

## ASCETICALLY SPEAKING, pp. 65-67

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### VANITY

St. John Chrysostom

When do you beat the air and run in vain? Every occupation has a purpose, obviously. Tell me then, what is the purpose of all the activity in the world? Answer, I challenge you! It is vanity of vanity: all is vanity.

### SEEKING HUMILITY

St. Gregory of Sinai

Those who seek humility should bear in mind the three following things: that they are the worst of sinners, that they are the most despicable of all creatures since their state is an unnatural one, and that they are even more pitiable than the demons, since they are slaves to the demons. You will also profit if you say this to yourself: how do I know what or how many other people's sins are, or whether they are greater than or equal to my own? In our ignorance you and I, my soul, are worse than all men, we are dust and ashes under their feet. How can I not regard myself as more despicable than all other creatures, for they act in accordance with the nature they have been given, while I, owing to my innumerable sins, am in a state contrary to nature.

### ORTHODOXY NOT JUST THEORY

Archbishop Averky

Orthodoxy is not only the sum total of dogmas accepted as true in a purely formal manner. It is not only theory, but practice; it is not only right faith but a life that agrees in everything with this faith. The true Orthodox Christian is not only he who thinks in an Orthodox manner but who feels according to Orthodoxy and lives Orthodoxy, who strives to embody the true Orthodox teaching of Christ in his life.

### FORGIVENESS GOSPEL

St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco

Let us hasten to forgive each other all hurts and offences. Let us ever hear the words of the Gospel of Forgiveness. Sunday: *If ye forgive men their trespasses,*

*your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (Matt. 6:14-15).*

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## WE MUST PRACTICE ASCESIS AND LIVE THE DIVINE ENERGIES

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

Theology that is taught like a science usually examines things historically and, consequently, things are understood externally. Since patristic asceticism and inner experience are absent, this kind of theology is full of uncertainty and questions. For with the mind one cannot grasp the Divine Energies if he does not practice asceticism and live the Divine Energies, that the grace of God might be energized within him. Whoever thinks that he can come to know the mysteries of God through external scientific theory, resembles the fool who wants to see Paradise with a telescope.

## OUR SECOND BIRTH (BAPTISM) IS A WONDERFUL TREASURE NO ONE CAN TAKE AWAY

St. Cyprian of Carthage

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of Scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.

## TRUE LOVE FROM THE MURDERED TO THE MURDERER

An account by Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand, heroic imprisoned minister, as in Orthodox Heritage, Message of the Month (March 2003)

At my right hand was an Orthodox priest by the name of Iscu. He was Abbot of a monastery. This man, perhaps in his 40's, had been so tortured he was near to death. But his face was serene. He spoke about his hope of heaven, about his love of Christ, about his faith. He radiated joy.

On my left side was the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest almost to death. He had been arrested by his own comrades. And so it happened that the Communist torturer who had tortured this priest nearly to death had been tortured

nearly to death by his comrades. And he was dying near me. His soul was in agony.

During the night he would awaken me saying, 'Pastor, please pray for me. I can't die, I have committed such terrible crimes.'

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Then I saw a miracle. I saw the agonizing priest calling two other prisoners. And leaning on their shoulders, slowly, slowly he walked past my bed, sat on the bedside of his murderer, and caressed his head - I will never forget this gesture. I watched a murdered man caressing his murderer! That is love - he found a caress for him.

The priest said to the man, 'You are young; you did not know what you were doing. I love you with all my heart.' But he did not just say the words. You can say 'love,' and it's just a word of four letters. But he really loved. 'I love you with all my heart.' Then he went on, 'If I who am a sinner can love you so much, imagine Christ, Who is Love incarnate, how much He loves you! And all the Christians whom you have tortured, know that they forgive you, they love you, and Christ loves you. He wishes you to be saved much more than you wish to be saved. You wonder if your sins can be forgiven. He wishes to forgive your sins more than you wish your sins to be forgiven. He desires for you to be with Him in Heaven. He is love. You only need to turn to him and repent.'

In this prison cell in which there was no possibility of privacy, I overheard the confession of the murderer to the murdered. Life is more thrilling than a novel - no novelist has ever written such a thing. The murdered - near to death - received the confession of the murderer. The murdered gave absolution to this murderer. They prayed together, embraced each other, and the priest went back to his bed.

Both men died that same night. It was Christmas Eve. But it was not a Christmas Eve in which we simply remembered that 2000 years ago Jesus was born in Bethlehem. It was a Christmas Eve during which Jesus was born in the heart of a Communist murderer.