East Meets West: Consumerism and Asceticism

Rev. Fr. Gregory Jensen, Ph.D.
St Sophia Ukrainian Orthodox Theological Seminary

I. Preparation for a joyful life.
   a. Christian asceticism liberates me for joy in two ways:
      i. Provides an anthropological sound foundation to understand human life
      ii. Provides a constellation of practical directives for human flourishing &
           Christian holiness
II. Consumption & culture
   a. Consumption and culture shape each other
III. Human beings were created hungry.
   a. We are by nature consumers
   b. As part of our “original hunger” we engage and shape the creation
   c. Communion with God and creation is the source of our self-understanding
   d. Taken as a whole, eating, working, marriage and family manifest our...
      i. absolute (ontological) dependency on God
      ii. relative (empirical) dependency on the world of persons, events and things
      iii. aspiration (desire) for a way of life that transcends the merely physical and
           functional dimensions
      iv. enduring (even if at time, hidden) desire for God.
IV. The spirituality of consumption
   a. Extremes to avoid
      i. Prodigal consumption
      ii. Parsimonious abstinence
   b. Ascetical consumption & the love of neighbor
   c. A Practical Example: The Nuns of Holy Trinity Orthodox Monastery
V. Asceticism & our economic life
   a. Asceticism is the Christian “Third Way”
   b. The Passions
   c. Asceticism & communion with the Holy Trinity
   d. Asceticism and our likeness of Christ
   e. “From glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18)
   f. A rhythm of personal renunciation and development
   g. Spiritual disciplines
      i. Prayer
      ii. Fasting
      iii. Almsgiving
      iv. Manual labor
   h. Monastic vows & economic virtues
      i. Poverty (simplicity)
      ii. Chastity (respect)
      iii. Obedience (prayerful living)
iv. Stability (vocational fidelity)

VI. Conclusion
   a. Consumption & culture shape each other
   b. We are by nature consumers
   c. Consumerism reflects the spiritual vacuum created by the Fall
   d. Asceticism is the Christian “Third Way”
   e. No asceticism, no freedom, so no free market

Contact information

Ss Cyril & Methodius Orthodox Church
3902 Milwaukee St Box 7011
Madison WI 53707-7011

(608) 561-1568
pastor@madisonorthodox.com