Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and from the later ascetical writer Evagrius Pontus (356–399), who emphasized the role of the mind or spiritual intellect (*nous*) in the human being's relationship with the divine. Diadochus speaks far more frequently about the heart

18 *Gnostic Chapters* 14.

19 See Vegge in the present volume, who elaborates on the words used for love.

20 I treat the terms “concept of love” and “idea of love” as synonymous.

21 *Gnostic Chapters* 14.

22 *Gnostic Chapters* 10.

23 *Gnostic Chapters* 74.

24 *Gnostic Chapters* 14.

25 *Gnostic Chapters* 14; 16; 23; 40; 91.

(*kardia*) (Plested, 1996, p. 235).²⁶ It is the heart that is the centre of the human person and the organ of true knowledge. Echoing the Apostle Paul, Diadochus writes: “One who loves God with the sense of his heart ‘is known by him’” [1 Cor 8:3].²⁷ The experience of “being known” produces in some way the ability to know God through love (Madden, 1989, p. 55). Likewise, those who shun the divine light of knowledge are condemned to live with a “darkened and sterile heart”.²⁸ The heart is the source of passionate love for God as well as being the organ that God works on to allow, and contribute to, the person’s progress towards the likeness. The most explicit text on the role of the heart is *Chapters* 14, using both *erōs* and *agapē*, even *pothos* (desire):

The one who loves (*agapōn*) God with the sense of the heart (*en aisthēsei kardias*) “is known by him” [1 Cor 8:3], because inasmuch as one receives the love of God, according to that measure he will dwell in the love of God. And from that moment onward, he comes to find himself immersed in such an ardent longing (*en erōti tini*) for the illumination of the intellect, penetrating even his bones, that he loses all awareness of himself and is completely transformed by the love of God. Such a one is present and absent in this life. He has his body for a dwelling place, but vacates it through love (*agapēs*). He relentlessly moves toward God in his soul. Once he has transcended (*hōs ekstas*) his self-love through love for God, his heart becomes consumed in the fire of love and clings to God with unyielding desire (*tini pothou*). “If we seem out of our senses (*eksestēmen*) it was for God; but if we are being reasonable now, it is for your sake”. [2 Cor 5:13]

This text offers us the many-faceted role of the heart and its almost universal usage in Diadochan vocabulary. In the passage we see that the heart becomes the receptive vessel of the Holy Spirit, “receiving the love of God”. The heart is also the source of longing for illumination of the *nous*, including “even his bones”. The reference to bones is worth noting. Diadochus does not believe that our ultimate goal is to be freed from our bodies: to be human is to have a body, and to be saved is to be saved body

²⁶ Plested argues that the difference between the two should not be exaggerated.

²⁷ *Gnostic Chapters* 14. Cf. 1 Cor 8:3.

²⁸ *Gnostic Chapters* 82.

and soul. This understanding of human integration is also important to bear in mind with regard to the emphasis Diadochus gives to physically praying, both psalms, and the prayer “Lord Jesus”.

Although for many fathers God could not be felt or sensed and for the Greek philosophical tradition the heart played little role on the path to God, for Diadochus this is no problem. “His theology bears within itself a healthy tension between rationality and believing affectivity”, writes Cliff Ermatinger in his fine introduction to his translation of Diadochus’s works (Ermatinger, 2010, p. 23).

God’s Love as an Experience of Heart and Body

Thus, inspired by the spirituality of the Fathers of the Desert, Diadochus presents us with a completely new vocabulary when speaking of spiritual matters. By using terms like experience (*peira*), awareness or perception (*aisthēsis*) and taste (*geusis*), he seems to value the body just as much as the spirit. Each person is composed of body and soul (*psyche*) which are joined at the interface of the heart (*kardia*), pertaining to both of them and experiencing through both of them. Man’s nature is thus a fundamental unity of body and soul, as he puts it: “It is in his composite being (*syngkrasis*) that man finds his true integrity”.²⁹ The soul comprises three parts, of which the intellect (*nous*) is the guiding faculty. Because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve all human beings are subject to the “Pauline dualism” of soul and body. Only God is good by nature, but man can become good through careful attention to his way of life, and this depends on the extent to which he desires this. As we have seen, presenting the human being as a dynamic person is an important characteristic of Diadochus’s anthropology.

There is then, throughout the *Chapters*, a strong experiential emphasis that is almost absent from the more “intellectualist” Evagrius. “Diadochus’s spirituality is spelt out in terms of feeling and conscious awareness”, writes Kallistos Ware, author and bishop in the Eastern Orthodox Church (Ware, 1985, p. 559). According to Ermatinger, “The spirituality of Diadochus is nothing if not a lived theology” (Ermatinger, 2010, p. 14).

²⁹ *Vision* 29.

Given the experiential emphasis of Diadochus's theology, it is logical that he places the role of "experience" (*peira*) at centre stage. Although a common word in modern spirituality, it was rather uncommon in the first centuries after the New Testament. For Diadochus it meant a sensate awareness (*aisthēsis*) of God and of his love that is felt in the depths of our heart (*eis ta bathē tēs kardias*). Since the human being through baptism is given purification both to the soul and to the body,³⁰ his or her experience of God may be felt in his or her entire person – not only in heart and mind, but in the whole body: "As a result it transmits its own share of joy even to the body, in proportion to its progress, exulting without ceasing in its full confession of love"³¹ Diadochus even claims that having an experience of God is a necessary precondition for discourse about him.³² In other words, if you have not had a concrete experience of God that has touched your physical being in one way or other, you do not have the right to speak about him!

The love of God also brings about a transformation in the Christian, leading them to see the world as God sees it, including how they see other people: "When one begins to perceive the love of God in all its richness, one begins also to love one's neighbour with spiritual perception. This is the love of which all the Scriptures speak."³³ In the first page of his treatise he gives a list of ten definitions, among them faith, hope, purity, freedom from anger, and so on. In the ninth he defines love, *agapē*: "*Agapē* is to grow in friendship to those who insult us". As Ermatinger writes: "For Diadochus love of God leads to the love of the other. When one has experienced God's love, it flows over for love of the other" (Ermatinger, 2010, p. 23).

Spiritual Senses

Diadochus attaches great importance to the cultivation of the spiritual senses, and refers on almost every page to the "awareness" or inner perceptive faculty of the intellect (*aisthēsis noos*), the heart (*aisthēsis kardias*) or soul (*aisthēsis psychēs*); and language normally employed about physical

30 *Gnostic Chapters* 78.

31 *Gnostic Chapters* 25.

32 *Gnostic Chapters* 7.

33 *Gnostic Chapters* 15.

sensations is here transposed to the order of the spirit, or, expressed in another way, a function of bodily sense is used to illustrate something that takes place at a higher level of awareness (Madden, 1989, p. 53).

Among the spiritual senses, he especially emphasizes the one which is perhaps the most intense of all, the sense of taste (*geusis*). He also uses the language of intoxication. The soul becomes “drunk” with love: “the soul, being intoxicated by the love of God, intends to exult in the glory of the Lord with a silent voice”.³⁴ Diadochus, when describing the perception of the love of God with this term (*geusis*), finds perhaps the scriptural counterpart of his own personal experience when he quotes Ps 34:8/33:9: “Taste, it is said, and see that the Lord is good. Through the exercise of love, the mind retains the memory of this taste”.³⁵ The taste is said to be the fruit of love (*agapē*),³⁶ and from taste proceeds seeing, and gives rise to joy. Through love the Lord is known empirically to be good: “If we fervently long for God’s virtue, at the outset of our progress the Holy Spirit lets the soul taste God’s sweetness (*glykytētos*) in all the fullness of the sense”.³⁷ And the person who has tasted that the Lord is good, has an experience and a memory (*mnemē theou*) to bring along in the continuing process towards the likeness they are striving to achieve.

The Prayer of Jesus and Apophatic, Imageless Contemplation

In addition to being known for his emphasis on experience and the role of the heart in relation to the divine, Diadochus is also important for his contribution to the development of the Jesus Prayer. The short command of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians (5:17): “Pray without ceasing” has exercised a decisive influence upon Eastern Orthodox monasticism (Bunge, 2002, p. 105). The idea that prayer is not merely an activity restricted to fixed times of the day, but should be something you do uninterruptedly, was adopted during the fourth century by the

³⁴ *Gnostic Chapters* 8.

³⁵ *Gnostic Chapters* 30. See Madden, 1989, p. 53.

³⁶ *Gnostic Chapters* 1, 14, 23, 40, 50, 95.

³⁷ *Gnostic Chapters* 90.

monastic communities. They started to use short formulas of prayer that were continually repeated, also during practical work.³⁸ Among several short formulas designed for constant repetition, the one most commonly employed over the centuries became the so-called Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me”. The prayer is still integrated in the spiritual life of the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The origins of the prayer may, in fact, be found in Diadochus (Ware, 1985, pp. 561ff.; Johnson, 2010, pp. 33–34). Diadochus spoke constantly of the remembrance, or memory, of God (*mnemē theou*) (Goettmann, 2008, p. 19). Central though it was, it remained only a means to a higher goal, which is love (*agapē*). Yet it was a necessary means, a means to heal the split or fragmentation that the Fall produced in man: a division of the will, mind and memory into two inclinations, one towards good and the other towards evil. The memory of God is thus a way of freeing the intellect, or mind, from the multiplicity of thoughts. How, asked Diadochus, can our fragmented memory be reduced to unity? How can our ever-active mind be brought from restlessness to stillness, from multiplicity to wholeness? This is his answer:

When we have sealed off every venue through the memory of God, our mind (*nous*) will demand from us an exercise that satisfies its need for activity. Here we must let out a “Lord Jesus” (*to kyrie Iesou*), as the only perfect way to achieve our goal ... Let the mind contemplate this word alone at all times in its interior treasury so as not to return to the imagination.³⁹

Thus he links the remembrance of God to the name of Jesus. The memory of God is definitely Christocentric, concentrated upon the person of Christ. He insists on one unvarying form of invocation: *kyrie Iesou*, Lord Jesus. This invocation of the name Jesus is never treated as an end in itself, only as a means. The words “Lord Jesus” are given to the mind as a practical exercise and an object for its concentration, so that by focusing on them the mind will not wander, but be directed to a “deep mindfulness of the Lord” (*batheian mnemēn tou theou*).⁴⁰ In the thinking of Diadochus,

38 See Ware, 1985 for an excellent treatment of this theme.

39 *Gnostic Chapters* 59.

40 *Gnostic Chapters* 96. See McGuckin, 1999, p. 89.

consciousness is bound up with the memory of God, which is sustained through the Jesus Prayer (Madden, 1989, p. 55). The mind should be kept free of all fantasy and free of any thoughts about the material world, and should practise the so-called “imageless prayer”.⁴¹ Through habitual use, Diadochus states, the prayer becomes ever more spontaneous and self-acting, “just as a mother might teach her son to say ‘daddy’, repeating along with him until she brings him to say it clearly – even in his sleep ... Thus we will be urged on to the memory and love of God our Father with all our affection”.⁴²

The supreme aim of all contemplation is love: to love God and other human beings. This Diadochus makes clear in the very first sentence in the *Gnostic Chapters*: “All spiritual contemplation, brothers, should be guided by faith, hope and love – but above all by love”.⁴³ The constant meditating on the name, he claims, produces in us a love of God: “... the mind’s perseverance in the memory of that glorious and most desirable name with an ardent heart produces in us a habitual love of his goodness.”⁴⁴

The Jesus Prayer is thus a way of “keeping guard” of the mind and heart. Although it is a prayer in words, it is so short and simple that it enables one to reach out beyond language into the silence of God (Ware, 1987, p. 406). In this the apophatic attitude may be applied not only to theology but also to prayer (Ware, 1987, p. 399). By commending imageless prayer, Diadochus proposed a practical method to the attainment of the overall goal, the love of God.

Designating the prayer imageless, or apophatic, I do not mean that it is empty, bereft of content. Christian meditation and contemplation is never empty; its contents, however, are never an “object”. The Bible and the liturgy are full of words, images and notions of God and they are all used in prayer. But since these words and images do not express the truth about God – since God himself is beyond words and images – the Christian orthodox tradition often urges us to balance the affirmative, cataphatic prayer with the negative, apophatic approach.

41 *Gnostic Chapters* 68.

42 *Gnostic Chapters* 61.

43 *Gnostic Chapters* 1.

44 *Gnostic Chapters* 59.

Conclusion

The concept of love plays a central role in Diadochus's spiritual theology. In the process towards the likeness of God, the love of God (*agapē*) is the driving force. It is through love that humanity is able to renounce its own will and enslave its freedom to God. The love that human beings find in themselves is all given them from God. And the person who has experienced this love in their heart is transformed and may dwell in divine love.

It is noteworthy that Diadochus, probably inspired by the spirituality of the desert fathers, presents us with a vocabulary with a strong experiential emphasis when speaking of spiritual matters, a vocabulary rather uncommon in a tradition that owed so much to Platonic intellectualism. Concepts like experience, heart, senses and taste are, as we have seen, commonly used by Diadochus.

In addition, Diadochus's contribution to the development of the Jesus Prayer is widely acknowledged. The name "Lord Jesus" was for Diadochus a means of strengthening mental focusing and concentration so as to arrive at a contemplation of God that would produce in us a love of the divine, the supreme aim of all.

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