

# BALAAM'S ASS

Or

A Sinner's Thoughts (Part Three)

by

Photios Kontoglou<sup>1</sup>

“And God opened the mouth of the ass  
and it spake to Balaam.”

(cf. Num. 22:28)

- All of us have labored to build the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) in which we live today and none of us can understand one another. Instead of stones [for the tower], we have used our hearts of stone; instead of mortar, we have used our ego.
- Philosophers, with their various theories and convoluted prattle, are altogether pointless for the Christian.
- We expect men to console us, knowing full well that their consolations are futile.
- Becoming a Christian means becoming simple. If one isn't simple, one can't become a Christian — even if one appears, from some false indications, to be a Christian.
- Fortunate are the simple and those who love simple and quiet things.
- O Lord, enlighten me and purify me, so that I may be able to love my enemies, because I should eagerly follow Thy venerable commands and forgive them. But how can I love them when many of them are like devils and insult Thee? Teach me, O Lord, because I don't know how to do this.

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<sup>1</sup>Selections translated by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston from the periodical *Kivotós* (in Greek), Athens, June 1952, pp. 237–238.

- One who has no contrition is a dead soul. That is why his mind is always aswirl with speculation. Faith in Christ is like water that springs up and gives us life everlasting [as the feast of Mid-Pentecost teaches us].
- Christ has enlarged man’s heart, whereas arrogance has constricted it. Humility expands the heart — this is truly extraordinary.
- If you were to give a Christian all the world’s treasures and glories, he wouldn’t want them. Indeed, he would reject all these things without even forcing himself, not only because these things separate him from his beloved Lord, but also because they no longer please him at all. They seem distasteful to him. What use does he have of them? Christ tells us that His burden is grievous and that His way is strait. Yet elsewhere He says that His burden is sweet and light. This is because in the beginning [of the spiritual life], the carnal man loves his flesh and it seems grievous to him to deny it. Nonetheless, once he has tasted the sweetness and love of God, this flame quenches every other carnal desire in his heart. That which, at first, had seemed grievous and difficult later becomes easy and desirable. Not only that, but everything carnal becomes distasteful and dead for him. This is what the Apostle Paul says — that is, that the carnal man dies within, together with his passions and lusts. Once a person loves Christ, he is crucified “with the passions and lusts” (Gal. 5:24). As the carnal man dies, the spiritual man comes to life mystically. It is concerning this new man that Christ spoke when He said, “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matt. 11:30).
- Fortunate is the man who has truly understood his weakness. He has seized the rope that will extract him from the labyrinth in which we find ourselves; this “rope” will bring him to the knowledge of God.
- How many times do we repeat the words of David: “As for man, his days are as the grass” (Ps. 102:13)? Yet few of us have understood them with our heart, so that we might direct our life accordingly.
- It is easier for a man who sins in the body to be saved than one who sins in the spirit.
- Everything human withers. Only the Gospel, “the unfading rose,” is everlastingly fresh.

- The flesh is the source of all evil: it is the source of gluttony, greed, and vainglory. In Orthodoxy, the flesh is the cause of every deformation and ruination, be it in our ecclesiastical iconography or our liturgical chant, which it adulterates with theatrical elements. Orthodoxy is spirit, and the spirit is adulterated by the flesh.
- The love of Christ is peaceful and unperturbed, whereas the love of the world is disturbed.

