

BALAAM'S ASS

Or

A Sinner's Thoughts (Part Six)

by

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

(cf. Num. 22:28)

- If you insult people, or argue with them, or write something against them, there comes a time when they may forgive you (“Forget about it, my brother! Let bygones be bygones!”). The one thing for which they will never forgive you, and for which they will hate you, is if you live in a manner that makes them feel ashamed of their own lives, or that censures their lives.
- Whoever has tasted the peace of God in his heart will constrain himself to be poor. He will desire poverty willingly, and he will grieve when he acquires something unnecessary, though it be the most worthless of things. Furthermore, without saying anything to anyone, he will feel a secret and heartfelt love for the humblest, the most paltry, and the most disdained of objects — because the humble man loves humble things and silence and wants to be forgotten. “God is nigh to the sorrowful of heart.”
- As soon as our spiritual trials have ended and the door of gaiety and ease opens, the portal of true joy closes. The Christian understands this perfectly.
- A prayer: I thank Thee, O most merciful Lord, I praise Thee, I glorify Thee, because Thou hast created me out of nothing. Yet Thou didst not create me just once, but Thou dost create me out of nothing every day; Thou dost extract me daily from the shadow of death into which I fall

¹Selections translated by Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston from the periodical *Kivotós* (in Greek), Athens, November, 1952, p. 422, and September, 1953, p. 358.

repeatedly. In this boundless world, in this swarming ant colony of mankind, I am nothing. Every single man is nothing. And yet, as if each one of us were alone in this world, Thou rememberest every man, Thou dost find him, Thou dost draw him to Thyself, Thou dost quicken him and raise him from the dead; Thy paternal hand doth fashion him anew. Thy mighty strength doth sustain all mankind and each and every soul, as though each were unique. Thou dost enable each and every one to aspire to immortality; to understand that Thou art our compassionate Father, Who never wearies of forgiving us or of creating us anew when we die from sin every moment of our life.

- Contemporary man occupies himself with many pointless pursuits, but with nothing that is edifying for his soul. He is like an empty bottle. He has no purpose on this earth. He has become “unsightly and formless,” like the earth was before it was illumined by the Spirit of God.
- Our mechanized [and computerized] man shall again fervently desire that which he has lost: simplicity of soul and life.
- The liturgical worship of the Orthodox Church is not — as some suppose — a conventional or man-made invention, but rather a true expression of the true Faith of Christ.
- According to the Septuagint text, the Prophet Ezekiel says, “And set a mark on the foreheads of men” (Ez. 9:4). In the Hebrew it says, “and set a *Tau* on the foreheads of men.” The *Tau* is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In one ancient manuscript of the Samaritan text, the *Tau* is shaped like a +, derived from the ancient Phoenician; it is from this latter language that the Greek “T” is derived. The early Christians believed that this prophesied the Sign of the Cross. Tertullian says, “‘Set the mark *Tau* upon the foreheads of men.’ Now the Greek letter *Tau* and our own [Latin] T is the very form of the Cross” (*Against Marcion*, Book III, chap. 22). Like the translators of the Septuagint, Christ Himself called the Cross “the sign of the Son of Man in heaven” (Matt. 24:30). Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness in that same form. Christ Himself called Moses’ act a prophecy of the Cross, saying, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up”

(John 3:14). Finally, in the Book of Revelation, it says, “we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads” (Rev. 7:3).

[Tr. Note: Our readers should keep in mind that, at least until the sixth century, the early Christians made the Sign of the Cross on their foreheads.]



“.... As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.” (John 3:13; cf. Num. 21:6–9)