

The content of one of the steps of *The Ladder* (No. 22) discusses the labour of uprooting vainglory (pride, self regard, self-centredness, egotism, hubris, narcissism). St. John writes,

Like the sun, which shines on all alike, vainglory beams on every occupation. What I mean is this: I fast, and turn vainglorious. I stop fasting so that I will draw no attention to myself, and I become vainglorious over my prudence. I dress well or badly, and am vainglorious in either case. I talk or I remain silent, and each time I am defeated. No matter how I shed this prickly thing, a spike remains to stand up against me.

A vainglorious man is a believing idolater. Apparently honouring God, he actually is out to please not God but men. To be a show off is to be vainglorious. The fast of such a man is unrewarded and his prayer futile, since he is practicing both to win praise. A vainglorious ascetic doubly cheats himself, wearying his body and getting no reward....

The Lord frequently hides from us even the perfections we have obtained. But the man who praises us, or, rather, who misleads us, opens our eyes with his words and once our eyes are opened, our treasures vanish.

The flatterer is a servant of the devils, a teacher of pride, the destroyer of contrition, a ruiner of virtues, a perverse guide. The prophet says, *Those who honour you deceive you* (Isa. 3:12).

Men of high spirit endure offense nobly and willingly. But only the holy and the saintly can pass unscathed through praise....

No one knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit within him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:11). Hence, those who want to praise us to our face should be ashamed and silent.

When you hear that your neighbour or your friend has denounced you behind your back or indeed in your presence, show him love and try to compliment him.

It is a great achievement to shrug the praise of men off one's soul. Greater still is to reject the praise of demons.

It is not the self-critical who reveals his humility (for does not everyone have somehow to put up with himself?). Rather it is the man who continues to love the person who has criticized him....

Our neighbour is moved by nothing so much as by a sincere and humble way of talking and of behaving. It is an example and a spur to others never to become proud. And there is nothing to equal the benefit of this....

The Lord often humbles the vainglorious by causing some dishonour to befall them. And indeed, the first step in overcoming vainglory is to remain silent and to accept dishonour gladly. The middle stage is to restrain every act of vainglory while it is still in thought. The end—if one may talk of an end to an abyss—is to be able to accept humiliation before others without actually feeling it....

When those who praise us, or, rather, those who lead us astray, begin to exalt us, we should briefly remember the multitude of our sins, and in this way, we will discover that we do not deserve whatever is said or done in our honour.