

with particular social problems resulted in a pathological pattern of moral compromise and inculturation that did not ultimately serve the global cause of Christ very well. Earth's present moral-ecological crisis is partly the poisonous fruit of this pathological inculturation. While some evangelized peoples continued in their newly refined, church-polished, covered barbarism, Christians in holy orders (priests, monks, and nuns) still taught and exercised spiritually via the ancient disciplines. As time passed, the ratio of religious to laity changed and the moral gap between them widened. Eventually, for many the idea of salvation was more connected to the formal profession of doctrine than it was to the subsequent practice of living Christ's morality in a continuing state of His grace.

An example of this change-process in disciplinary expectations can be seen in relationship to dietary temperance and the use of alcohol. First, dietary concessions were made for missionary religious living in the hostile environments of Northern Europe, where game was often the only food available in the midst of long, harsh winters. General flesh abstinence was not only impractical, but often impossible in some mission fields. Necessary adjustments in the ascetic rules were made. In some places, due to a lack of potable water, beer or wine was regularly mingled with it to kill germs. Such exceptional and justifiable modifications seem to have been the beginning of the end for the ancient apostolic practices of general abstinence from flesh foods and alcohol. Over the centuries, human frailty, time, and circumstance conspired to change slowly the ancient standard of abstinent and temperate behavior for believers. Nazarite Jews had abstained from consuming flesh and alcoholic wine. Knowledge of such abstinence, common among the Apostolic Fathers, finally disappeared from popular Western Christian memory. Then the slow cultural corruption of much religious life insured that it would remain forgotten for many in the church.

In time, a class of believers was created that was not expected to live up to old apostolic standards. Religious were still expected to, but eventually the standard itself was modified by religious for various justifiable and spurious reasons of survival and inculturation. These modifications then became a standard unto themselves and various rationales were created to defend the once exceptional practices as if they were actually part of our authentic Judeo-Christian moral heritage. Anti-ascetical Christianity is still suffering today from a pathological denial of this moral corruption. This nominal Christianity has become more and more locally confounded with the peculiar sins of cultures, races, and nationalities. This corrupt Christianity does not transcend such things as racism and sexism, but rather, it has been pressed into the service of these things. God's authority in Jesus Christ has now been invoked by evil-do-