

BALAAM'S ASS

Or

A Sinner's Thoughts (Part Four)

by

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

(cf. Num. 22:28)

- When you speak to pseudo-Christians about severe bodily and spiritual asceticism for the love of Christ, they become angry; they call you a fakir, an idolater, and a barbarian. If you want to test the faith of a Christian, speak to him about the ascetical life. The faithful Christian will feel contrite; the luke-warm — that is, the false — Christian, will protest. So what if Christ tells us, “Blessed are they that have forsaken all things and followed Me”? Or, “The Kingdom of God suffereth violence and the violent take it by force”? Or, “Ye shall be afflicted”? Or, “Strait and afflicted is the way that leadeth to life”? We want to be Christians without Christ — that is, without spiritual affliction, without taking up the austerity of the Cross. We want to follow the broad path. When someone speaks to these pseudo-Christians about a difficult and deprived life, about sacrifice, about the ascetical life, they say that Christ doesn't want these things, that one who practices these things is over-doing it. But in Christianity, O foolish man, nothing [godly] can be over-done. In regards to human affairs, you might say that something is over-done. For Christianity, there is no over-doing it. What “over-doing it” can there be when you are taught to love even the man who has killed your father? What “over-doing it” can there be when you are asked to turn the other cheek when you are smitten? What “over-doing it” can there be when you are asked to hunger and thirst

¹Selections translated by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston from the periodical *Kivotós* (in Greek), Athens, November 1952, p. 421.

for the contempt of men? What “over-doing it” can there be when you are asked to do whatever Christ commands — that is, that you should love your enemies, that you should speak kindly to him that insults you, that you should not judge him that condemns you, that you should humble yourself before the least of all men, and that when you have done all these things you should say that you are an “unprofitable servant” (Lk. 17:10)? Furthermore, what “over-doing it” can there be when you are taught to believe that our bodies will arise immortal in the twinkling of an eye? That all of the world will be transfigured suddenly, and that there will be another, new, incorruptible world? So can there be such a thing as “over-doing it” in Christianity? Christianity is the hyperbole of hyperboles, the most incredible of things incredible. That is why there is only one portal whereby one enters the new land of Christ: faith. As far as faith is concerned, there is no “over-doing it.” In contrast, for those who disbelieve, there is scheming cleverness, slackening, and compromise. That is why such pseudo-Christians cannot endure the fire of faith and have turned Christianity into an ethical system useful only for this earthly life. In this understanding of Christianity, there is no need at all of Christ. The unbeliever fears, whereas he that believes “is confident as a lion” (Prov. 27:28), as Solomon says.

