

Through ascetic discipline, we avoid gluttony by bridling the mind and senses and exercising our ability to say no to them. Having attained mental and physical control, we are able to resist when pushers tempt us to taste forbidden fruits. Freedom depends on this self-control. Without it we become slaves to our bodily appetites and to those who supply our self-destructive addictions. This bondage can diminish our ability to respond to God's grace. Unless we cultivate the ability to say no to both the kind and quantity of what is available for our consumption, we live without discipline like two-legged wild animals, completely at the mercy of our base wants and needs. Being civilized, mature adults should mean that we are in control of our appetites.

In reality, many non-Christians are highly civilized, while the Christians seeking to evangelize them are not. This is scandalous. While Christians should be models of ascetic virtue and leaders in moral sensitivity and stewardship, large numbers of them are slaves to the false gods of the tempter's world. Some of these addicts have become pushers of consumerism themselves in order to support their own perversely pleasurable but destructive habits. How is it possible that the pious, gentle, ascetic church of the apostles has appeared to permutate into the voracious, violence-ridden, materialistic, so-called Christian culture of today? Where and how have we Catholics deviated from the ancient moral ethical standards of our faith? What has happened to our asceticism, our moral teaching, our discipline?

Our Ascetic Heritage

Asceticism was the common discipline that incarnated the moral theology of the pre-Advent, non-ethnocentric, salvific, incarnational monotheism devoted to Eli-Jahu. Eli-Jahu's ascetics lived lives of intercessory penance for the sake of others' salvation. They sought to participate in the redemption of humanity and the restoration of earth. Whether they were Greek ascetics, Jewish *tzaddics*, Vaishnava *saddhus*, *sadhakas*, *sattvatas*, or Pure Land Buddhist *bodhisattvas*, these *sants* (saints) took an active role in the divine effort to restore enslaved humans to their rightful dignity as children of God. Like these pre-Advent Eli-Jahu believers, later Christian ascetics abstained from unnecessary killing and the consumption of flesh sacrificed to false gods. They abstained from intoxication, gambling, and sexual activity other than lawful wedded union. These activities were seen as debasing and polluting to both the inner and outer world of humanity. In our time, the Vaishnava Mahatma Gandhi taught these principles as *ahimsa*