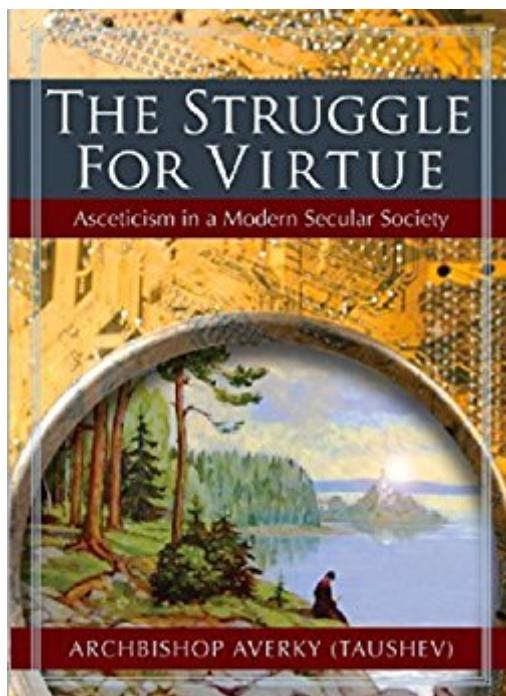


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The Struggle For Virtue: Asceticism In A Modern Secular Society



Synopsis

Archbishop Averky is considered one of the great scholars of 20th-century Orthodoxy and this book brings to the English-speaking world his answer to the question "What is asceticism?" • A bearer of the saving doctrine of the Patristic teaching, he steadfastly defended traditional Orthodoxy and passed on this teaching through his commentaries on Scripture and other works in the Russian language. In showing how evil is rooted out and virtue is implanted in the soul, Archbishop Averky counters the many false understandings that exist showing that the practice of authentic asceticism is integral to the spiritual life and the path to blessed communion with God.

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Customer Reviews

This book definitely has very helpful spiritual challenges in it but I found it a "struggle" to read in some ways that lead to me offer a few words of caution to prospective readers. First, I might also note that, after my first read through, I would have only given it 3 stars but my appreciation for the book grew significantly from being part of an online discussion group. The discussion questions pushed me to take the book more slowly and really consider what the author meant when it wasn't

clear on the surface. Therefore, expect the book to be some work. Secondly, it is important to realize that the book chapters are actually slightly edited lectures given by the author and they were not all translated by the same person. Thus, it reads differently than most books where an author composes with the intention of it being a book on a specific topic. The Introduction is excellent. Many of the other chapters have fine content too but, at times, it is not clear how it all ties together to be book about asceticism. (This became clearer toward the end, however, and with multiple readings of chapters.) Thirdly, the author's lectures were given just after World War II. There is nothing wrong with this but someone not familiar with the life and times of the author might be anticipating that a newly released book about "modern" society might be more contemporary. Many of his observations were still quite relevant. Fourthly, VI. Averky has a tendency at times to make rather extreme and broad statements at times that I found distracting. It certainly may have been my personal weakness that caused me to react this way and I was able to garner more meaning with effort, but I warn others of this possible trap.

Asceticism can be a scary word to laity. We tend to largely ignore it, and convince ourselves that it is something suitable for priests, sisters, and monks, but certainly not us! That thought process could not be further from the truth. Asceticism is, in fact, the "constant practice of good works." These works consist of love of God, love of neighbor, and any other works that show we are trying to love God and neighbor. All of this information is spelled out in the introduction of the book, *The Struggle for Virtue*. The book then goes on to discuss subjects such as pride and humility, Christian love, conscience, and spiritual warfare. I am not bold enough to pick a section that spoke to me more than the others, because it felt like they were all shouting at me, not in a bad way, but in a you can do better in your spiritual life. You can be better. For example, Chapter Seven deals with the distractions of life. This is something that has always been present, and not a new phenomenon that just affects our current generation. Thus, we must work to shield our heart from seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling or feeling anything that will lead us to sin. Easier said than done. I know! Chapter Eight: Resisting Evil and Chapter Nine: Waging Unseen Warfare are both vitally important to your everyday life. Four steps are given by the Holy Fathers, which I will briefly summarize: 1. Based on your life experience, know your weakness and know that you cannot do any good without God's help. 2. Ask God to reveal to you your weaknesses. 3. Fear for yourself and beware of Satan, knowing that you can only wrestle with him with God's help. 4.

This is an excellent introductory into Orthodox spirituality and ascetic theology. It is well translated

into fluid and vivid English. It starts with simple basic points and then develops them in depth in an easy and accessible manner relying on the core of Orthodox Patristics of the Ascetic Fathers. My only fault with it is that it does not go the one step further into demonstrating how a) the Power of the Divine Energies of Grace are transmitted through the Mysteries of the Church and b) how the origins of modern secularism and misconceptions about Christianity are rooted in the misconceptions of Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. This latter is mentioned but needs to be further articulated so that it is made clear that the mechanistic, juridical Western reduction of the meaning of Redemption is seen as the basis for modernist objections to Orthodox asceticism. The Calvinist idea of total depravity which is the final form of the Augustinian predestination and inherited "original" guilt errors produces a pathological passivity and fatalism so that Redemption becomes merely a buying off of merciless Divine justice via Anselm's Vicarious Satisfaction Theory (which isolates the Crucifixion and actually demeans the ascetic achievement of the Saviour) rather than the Apostolic/Patristic Orthodox teaching of the union of the Divine and human natures in Christ (so that they cohere) which lies at the core of the Seven Ecumenical Councils and which empowers the Christian Orthodox striver with the Grace (via the Church) needed to proceed on the path of deification by Grace whose groundwork is laid by the Resurrection and descent of the Holy Spirit on the Church at Pentecost which are the culminations of the union of the two natures in the God-man Christ.

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