

East Meets West: Consumerism and Asceticism

Theology and Human Nature

- We heard that **human beings are "by nature consumers"** and possess an "original hunger" that is part of our created design. How does this perspective change our understanding of consumerism—not as a new vice, but as a **"spiritual vacuum" created by the Fall** that misdirects a natural desire?
- If we define human existence as **"absolute dependency on God"** and "relative dependency on the world of persons," how should this theological anthropology challenge the economist's traditional model of the "autonomous, self-interested individual"?

The Economic "Third Way"

- Neither **"prodigal consumption"** nor **"parsimonious abstinence"** fosters human flourishing, and both extremes can "fail my neighbor". How can we practically define a **"spirituality of consumption"** that enjoys material goods (like the wedding at Cana) without falling into avarice?.
- The presentation identifies **asceticism as the Christian "Third Way"**. For those in mainline Protestant or Evangelical traditions who may be less familiar with formal asceticism, how can the "constellation of practical directives" (like fasting and manual labor) be adapted by faithful in your tradition?

Ethics and Social Application

- St. Maximos the Confessor suggests that **material things are not evil**, but that "misuse" occurs when the "intellect fails to cultivate its natural powers". Looking at your own tradition, what systems or habits does it encourage to help people to cultivate their "intellect" to resist the "crippling uncertainty" of the passions?.
- How does the economic concept of **"comparative advantage"**—illustrated by the tall and short dudes specializing in different tasks—integrate with the theological call to **"communion" and the "love of neighbor"**? Does economic specialization facilitate a form of "relative dependency" that can be used for spiritual growth?.

Practical Christian Living

- Let's accept for the sake of argument that **"consumption and culture shape each other"** in a continuous cycle. What are the most effective **"spiritual disciplines"** (e.g., almsgiving, stability, or simplicity) that laity and clergy can use to break a culture of "killing" consumerism and replace it with "likeness to Christ"?
- Reflecting on the example of **Madre Inez and the Nuns of Holy Trinity Monastery**, do monastic vows like "poverty" (as simplicity) and "obedience" (as prayerful living) offer a scalable model for **human flourishing** in a secular, consumer-driven economy?

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