

The Best of Jonathan's Corner

From the "Major Works" series

C.J.S. Hayward

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Foreword

By Sydney Nicoletta W. Freedman

The Best of Jonathan's Corner: An Anthology of Orthodox Christian Theology is a book that provides not only a good introduction to the author's work but also a dose of the clear thinking and spiritual wisdom prescribed for our times. The author lives to create treasure, and he has mined, refined, and gathered wisdom for our age. It is not new knowledge, but rather, it has been artfully distilled from the writings of Church Fathers and his own life, from study and experience.

The pieces in this book speak with clarity about spiritual topics and with depth about practical ones, addressing the intrigues and issues that we all face, explore, and question. Orthodox Christian readers will find insightful discussions of art and worship, such as "Lesser Icons," and lucid, applicable discussions of the spiritual life, such as "God the Spiritual Father." This Eastern Orthodox perspective may shed light on matters for readers from other traditions as well. Such is especially true for pieces on such timely issues as economic hardship ("Money," and "The Best Things in Life are Free") and the discussion of religion and science, including "'Religion and Science' Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution." Regarding this latter work, a Roman Catholic reader recently deemed it to be one of the 'most intelligent and erudite' things that he has ever

read. The essays on silence, the place of technology, and nature are treasures among the discussions of such popular and important issues. For those concerned with Orthodox theology and where it stands in relation to other denominations, “An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism” is profitable reading.

Illuminating reflections on the Christian life, including “An Author’s Musing Memoirs” and “Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance,” crown the theological articles, stemming from Hayward’s experiences and vast knowledge of Orthodox theology. The homilies, articles, commentaries, and essays in this book are treasure enough, but the talented writer has also included numerous creative pieces.

The poetic and fictional works in this book offer the same spiritual knowledge for which our society thirsts but in the deeper and more elevated way that is inherent to their genres. Some of the poems, “Open,” for example, are prayers, which readers may find to voice some of their own words and which fittingly glorify God and His saints. Other poetry, such as “How shall I Tell an Alchemist,” pointedly deals with questions of spirituality and theology with the magnified acuity that only this particular art can achieve. Socratic dialogue (“The Damned Backswing”) and other creative forms play their part as well, rounding out the book.

The work that stands out most among the creative pieces, perhaps among all of them, is that which opens the book, “The Angelic Letters.” I have had the pleasure of reading nearly all of Hayward’s writings, and I was delighted that he undertook to write such a work. Readers who are familiar with C. S. Lewis’ *The Screwtape Letters* will recognize at once that it is the very book which that author desired, but felt unable, to write in order to balance the demonic correspondence. It is a mark of Hayward’s skill, knowledge, and spiritual insight that he has successfully written something that such a theologian as Lewis did not wish to attempt. He has of course accomplished this work with God’s help, but one must realize the spiritual struggle, mental effort, careful study, and deep prayer that has gone into every piece in

this anthology. Hayward has done much work for us. He has grappled with questions and problems that many of us face, but we may not feel that we have the resources to confront them. We therefore can find within these pages words that will perhaps directly answer some of our questions and certainly facilitate the difficult but necessary task of learning and discerning that we all must carry out, each as he is able. I am privileged to introduce some of the fruit that has come from the author's efforts to complete this task himself so that all may benefit from both its example and its contents. May it leave seeds of knowledge in all who read. This author has gathered pearls for us, and may we gladly look upon them. They hold glimmers that can reflect our lives.

Treasure

Treasure is not measured in dollars

I would like to begin by telling a story. I was in a medical waiting room for a medical test, when a mother came in, pulling along a little girl by the hand, and taking care of the paperwork. The child had, by the looks of it, slammed her thumb in a door or something similar: there was a dark purple bulge under her thumbnail. I remembered when that had happened to me, and I was *not* a happy camper. No wonder the little girl was bawling her eyes out!

She was sitting in a chair, and I thought things might be better if she were engaged in a conversation. So, gently and softly, I told her a joke: "What kind of musical instrument does a dog play?" and answered, "A trombone." She didn't get it. So I tried to talk about several other things, trying and failing to engage her in conversation. After a few minutes, I had still managed an absolute zero percent success rate at making age-

appropriate conversation that would allow her to contribute her half of the conversation. But I realized something: she was looking at me, and she was not crying. I had obtained her rapt attention, and for the moment she had completely stopped crying.

I was called and politely took my leave; a few minutes later, after my blood draw, I came out and the mother was giving TLC and comforting her daughter. The mother said, "You have a very gentle way about you." I thanked her, shook the daughter's hand, and told her, "I have to leave now, but I'm glad I met you." The mother repeated once or twice, "You have a very gentle way about you." And she caressed her little one.

This is a tale of treasure, and it arose in my heart, perhaps, because none of it is measured with dollars. My blood test cost money, of course, and the treatment of the child's thumb presumably also cost money, of course, but the treasure is not measured in dollars. If the treasure were of gold, or some other material item, one could equate treasure with a high dollar value, but for the mother to pay me money, or for me to ask for it, would have been a crass way of defacing a treasure. There was joy and a lesson in it for me, and pain relief and a pleasant meeting for the child, but this, this *treasure*, falls under the heading of "The best things in life are free."

By contrast, I would tell a joke:

I was trying to help a friend's son look into colleges, and yesterday he handed me the phone, really excited, and said, "You have got to speak with these guys." I fumbled the phone, picked it up, and heard, "—online. We offer perhaps the best-rounded of degrees, and from day one our students are equipped with a top-of-the-line Dell running up-to-the-minute Vista. We address back-end issues, giving students a grounding in Visual Basic .NET, striking the right balance between 'reach' and 'rich,' and a thorough groundings in Flash-based design and web design optimized for the latest

version of Internet Explorer. Throw in an MCSE, and marketing-based communication instruction that harnesses the full power of PowerPoint and covers the most effective ways to make use of animated pop-ups, opt-in subscriber lists, and—"

I interrupted. "Internet Exploder 6? Minesweeper Consultant and Solitaire Exp—excuse me, but what is your organization *called*?"

"The *A-rist-o-crats*."

For those of you who have been spared the joke, there is a classic off-color joke where a group of performers approach a theatre owner or the like, are asked what they do and describe an X-rated show that is grosser than gross (bestiality, necrophilia, ...), and when asked what they are called, say, "The Aristocrats."

The fork off that joke above is that all of these mostly technological items, however expensive, are false treasure at best. The original "The Aristocrats" is plain in advertising anti-treasure; the latter take, in a Unix chauvinist's way, has things that appear to be treasure but are really false treasure, anti-treasure that calls for the grosser-than-gross pun. *And perhaps more than one of those jokes is false treasure, but we won't go into that.*

My reason for mentioning treasure that is free, like the best things in life, and expensive anti-treasure, is to say that while many treasures may be worth money, and bigger treasures can be worth more money, real treasure is beyond money. *The best things in life are free*, as the saying goes.

Living for treasure

I live to create treasure. Actually I live to contemplate God, and worship his glory, but there are a million concrete ways one

can contemplate God, and one of them is creating treasure. My website at CJSHayward.com is created to be a treasure, or a treasurehouse of treasures, and while there are pieces you could look at and say, "You botched this and that," my intent is still to create a treasure. There are other areas where I try to create treasure (a picturebook of loved ones for a hospitalized child), but the greatest success I receive is to finish something and find it has been a treasure to the person who has received it.

In "Doxology," God the Father is called,

The Treasure for whom all treasures are named,

And if ever there is treasure, he is God. Mankind and angels are treasures; there is a discussion in the Gospel where Christ is asked if it is lawful to pay a tax or not, asks to see the coin used to pay the tax, and asked whose image and superscription it was. "Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God;" thus Jesus Christ appealed to a principle that whoever coins money has the authority to tax that money. Augustine picks up on this: "Caesar seeketh his image; render it; God seeketh his image; render it. Let not Caesar lose from you his coin: let not God lose in you His coin." He explores it, and there is the suggestion at least that we are God's coins: first and foremost by being struck with his image, but it cannot be too far from mind that coins could be struck on precious metal, that a coin is treasure. Augustine attends to the minor point, that the mere earthly coin with Caesar's image is due to Caesar, but all the much more the coin imprinted in the image of God and nothing less, is due to God: a parish of faithful followers is much more a treasury than a room with chests of silver coins.

The Lord God Almighty and the Uncreated Light reigns over all; the Uncreated Light illumines the cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels: the glory and treasure of the Lord thunder through rank on rank of angel host. The Mother of God

bore God in her womb and exchanged with her Son: she gave him his humanity, and he gave to her from his divinity, leaving her as a treasure eclipsing all the angels. The treasure unfurls and unfolds on earth: the sacramental priesthood and the spiritual priesthood, songs, liturgy, angels, and ten thousand other treasures. And treasure is close to the heart of the treasure of the Church: a Church saying says, "If you have two small coins, you use one to buy bread for the altar, and the other to buy flowers for the icons."

Hard treasure

There are some hard lessons in "The Best Things In Life Are Free," and hard lessons in "Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance." But both of these give up false treasure for true treasure, true treasure for greater treasure. Christ commanded something great: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Some of us are to hold earthly treasure with detachment; others are to get rid of it altogether, but in any case we are called to reach far beyond earthly treasure for treasures in Heaven, such as good works, virtues, and graces. The call is a Narnian "Further up and further in!"

We live in a time where treasures seem to be evaporating, or at least money. Once a rising standard of living was taken for granted; now employment is not taken for granted. We are urged to sell gold for cash. But treasure is still here. *The best things in life are free, even now, even if we are in an arena, a cosmic coliseum.* False treasures abound; for treacherous technology, see the Technonomicon. And there is a great deal in technologies

that can be treacherous, *with a right grievous backswing*. But that is not all.

The authors John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes were authors with a very pessimistic view of mankind. But in the comic strip named after them, *Calvin and Hobbes*, we meet a claim well worth heeding:

There's treasure everywhere!

The Angelic Letters

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

I am writing to you concerning the inestimable responsibility and priceless charge who has been entrusted to you. You have been appointed guardian angel to one Mark.

Who is Mark, whose patron is St. Mark of Ephesus? A man. What then is man? Microcosm and mediator, the midpoint of Creation, and the fulcrum for its sanctification. Created in the image of God; created to be prophet, priest, and king. It is toxic for man to know too much of his beauty at once, but it is also toxic for man to know too much of his sin at once. For he is mired in sin and passion, and in prayer and deed offer what help you can for the snares all about him. Keep a watchful eye out for his physical situation, urge great persistence in the liturgical and the sacramental life of the Church that he gives such godly participation, and watch for his asceticism with every eye you have. *Rightly*, when we understand what injures a man, nothing can injure the man who does not injure himself:

but it is treacherously easy for a man to injure himself. Do watch over him and offer what help you can.

With Eternal Light and Love,
Your Fellow-Servant and Angel

My dear son Eukairos;

I would see it fitting to offer a word about medicating experience and medicating existence.

When one of the race of men medicates experience by means of wine, that is called drunkenness. When by means of the pleasures of the palate, that is called gluttony. When by means of other pleasures, it is called lust. When by means of possessions and getting things, it is called avarice. Escapism is an ancient vice and a root of all manner of evils: ancient Christians were warned strongly against attempting to escape this world by medicating experience.

Not that pleasure is the only way; medicating experience by mental gymnastics is called metaphysics in the occult sense, and medicating experience by means of technology is a serious danger.

Not all technologies, and perhaps not any technology, is automatically a problem to use. But when technologies become a drone they are a problem. Turning on a radio for traffic and weather news, and then turning it off, is not a drone. Listening to the radio at a particular time to devote your attention to a concert is not a drone. Turning on a radio in the background while you work is a drone; even *Zen and the Art of the Motorcycle Maintenance*

discusses what is wrong with mechanics having the radio on in the background. And texting to get specific information or coordinate with someone is not a drone, but a stream of text messages that is always on is a drone. Technology has its uses, but when technology is a drone, noise in the background that prevents silence from getting too uncomfortable, then it is a spiritual problem, a tool to medicate experience. And there are some technologies, like video games, that *exist* to medicate experience.

(Of course, technologies are not the only drone; when Mark buckles down to prayer he discovers that his mind is a drone with a stream of thoughts that are a life's work to quiet.)

More could be said about technologies, but my point here is to point out one of the dangers Mark faces. Not the only one, by any means, but he has at his disposal some very powerful tools for doing things that are detrimental. It's not just a steady stream of X-rated spam that puts temptation at his fingertips. He has all the old ways to medicate experience, and quite a few powerful technologies that can help him medicate his experience as well. And for that he needs prayer.

But what is to be done? The *ways* of medicating experience may be in some measure than many saints have contended with; the *answer* is the same. Don't find another way to medicate experience, or escape the conditions God has placed you in, trying to escape to Paradise. Don't ask for an easier load, but tougher muscles. Instead of escaping the silence, engage it. *Prayerfully* engage it. If your dear Mark does this, after repenting and despairing of finding a way to escape and create Paradise, he will find that escape is not needed, and Paradise, like the absent-minded Professor's

lost spectacles, were not in any of the strange places he looked but on his nose the whole time.

A man does not usually wean himself of drones in one fell swoop, but pray and draw your precious charge to cut back, to let go of another way of medicating experience even if it is very small, and to seek not a lighter load but a stronger back. If he weans himself of noise that medicates uncomfortable silence, he might find that silence is not what he fears.

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

Your Dearly Loving Elder,
Your Fellow-Servant,
But a Wind and a Flame of Fire

My dear, dear Eukairos;

When fingers that are numb from icy cold come into a warm, warm house, it stings.

You say that the precious treasure entrusted to you prayed, in an uncomfortable silence, not for a lighter load but for a stronger back, and that he was fearful and almost despairing in his prayer. And you wonder why he looks down on himself for that. Do not deprive him of his treasure by showing him how much good he is done.

He has awakened a little, and I would have you do all in your power to show him the silence of Heaven, however little he can receive it yet. You know some theologians speak of a river of fire, where in one image among others, the Light of Heaven and the fire of Hell are the same thing: not

because good and evil are one, but because God can only give himself, the uncreated Light, in love to his creatures, and those in Hell are twisted through the rejection of Christ so that the Light of Heaven is to them the fire of Hell. The silence of Heaven is something like this; silence is of Heaven and there is nothing to replace it, but to those not yet able to bear joy, the silence is an uncomfortable silence. It is a bit like the Light of Heaven as it is experienced by those who reject it.

Help Mark in any way you can to taste the silence of Heaven as joy. Help him to hear the silence that is echoed in the Church's chanting: when he seeks a stronger back to bear silence, strengthen his back, and help him to taste the silence not as bitter but sweet. Where noise and drones would anaesthetize his pain, pull hi *through* his pain to health, wholeness, and joy.

The Physician is at work!

With Eternal Light and Love,
Your Fellow-Servant and Angel

Dear blessed Eukairos;

Your charge has had a fall. Do your best that this not be the last word: help him get up. Right now he believes the things of God are not for those like him.

The details of the fall I will not treat here, but suffice it to say that when someone begins to wake up, the devils are furious. They are often given permission to test the awakening man, and often he falls. And you know how the

devils are: before a fall, they say that God is easy-going and forgiving, and after a fall, that God is inexorable. Do your best to aid a person being seduced with the lie that God is inexorable.

Mark believes himself unfit for the service of the Kingdom. Very well, and in fact he *is*, but it is the special delight of the King to work in and through men who have made themselves unfit for his service. Don't brush away a mite of his humility as one fallen, but show him what he cannot believe, that God wishes to work through him now as much as *ever* And that God wishes for him prayer, liturgy, sacrament..

And open his eyes now, a hint here, a moment of joy there: open them that eternity is now: eternal life is not something that begins after he dies, but that takes root now, and takes root even (or rather, *especially*) in those who repent. He considers himself unworthy of both Heaven and earth, and he *is*; therefore, in God's grace, give him both Heaven and earth. Open up earth as an icon, a window to Heaven, and draw him to share in the uncreated Light and Life.

Open up his repentance; it is a window to Heaven.

In Light and Life and Love,
Your Brother Angel

My dear fellow-ministering angel;

I would make a few remarks on those windows of Heaven called icons.

To Mark, depending on the sense of the word 'window', a 'window' is an opening in a wall with a glass divider, or alternately the 'window' is the glass divider separating inside from outside. But this is not the exact understanding when Orthodox say an icon is a window of Heaven; it is more like what he would understand by an open window, where wind blows, and inside and outside meet. (In most of human history, a window fitted with glass was the exception, not the rule.) If an icon is a window of Heaven, it is an opening to Heaven, or an opening between Heaven and earth.

Now Mark does not understand this, and while you may draw him to begin to sense this, that is not the point. In *The Way of the Pilgrim*, a man speaks who was given the sacred Gospels in an old, hard-to-understand book, and was told by the priest, "Never mind if you do not understand what you are reading. The devils will understand it." Perhaps, to Mark, icons are still somewhat odd pictures with strange postures and proportions. You may, if you want, help him see that there *is* perspective in the icons, but instead of the usual perspective of people in their own world, it is reverse perspective whose vanishing point lies behind him because Mark is in the picture. But instead of focusing on correcting his understanding, and certainly correcting his understanding all at once, draw him to venerate and look at these openings of Heaven. Never mind if he does not fully grasp the icons he venerates. *The devils will understand.*

And that is true of a great many things in life; draw Mark to participate in faith and obedience. He expects to understand first and participate second, but he needs to come to a point of participating first and understanding

second. Many things need to start on the outside and work inwards.

Serving Christ,
Whose Incarnation Unfurls in Holy Icons,
Your Fellow

Dear cherished, luminous son;

Your charge is reading a good many books. Most of them are good, but I urge you to spur him to higher things.

It is a seemingly natural expression of love to try to know as much about possible about Orthodoxy. But mature Orthodox usually spend less time trying to understand Orthodoxy through books. And this is *not* because they have learned everything there is to learn. (That would be impossible.) Rather, it is because they've found a deeper place to dig.

God does not want Mark to be educated and have an educated mind. He wants him to have an enlightened mind. The Orthodox man is not supposed to have good thoughts in prayer, but to have no thoughts. The Orthodox settled on the path have a clear mind that is enlightened in hesychastic silence. And it is better to sit in the silence of Heaven than read the Gospel as something to analyze.

Books have a place. Homilies have a place. But they are one shadow of the silence of Heaven. And there are more important things in the faith, such as fasting and

almsgiving, repentance and confession, and prayer, the crowning jewel of all asceticism. Give Mark all of these gems.

With Deep Affection,
Your Brother Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

Your priceless charge Mark has been robbed, and I am concerned.

He is also concerned about a great many things: his fear now, which is understandable, and his concerns about where money may come from, and his loss of an expensive smartphone and a beautiful pocketwatch with sentimental as well as financial value to him, and his inconvenience while waiting on new credit cards.

There are more concerns where those came from, but I am concerned because he is concerned about the wrong things. He has well over a week's food in his fridge and he believes that God failed to provide. Mark does not understand that *everything* that happens to a man is either a temptation God allowed for his strengthening, or a blessing from God. I am concerned that after God has allowed this, among other reasons so Mark can get his priorities straight, he is doing everything but seeking in this an opportunity for spiritual growth to greater maturity.

If you were a human employee, this would be the time for you to be punching in *lots* of overtime. Never mind that he thinks unconsciously that you and God have both

deserted him; your strengthening hand has been invisible to him. I do not condemn you for any of this, but this time has been appointed for him to have opportunities for growth and for you to be working with him, and the fact that he does not seek growth in this trial is only reason for you to work all the harder. That he is seeking to get things back the way they were, and suffering anger and fear, is only reason for you to exercise more diligent care. God is working with him now as much as ever, and I would advise you for now to work to the point of him seeking his spiritual good in this situation, however short he falls of right use of adversity for now.

Your name, "Eukairos," comes from "eu", meaning "good", and "kairos", an almost inexhaustible word which means, among other things, "appointed time" and "decisive moment." You and Mark are alike called to dance the great dance, and though Mark may not see it now, you are God's agent and son supporting him in a great and ordered dance where everything is arranged in God's providence. Right now Mark sees none of this, but as his guardian angel you are charged to work with him in the dance, a dance where God incorporates his being robbed and will incorporate his spiritual struggles and, yes, provide when Mark fails to see that the righteous will never be forsaken.

A good goal would be for Mark to pray for those that robbed him, and through those prayers honestly desire their good, or come to that point. But a more immediate goal is his understanding of the struggle he faces. Right now he sees his struggle in terms of money, inconveniences, and the like. Raise his eyes higher so he can see that it is a spiritual struggle, that God's providence is not overruled by this tribulation, and that if he seeks first the Kingdom of God,

God himself knows Mark's material needs and will show deepest care for him.

Your Fellow-Servant in Prayer,
**But an Angel Who Cannot Struggle Mark's Struggle
on his Behalf**

My dear, esteemed son and fellow-angel Eukairos;

That was a deft move on your part, and I thank you for what you have helped foster in Mark's thoughts.

Mark began to console himself with the deep pit of porn, that poison that is so easily found in his time and place. And he began to pray, on his priest's advice, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," and "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me," Saint John the Much-Suffering and Saint Mary of Egypt being saints to remember when fighting that poison. And you helped him for a moment to see how he was turned in on himself and away from others, and he prayed for help caring about others.

At 10:30 PM that night on the dot, one of his friends was walking in the dark, in torrential rains, and fell in the street, and a car ran over his legs. This friend was someone with tremendous love for others, the kind of person you cannot help but appreciate, and now that he had two broken legs, the flow of love reversed. And Mark unwittingly found himself in an excellent situation to care about something other than himself. He quite forgot about his money worries; and he barely noticed a windfall from an

unexpected source. He kept company and ran errands for his friend.

What was once only a smoldering ember is now a fire burning brightly. Work as you can to billow it into a blaze.

With an Eternal Love,
Your Respectful Brother Angel

My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;

I would recall to you the chief end of mankind. "To glorify God and enjoy him forever" is not a bad answer; the chief end of mankind is to contemplate God. No matter what you do, Mark will never reach the strictest sense of contemplation such as monastic saints enjoy in their prayer, but that is neither here nor there. He can have a life ordered to contemplation even if he will never reach the spiritual quiet from which strict contemplation is rightly approached. He may never reach beyond the struggle of asceticism, but his purpose, on earth as well as in Heaven, is to contemplate God, and to be deified. The point of human life is to become by grace what Christ is by nature.

Mark is right in one way and wrong in another to realize that he has only seen the beginning of deification. He *has* started, and only started, the chief end of human life, and he is right to pray, go to confession, and see himself as a beginner. But what he is *wrong* about is imagining that the proof of his fledgling status is that his wishes are not fulfilled in the circumstances of his life: his unconscious and unstated assumption is that if he had real faith like saints

who worked miracles, his wishes would be fulfilled and his life would be easier. Those saints had *less* wishes fulfilled, not more, and much harder lives than him.

(And this is beside the point that Mark is not called to perform miracles; he is called to something greater, the *most excellent way*: love.)

Mark imagines you, as his guardian angel, to be sent by God to see that at least some of his wishes happen, but the truth is closer to saying that you are sent by God to see that some of his wishes do not happen so that in the cutting off of self-will he may grow in ways that would be impossible if he always had his wishes. There is a French saying, «*On trouve souvent sa destinée par les chemins que l'on prend pour l'éviter.*»: "One often finds his destiny on the paths one takes to avoid it." Destiny is not an especially Christian idea, but there is a grain of truth here: *Men often find God's providence in the situations they hoped his providence would keep them out of.*

This cutting off of self-will is part of the self-transcendence that makes deification; it is foundational to monks and the office of spiritual father, but it is not a "monks-only" treasure. Not by half. God answers "No" to prayers to say "Yes" to something greater. But the "Yes" only comes *through* the "No."

As Mark has heard, "We pray because we want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us."

Mark has had losses, and he will have more to come, but what he does not understand is that the path of God's sanctification is precisely through the loss of what Mark thinks he needs. God is at work allowing Mark to be robbed. God is at work allowing Mark to use "his" "free" time to

serve his friend. And God is at work in the latest challenge you wrote to me about.

Mark has lost his car. A drunk and uninsured driver slammed into it when it was parked; the driver was saved by his airbag, but Mark's car was destroyed, and Mark has no resources to get another car, not even a beater for now. And Mark imagines this as something that pushes him outside of the Lord's providence, not understanding that it is by God's good will that he is now being transported by friendship and generosity, that he is less independent now.

Right now Mark is not ready either to thank God for his circumstances or to forgive the driver. But do open his eyes to the good of friendship and generosity that now transports him. Even if he sees the loss of his car as an example of God failing to provide for him, help him to see the good of his being transported by the love and generosity of his friends. Help him to see God's providence in circumstances he would not choose.

Your Fellow-Servant in the Service of Man,
A Brother Angel

My dear son Eukairos;

Your precious charge, in perfectly good faith, believes strongly in *bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*. His devotion in trying to bring *into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* is really quite impressive, but he is fundamentally confused about what that means, and he is not the only one.

Mark would never say that you can reason your way into Heaven, but he is trying to straighten out his worldview, and he thinks that straightening out one's ideas is what this verse is talking about. And he holds an assumption that if you're reasoning things out, or trying to reason things out, you're probably on the right path.

Trying to reason things out does not really help as much as one might think. Arius, the father of all heretics, was one of many to try to reason things out; people who devise heresies often try harder to reason things out than the Orthodox. And Mark has inherited a greatly overstated emphasis on how important or helpful logical reasoning is.

Mark would be surprised to hear this; his natural question might be, "*If bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ* is not what you do when you straighten out your worldview, then what on earth is?

A little bit more of the text discusses unseen warfare and inner purity: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

Men's thoughts are not just abstract reasoning; they are all sorts of things, some entangled with sinful desire, that are around all the time to a mind that has not learned hesychastic silence. Thoughts that need to be taken captive include thoughts of money entangled with greed, thoughts of imagined success entangled with pride, thoughts of wrongs suffered entangled with anger, thoughts of food compounded with gluttony, thoughts of desired persons

compounded with lust, thoughts of imagined future difficulties entangled with worry and doubt about the Lord's good providence. Such thoughts as these need to be addressed, and not by tinkering with one's worldview: these thoughts remain a battleground in spiritual warfare even if one's worldview condemns greed, pride, anger, gluttony, lust, worry, and doubt.

Work with Mark. Guide him and strengthen him in the unseen warfare that includes learning to cut off such thoughts as soon as possible: a fire that is spreading through a house is hard to put out, and what Mark needs to learn is to notice the smoke that goes before fire and extinguish the smoldering that is beginning and not waiting for leaping flames to make doomed efforts to fight it. Help him to see that his thoughts are not only abstract ideas, and help him to be watchful, aware of his inner state. Unseen warfare in thoughts is of inestimable importance, and do what you can to help him see a smoldering smoke when it has not become a raging fire, and to be watchful.

Do what you can to draw him to repeat the Jesus Prayer, to let it grow to a rhythm in him. If the question is, "What should I start thinking when I catch myself?", the answer is, "The Jesus prayer."

Keep working with Mark, and offer what support you can. And keep him in your prayers.

With Deepest Affection,
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

Mark has the wrong picture with a scientific worldview in which temptations are more or less random events that occur as a side effect of how the world works. Temptations are intelligently coordinated attacks by devils. They are part of unseen warfare such as Mark faces, part of an evil attack, but none the less on a leash. No man could be saved if the devils could give trials and temptations as much as they wished, but the devils are allowed to bring trials and temptations as much as God allows for the strengthening, and the discipleship, of his servants.

Some street drugs are gateway drugs, and some temptations are temptations to gateway sins. Gluttony, greed, and vanity are among the "gateway sins", although it is the nature of a sin to give way to other sins as well. Gluttony, for instance, opens the door to lust, and it is harder by far to fight lust for a man whose belly is stuffed overfull. (A man who would fare better fighting against lust would do well to eat less and fast more.) In sin, and also in virtue, he who is faithful in little is faithful in much, and he who is unfaithful in little is also unfaithful in much. You do not need to give Mark what he expects now, help in some great, heroic act of virtue. He needs your help in little, humble, everyday virtues, obedience when obedience doesn't seem worth the bother.

The liturgy speaks of "the feeble audacity of the demons", and Mark needs to know that that is true, and true specifically in his case. What trials God allows are up to God, and the demons are an instrument in the hand of a God who would use even the devils' rebellion to strengthen his sons. The only way Mark can fall into the demons' hands

is by yielding to temptation: nothing can injure the man who does not *harm himself*. The trials Mark faces are intended for his glory, and more basically for God's glory in him—but God chooses glory for himself that glorifies his saints. Doubtless this will conflict with Mark's plans and perceptions of what he needs, but God knows better, and *loves* Mark better than to give Mark everything he thinks he needs.

Do your best to strengthen Mark, especially as regards forgiveness to those who have wronged him and in the whole science of unseen warfare. Where he cannot see himself that events are led by an invisible hand, help him to at least have faith, a faith that may someday be able to discern.

And do help him to see that he is in the hands of God, that the words in the Sermon on the Mount about providence are not for the inhabitants of another, perfect world, but intended for him personally as well as others. He has rough things he will have to deal with; help him to trust that he receives providence at the hands of a merciful God who is ever working all things to good for his children.

With Love as Your Fellow-Warrior and Mark's,
Your Fellow-Warrior in the War Unseen

My dear, watchful son Eukairos;

Mark has lost his job, and though he has food before him and a roof over his head, he thinks God's providence has run short.

Yet in all of this, he is showing a sign of growth: even though he does not believe God has provided, there is a deep peace, interrupted at times by worry, and his practice of the virtues allows such peace to enter even though he assumes that God can only provide through paychecks.

Work on him in this peace. Work on him in the joy of friendship. Even if he does not realize that he has food for today and clothing for today, and that this is the providence he is set to ask for, help him to enjoy what he has, and give thanks to God for everything he has been given.

And hold him in your prayers.

As One Who Possesses Nothing,
One Who Receives All He Needs From God

My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

Prayer is the silent life of angels, and it is a feast men are bidden to join. At the beginning it is words; in the middle it is desire; at the end it is silence and love. For men it is the outflow of sacrament, and its full depths are in the sacraments. There are said to be seven sacraments, but what men of Mark's day do not grasp is that seven is the number of perfection, and it would do as well to say that there are ten thousand sacraments, all bearing God's grace.

Help Mark to pray. Pray to forgive others, pray for the well-being of others, pray by being in silence before God. Help him to pray when he is attacked by passion; help him to pray when he is tempted and when he confesses in his

heart that he has sinned: *O Lord, forgive me for doing this and help me to do better next time, for the glory of thy holy name and for the salvation of my soul.*

Work with Mark so that his life is a prayer, not only with the act-prayer of receiving a sacrament, but so that looking at his neighbor with chaste eyes he may pray out of the Lord's love. Work with Mark so that ordinary activity and work are not an interruption to a life of prayer, but simply a part of it. And where there is noise, help him to be straightened out in silence through his prayer.

And if this is a journey of a thousand miles that Mark will never reach on earth, bid him to take a step, and then a step more. For a man to take one step into this journey is still something: the Thief crucified with Christ could only take one step, and he took that one step, and now stands before God in Paradise.

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

With You Before God's Heart that Hears Prayers,
A Praying Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished, esteemed son; My holy angel who sees the face of Christ God; My dear chorister who sings before the eternal throne of God; My angel divine; My fellow-minister;

Mark is no longer your charge.

He has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

He went to church, and several gunmen entered. One of them pointed a gun at a visitor, and Mark stepped in front

of her. He was ordered to move, and he stood firm. He wasn't thinking of being heroic; he wasn't even thinking of showing due respect to a woman. He only thought vaguely of appropriate treatment of a visitor and fear never deterred him from this vague sense of appropriate care for a visitor.

And so death claimed him to its defeat. *O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?* Death claimed claimed saintly Mark to its defeat.

Mark is no longer your charge.

It is my solemn, profound, and grave pleasure to now introduce you to Mark, no longer as the charge under your care, but as a fellow-chorister with angels who will eternally stand with you before the throne of God in Heaven.

Go in peace.

Your Fellow-Minister,

מיכאל • MHX AEL • МИХАИЛ • MICHAEL • Who Is Like God?

55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine

(Note: Some of this is old and some of this is new. I'm not seeking to be original.)

1. Trust technology about as far as you can throw it, and remember that you can't throw software or the web.
2. When facing a situation, ask, "What would a Boomer do?"
3. If your priest is willing, ask for pastoral guidance in slowly but steadily withdrawing from technologies that hurt you. (Don't try to leap over buildings in one bound. Take one step at a time, and one day at a time.)
4. Practice the spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, generosity, church attendance, the sacraments, silence, etc.
5. Use older technologies.
6. Fast from technologies some of the time, especially on fasting days.

7. Use your phone only for logistics, never for games, entertainment, or killing time. (You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.)
8. Unplug your intravenous drip of noise, little by little. It may be uncomfortable at first, but it's worth it.
9. Own and read paper.
10. Leave your phone at home some days.
11. Read *The New Media Epidemic*.
12. Read *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, this collection, and in particular *The Consolation of Theology*.
13. Minimize or cut out completely your use of anti-social media. (By the way, spending time sucked into Facebook is a good way to enter a depression.)
14. Read up on Humane Tech and advice for how to take control, but do not limit yourself to that.
15. Do not own a television.
16. Do not feed the trolls.
17. Choose face-to-face meetings over Zoom meetings if you have a choice, and Zoom over any instant messaging.
18. Consider screen time, and multitasking, to be a drain on the mindfulness we are seeking from the East because we have rejected it in the West.
19. Turn off all phone notifications you have a live option to do.
20. Look at your phone when it rings or buzzes. Do not check your phone unprovoked every five minutes to see if you missed a text.

21. When you are reading on the web, don't just scan the page. Read it, like a paper book, slowly.
22. When you type, type full words, not txtisms.
23. Don't trade your adequate, existing, working gadgets for the latest and hottest gadget.
24. Set a fixed bedtime, and then lights out is lights out.
25. Keep and charge your phone in some room that is away from your bedroom.
26. If you use porn, stop. If you find yourself unable to stop, bring it to confession, and *seriously* consider **XXXchurch.com**.
27. Do not store up treasures on earth, but own and use technology only so far as it advances the Kingdom of Heaven.
28. Live by a *Silicon* Rule of, "What technologies do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?" Steve Jobs, for instance, gave his kids walls of paper books and animated discussion, and so far as I am aware no iPads.
29. Reject contraception and Splenda.
30. Shop in real, local stores, even a local Wal-Mart, rather than making Amazon your first port of call.
31. Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need.
32. When you want to go shopping like some feel-good sacrament, do not buy it. You may buy it after you've let go of coveting after it, not before.
33. Limit your consumption of TED talks, and recognize them along psychology as something of a secular religion. (But if you need help, get help, without fear or shame.)

34. Write snailmail letters, preferably with your own handwriting.
35. Recognize that from the Devil's perspective, Internet is for porn—and he may have helped inspire, guide, and shape its development.
36. Expect Amazon and Google Books to delist priceless treasures. (This is already happening.)
37. Cultivate social skills, especially for face-to-face.
38. Cultivate the virtues.
39. If your conscience and applicable law permit, *maybe* consider owning and learning to use a gun. It's safer for everyone to have most criminals and some law-abiding citizens be armed than only have criminals be armed.
40. Seek theosis in the acquisition of the Spirit.
41. When shopping, use a debit card before a credit card, and use cash before either if you have a choice. Giving away paper bills and wondering what to do with change is a partial deterrent to buying things you do not need.
42. Never form an identity around the brands you patronize, *and do not adopt a personal brand.*
43. Limit new technological intrusions into your life.
44. Repent of your sins.
45. Read aloud some of the time.
46. Cultivate connection with nature.
47. Drop it and drive.
48. Drop it and pay attention to the person you're with.
49. Keep good posture and take steps to avoid the diseases of civilization. Some approaches that have been taken to all

be important include using Paleo diet (with fasts, eating vegetables in lieu of grain) and exercise, have a balanced ratio of Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acids, get real sleep, have engaging activities, and have social interactions.

50. Do not be surprised if you live to see the Antichrist rise to power.

51. Learn survival skills.

52. Recognize that we are already in an apocalyptic singularity.

53. Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people.

54. Keep a reasonable amount of cash available, at home or in a money belt.

55. Read, and live, Fr. Tom Hopko's 55 Maxims.

The Arena

1. We stand in an arena, the great coliseum. For it is the apostles who were sent forth last, as if men condemned to die, made a spectacle unto the world, to angels and men.
2. St. Job the Much-Suffering was made like unto a champion waging war against Satan, on God's behalf. He lost everything and remained God-fearing, standing as the saint who vindicated God.
3. But all the saints vindicate God.
4. We are told as we read the trials in the Book of Job that Satan stands slandering God's saints day and night and said God had no saint worthy of temptation. And the Lord God Almighty allowed Satan to tempt St. Job.
5. We are told this, but in the end of the Scripture, even when St. Job's losses are repaid double, St. Job never hears. He never knows that he stands in the cosmic coliseum, as a champion on God's behalf. Never on earth does St. Job know the reason for the catastrophes that befell him.

6. St. Job, buffeted and bewildered, could see no rhyme or reason in what befell him. Yet even the plagues of Satan were woven into the plans of the Lord God who never once stopped working all things to good for this saint, and to the saint who remained faithful, the plagues of Satan are woven into the diadem of royal priesthood crowning God's saints.
7. Everything that comes to us is either a blessing from God or a temptation which God has allowed for our strengthening. The plagues by which Satan visited St. Job are the very means themselves by which God glorified his faithful saint.
8. Do not look for God in some other set of circumstances. Look for him in the very circumstances you are in. If you look at some of your circumstances and say, "God could not have allowed that!", you are not rightly accepting the Lord's work in the circumstances he has chosen to work his glory.
9. You are in the arena; God has given you weapons and armor by which to fight. A poor warrior indeed blames the weapons God has armed him with.
10. Fight therefore, before angels and men. The circumstances of your life are not inadequate, whether through God lacking authority, or wisdom, or love. The very sword blows of Satan glancing off shield and armor are ordained in God's good providence to burnish tarnishment and banish rust.
11. The Almighty laughs Satan to scorn. St. Job, faithful when he was stricken, unmasked the feeble audacity of the demons.

12. God gives ordinary providence for easy times, and extraordinary providence for hard times.
13. If times turn hard for men, and much harder for God's servants, know that this is ordained by God. Do not suppose God's providence came when you were young but not now.
14. What in your life do you wish were gone so you could be where you should be? When you look for God to train you in those very circumstances, that is the beginning of victory. That is already a victory won.
15. Look in every circumstance for the Lord to train you. The dressing of wounds after struggle is part of training, and so is live combat.
16. The feeble audacity of the demons gives every appearance of power, but the appearance deceives.
17. Nothing but your sins can wound you so that you are down. And even our sins are taken into the work of the Almighty if we repent.
18. When some trial comes to you, and you thank God, that is itself a victory.
19. Look for God's work here and now. If you will not let God work with you here and now, God will not fulfill all of your daydreams and then begin working with you; he will ask you to let him train you in the here and now.
20. Do you find yourself in a painfully rough situation? Then what can you do to lighten others' burdens? Instead of asking, "Why me?", ask, "Why not me?"

21. An abbot asked a suffering monk if he wanted the abbot to pray that his suffering be taken away. The disciple said, "No," and his master said, "You will outstrip me."
22. It is not a contradiction to say that both God has designs for us, and we are under the pressure of trials. Diamonds are only made through pressure.
23. No disciple is greater than his master. Should we expect to be above sufferings when the Son of God was made perfect through suffering?
24. Anger is a spiritual disease. We choose the path of illness all the more easily when we do not recognize that God seeks to train us in the situation we are in, not the situation we wish we were in.
25. It is easier not to be angry when we recognize that God knows what he is doing in the situations he allows us to be in. The situation may be temptation and trial, but was God impotent, unwise, or unloving in how he handled St. Job?
26. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds by any means. We live instead in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods. And that is the greater blessing.
27. Some very holy men no longer struggle spiritually because spiritual struggle has worked out completely. But for the rest of us, struggle is a normal state. It is a problem for you or I to pass Lent without struggle. If we struggle and stumble and fall, that is good news. All the better if we cannot see how the thrusts and blows of the enemy's sword burnish away a little rust, one imperceptible speck at a time.

28. Do you ask, "Did it have to hurt *that* much?" When I have asked that question, I have not found a better answer than, "I do not understand," and furthermore, "Do I understand better than God?"
29. We seek happiness on terms that make success and happiness utterly impossible. God destroys our plans so that we might have the true happiness that is blessedness.
30. Have a good struggle.
31. There is no road to blessedness but the royal road of affliction that befits God's sons. Consider it pure joy when you fall into different trials and temptations. If you have trouble seeing why, read the Book of James.
32. Treasures on earth fail. Treasures in Heaven are more practical.
33. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for what good you do. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is how the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
34. If you have hard memories, they too are a part of the arena. Forgive and learn to thank God for painful memories.
35. Remember that you will die, and live in preparation for that moment. There is much more life in mindfully dying each day than in heedlessly banishing from your mind the reality. Live as men condemned to die, made a spectacle before men and angels.

36. Live your life out of prayer.
37. It takes a lifetime of faith to trust that God always answers prayers: he answers either "Yes, here is what you asked," or "No, here is something better." And to do so honestly can come from the struggle of praying your heart out and wondering why God seemed to give no answer and make no improvements to your and others' pain.
38. In the Bible, David slew Goliath. In our lives, David *sometimes* prevails against Goliath, but often not. Which is from God? *Both*.
39. Struggling for the greater good is a process of at once trying to master, and to get oneself out of the way. Struggle hard enough to cooperate with God when he rips apart your ways of struggling to reach the good.
40. Hurting? What can you do to help others?

Why this Waste?

"Why this waste?" quoth the Thief,
Missing a pageant unfold before his very eyes,
One who sinned much, forgiven, for her great love,
Brake open a priceless heirloom,
An alabaster vessel of costly perfume,
Costly chrism beyond all price anointing the Christ,
Anointing the Christ unto life-giving death,
Anointed unto life-giving death,
A story ever told,
In memory of her:

"Why this waste?" quoth also the Pious,
Kings and Priest and Prophet one,
Regarding in Heaven and earth a cornucopia great of blessing,
Rank on rank of angelic host,
Seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities,
principalities, archangels and angels,
Sapphire Heavens and an earth growing living emeralds,
A sun of gold, a moon of silver,
A Theotokos eternally reigning after Heaven kissed earth,
The Son of God who opened the womb of death,
Pageantry of uncreated God and creation made one with God,
"Why this waste?" indeed.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Skeptic,
 A pageant missed, other else ignored,
 A hawk's eye opened to root out magical thinking in the Pious,
 A man's eye closed to his own magical thinking one must needs
 embrace,
 Materialist or naturalist to be,
 "I see no evidence of God or any spirit,"
 Quoth he through his spirit,
 With the breath of God.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Mother,
 A child borne in her womb,
 Soon become a corpse nestled in her bosom,
 Rejecting the empty consolation of lies that lie evil away,
 Facing the stark, hard truth,
 Of clay in the hands of the potter,
 Dust is she too,
 To dust also to return,
 The last word, this is not:
 "Why this waste?" quoth not another Mother,
 Whose Son's death as a sword her heart pierced,
 And seeth the infant son lost,
 In no wise lost, but found on her Son's throne in Heaven.

"Why this waste?" quoth the Father Almighty,
 Seeing his creation enter sin, death, and decay,
 Then moved Heaven and earth, nay the two hands of his Son and
 Spirit,
 To right things wrong, straighten all things bent,
 Until sinners should become saints,
 The physical body sown in dishonor raised in honor,
 Spiritual, incorruptible, imperishable, glorious,
 Every move Satan makes one step closer to God sealing
 checkmate,
 The triumph of God using every attack of Satan in victory eternal.

"Why this waste?" quote you and I,
Having lost some things in a global economic crisis,
More losses to come, it would seem.
It would seem.
Fearing that the providence of God,
Faiileth us in a disaster.
"Why this waste?" quote we in error,
Mistaking the limits of sight for those of faith itself.

Why this waste?

A Cantic to Holy, Blessed Solipsism

O Lord, help me reach poverty, that I may own treasures avarice
could never fathom or imagine,
Obedience that I may know utter freedom, first of all of the
shackles of my sin and vice,
Chastity, that I may be virile beyond reckoning,
A solipsist that I may embrace Heaven and Earth,
(For Earth can never fail to merit a capital E,
Not since our Saviour walked it.)
Let me be alone with You, through the bridge of a second holy
Moses,
Let me love You with my whole being
(A holy Being, grant it might be),
That I may reach you through six billion prisms,
The royal race of men,
And made in Your Divine Image.
And may this love bubble over,
Cascading on animals because I love men,

Cascading onto plants that are also alive,
Cascading onto rocks that exist in some measure,
Cascading on nothingness, You Who have been called Everything
and Nothing,
For even nothingness is in some way Your Image,
You Who are beyond existence and nonexistence alike.

Today is a day of interest in genes,
In mortals who want to know their roots,
And I am indeed among them,
Though I dig for a Deeper Root.
A kit and refined science,
Can tell me what lands my ancestors came from,
And had I the wealth, I could go on pilgrimage, To visit the
places,
That gave me my greying red beard.
But my Root is Simple:
God Himself,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
The Triune Pattern after which each man is made,
And I reverence each man as God after God:
To do less is to fail to grasp the One God, Who transcends His
Own Transcendence,
Immanent beyond all imagination,
Immanent beyond all measure,
Closer to you than you are to yourself;
The very breath you breathe is God's Own.

My Motherland is Heaven,
And so I go and seek pilgrimage,
To the God who is everywhere and everywhere,
In Holy Russia,
In Holy Russia now though I be on American soil.
Holy Russia has come to me,
And God please, let me come to Holy Russia,
A monk to the end of my days as mortal man.

Who am I to worship You,
 Whom Heaven and Earth cannot contain?
 Who am I even to give You thanks?
 I am unworthy to even give You thanks,
 And I thank you anyway.
 It is my burden: it is my joy.

“Only God and I exist,”
 Or so the saying goes,
 For there is only One Will to please:
 All else follows suit,
 All ducklings in a row.
 Christians today do not know that they are pagans:
 And not in the sense that Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-paganism
 isn't.

Do you not understand the radical breach,
 Of One God Almighty of sacred Israel?
 One thing only could offend God,
 A God Who stands besides all possibility of offense,
 Except in the person of another:

Sin.

The pagans all around worshipped among the cacophonous din of
 a treacherous junior high:
 There was no reckoning of sin,
 Only appeasement of arbitrary, bickering gods,
 Who were not much more than overclocked men,
 And truth be told, sometimes far less.
 And what appeased one god,
 Might well offend anger another.
 Are you a Christian?
 Then why do you appease so many bickering gods,
 And why do you worry with it?
 Be thou a solipsist, *please!*

And the voyage to meet first my Root,
Is the simple repentance offered here and now.
“Awaken!” beckon God and the saints,
And rank upon rank of angel hosts!
Repent: for the Kingdom of God is nigh:
Indeed, it is already here.
Your room will teach you everything you need to know,
And the longest journey we will ever take,
Is rightly called the journey from our head to our heart.
Repent!

And lastly become truly a solipsist,
No longer know that you are you and God is God:
For the wall between created nature and Uncreated God only
exists that we may rise above it;
The Son of God became a man that men might become the Sons
of God!
God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that
men and the sons of men,
Might become gods and the sons of God!
Adam, trying to be God, failed to be god;
Christ became Man that he might make Adam god:
The whole purpose of human life is to become by Grace What
Christ is by nature:
Be nothing before God and take down the curtain separating
“You” and “me.”

Amen! Amen! Amen!

Who Is Rich? The Person Who Is Content.

In “A Pet Owner’s Rules,” I wrote of God as a Pet Owner who has only two rules: to enjoy freely of the gifts he has given, and “Don’t drink out of the toilet.” I wrote, “Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet... It takes chastity to enjoy even lust... It takes contentment to enjoy even greed... As G.K. Chesterton said, it takes humility to enjoy even pride...”

I would like to zero in on it taking contentment to enjoy even covetousness.

When I was an undergraduate, one of my suitemates had an "I Learned It All From Kindergarten"-style poster, except it was in this case it was "All I Need to Know About Life I Learned from Star Trek," and one of the entries was, "**Having is not so pleasing a thing as wanting; it is not logical but it is often true.**"

Whatever your opinion of Star Trek may be, I regard this specific lesson (which I don't remember meeting in any Star Trek TV show or movie that I've watched), as an unfortunate lesson. Possibly there is more pleasure in starting to covet something

than being in contentment before; twentieth century critiques offering conservative warnings about capitalist society where people like corporations because they sell them such desirable and coveted things; advertising perennially creates a spirit of discontent with whatever one has. And here what is a great good appears small and what is small in its merits appears great: the greatness of being content with what you have appears a trivial thing, and the triviality of things that can be acquired by chasing covetousness appears deceptively great.

The Orthodox Church does us a service in exhorting us to be content with what we have. In fact, through the purifying fire of fasting (for instance), the Orthodox Church does us a service by exhorting us to be content with *less* than what we have.

St. Paul tells us, "Godliness with contentment is great gain... The love of money is the root of all evil." St. John Chrysostom magnifies this good dose of clear thinking, with great beauty and eloquence, about what is real treasure and hollow and what is and is not truly desirable; if you want an entryway into his magnificent collection, one highly recommended work is "A Treatise to Prove That Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself," as bringing great clarity about what is truly desirable, and what is truly to be feared.

What did St. Paul have in mind when he called a form of covetousness "*the root of all evil?*" Let me give one educated guess about two people who coveted more than reigning as lords in Paradise. Adam and Eve did not fall because they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; God's Plan A had always been for them to eat that fruit, *in the right way, and when they were ready for it.* The ban was only meant to be temporary while they grew. Adam and Eve fell because they went behind God's back and had the fruit on their own terms, not God's. And that is why what God intended as a profound blessing was received as the venomous sting of death, that opened the door to every sin, suffering, and sorrow known to man.

Now for this article, I personally find it annoying when other people use a made-up term known only to themselves without explaining what they mean and expect other people to understand them, and here I'm going to do half half better by using some made-up terms, but explain what no standard term I'm aware of meaning. In each case I will explain the term, and I'm sorry if this is confusing. I'll try to be understandable, but here I think new terms will be fruitful.

In my own covetousness I have experienced some future purchase as *mediating humanity*. What I mean by *mediating humanity* is that I feel that I will not be full and complete as a human being until I get whatever hot new thing I just can't live without. But whenever I get whatever junk I need to have, it thrills for a short while but the thrill quietly slips away, and I soon finding myself needing some other acquirement to *mediate* my being fully *human*. Ick!

When I was getting ready to study theology, I had some money and used it to buy a computer that ended up lasting me for several years: an IBM ThinkPad (a respected brand, for good reason), with 15" of screen real estate, having 1GB RAM and a 1GHz processor. That's still plenty for running Linux, and it was quite respectable for a laptop when I bought it in 2002 and several years after.

When I was working out buying a computer that I would have last me for a long time, I worked out the details of a practical investment, but there was something holding me back. My conscience wasn't quiet. I didn't see why this wouldn't be an optimal solution to a rational problem, but my desire was in part what I call *sacramental shopping*. Not too far in meaning from mediating humanity, *sacramental shopping* is an ersatz sacrament, a sacrament made much dumber. Not that we are not to live by consuming: the Holy Mysteries are quite specifically there for us to feed on and live by consuming. But we are missing something if we shop for merchandise to give us life. And, finally, I repented of my seeking sacramental shopping and accepted my

conscience's "No," whole cloth. And then my conscience surprised me by changing, and I purchased the computer as a careful investment, but only a rational choice and not sacramental shopping.

Indulging covetousness does not satisfy. It can't. Contentment is what satisfies.

St. Basil said of lust that it is like a dog licking a saw. The dog continues because of the taste, but the taste is of his own blood, of his own woundedness. And so, really is seeking contentment from indulging covetousness. The pleasure is the pleasure of our own woundedness.

But in all this, and in "A Pet Owner's Rules," the bit about not drinking out of the toilet is only a footnote to the #1, central rule: "I am your owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have provided for your good!" We are perhaps content to feed a dog canned or dry pet food and water, but "eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has any heart imagined" what the Pet Owner in Heaven has for us, beginning not after the Last Judgment but here and now. I remember a time visiting a monastery where I was bowled over by humility by a layman who was not even a novice, just one of the people who worked in the kitchen, and I came back and wanted to see him, not because he was kind to me (although I assure you that he was very warm and kind), but because I wanted to catch some crumbs from under the table of his humility. My two thoughts were that I had not dreamed there were such things in Heaven or on earth, and a perhaps brash thought, "I want the mint [spiritual money-printing machine]!" because his humility really had reached that degree, and I wanted the source of such money. (Perhaps we are commanded in the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not store up treasures on earth," but that is a #2 helper, a footnote, to "Store up treasures in Heaven," and humility is one such treasure, legitimate to have and legitimate to desire and seek.) And let us ascend!

Again, as we climb higher, we may say this. Sacramental shopping is alchemy made dumber: alchemy—the spiritual

tradition of transforming metals and men with a technique that would circumvent the need for a lifetime of hard discipline. Alchemy is much more confusingly similar to Truth than sacramental shopping, but alchemy is sacramental Christianity made dumber. Boethius lamented the person who fathered the practice of adorning with lifeless jewels and gold the human body: the living artwork of God. And what is the transformation into gold, possible or impossible, besides the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ himself?

And beyond that, we are to heed St. Athanasius that we are not to command the driver's seat for ourselves. Our participation in the Holy Mysteries is to recognize ourselves a partner in a Great Dance where God himself seeks our consent to transform us. All of creation is blessed to follow God's lead, and we humans are blessed to actively participate in our following God's lead. We are not solipsists who on our own are worthy to be transformed by the Body and Blood of Christ. We must not count ourselves worthy of things much lesser: but God laughs and beckons us further up and further in!

And beyond even that, we cannot overreach. Not in anything truly important, that is. We may be forbidden to seek the office or honors of Bishop, Archbishop, Metropolitan, Patriarch, or Pope, but not one of us is forbidden to seek repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, nor asceticism, nor moral character worthy of such office. Humility, true humility, is a wonder such as we can scarcely even guess; when we meet a truly humble man we may say, "I'd have been a better man all my life if I'd known there were things like this." And in deifying transformation, we cannot pursue too much or too hard. Possibly we can pursue unwisely, as novices who attempt impossible virtues, or monastics who attempt warfare above their strength, but this is not really a matter of wanting too much good for ourselves, but traps beside the way of virtue that miss the mark and seek good in a premature and flawed way. We are summoned perhaps to let go of dust and ashes like coveted silver and gold, but only that we

may be made able to grasp Silver beyond silver and Gold beyond gold, the Treasure for Whom every treasure in Heaven and on earth is named. We may be forbidden to seek fame and praise before men: I am perhaps forbidden to seek fame before my fellow laity, or the Readers, or the Subdeacons, or the Deacons, or the Priests and Archpriests, or my Archbishop, or ROCOR's Metropolitan, or the Patriarch of Moscow, but that is only because all of us are summoned to seek fame before God himself, a God who Wonders at our slightest act or thought of good. I may be forbidden to be impressed with myself: but that is so that God may be eternally impressed.

One priest complained that no one ever confessed covetousness. Covetousness is one of many gates of Hell, if indeed Hell has more than one gate. The virtues are one Virtue, and consequently there is really only one vice we need shed. But if we shed covetousness, with it open not only Heavenly contentment, but the gates of Heaven open to live here on earth.

Perhaps some day we may speak of love.

Apprentice gods

1. This life is an apprenticeship. You do not understand its purpose until you understand that we are created to be apprentice gods.
2. It is said, a man knows the meaning of life when he plants a tree knowing he will never live to sit in its shade. Truer is to say that a man knows the meaning of life when he plants a tree not seeing how he will ever *this side of Heaven* sit in its shade.
3. You do not understand life in the womb until you understand what is after the womb. For some actions in the womb bear fruit in the womb, but suckling and kicking are made to strengthen muscles for nursing and walking, and nursing a preparation for the solid food of men.
4. You shall surely die: such Adam and Eve were warned, such Adam and Eve were cursed, and such the saints are blessed. For death itself is made an entryway for life. But we can only repent in this life: after this life our eternal choice of Life or Death is sealed.

5. Do not despise moral, that is to say eternal, victories. Have you labored to do something great, only to find it all undone? Take courage. God is working with you to wreak triumph. From his eternal providence he is working, if you will be his co-worker, in synergy, to make with you something greater than you could possibly imagine, a treasure in Heaven which you never could imagine to be able to covet.
6. The purpose of life may be called as an apprenticeship to become divine. The divine became man that man might become divine. The Scriptures oft speak of the sons of God, and of men's participation in the nature divine. This divinisation begins on earth and reaches its full stature, when the Church triumphant and whole becomes the Church of saints who have become what in God they were trying to become. And we are summoned to that door.
7. Were sportsmanship to be found only in a foreign culture, we would find it exotic. Play your best, seek to win a well-played game, but have dispassion enough to be graceful in winning and losing alike. But one of its hidden gems is that most often a team that has to win will be defeated by a team that only tries to give it their best.
8. But sportsmanship is not just for sports. Hard times are encroaching and are already here: but we are summoned, not to win, but to play our best. Hence St. Paul, at the end of a life of as much earthly triumph as any saints, spoke as a true sportsman: he said not, "I have triumphed," but that he had been faithful: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my [race]course, I have kept the faith." This from a saint who enjoyed greater earthly accomplishments than his very Lord.

9. It is said that there are three ranks among the disciples: slaves who obey God out of fear, hirelings who obey God out of the desire for reward, and sons who obey God out of love. It has also been said that we owe more to Hell than to Heaven, for more people come to the truth from fear of Hell than the desire for the rewards in Heaven. But if you want a way out of Hell, seek to desire the incomparably greater reward in Heaven; if you seek reward in Heaven, come to obey God out of love, for love of God transcends even rewards in Heaven.
10. It is said, Doth thou love life? Then do not waste time, for time is the stuff life's made of. It might be said, Seekest thou to love? Then do not shun asceticism and discipleship, for they are the stuff love is made of. Or they are a refining fire that purges all that is not silver and gold. Our deifying apprenticeship takes place through asceticism and being disciples.
11. Two thoughts are to be banished: *I am a saint*, and *I shall be damned*. Instead think these two thoughts: *I am a great sinner*, and *God is merciful*. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. You have not met Christ's dread judgment throne yet: seek each day to pursue more righteousness.
12. The sum of our status as apprentice gods is this: Love men as made in the image of God, and work in time as the womb of eternity. Fulfill your apprenticeship with discipleship as best you are able. And follow God's lead in the great Dance, cooperating in synergy with his will. And know that lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The Commentary

Memories flitted through Martin's mind as he drove: tantalizing glimpses he had seen of how people really thought in Bible times. Glimpses that made him thirsty for more. It had seemed hours since he left his house, driving out of the city, across back roads in the forest, until at last he reached the quiet town. The store had printer's blocks in the window, and as he stepped in, an old-fashioned bell rung. There were old tools on the walls, and the room was furnished in beautifully varnished wood.

An old man smiled and said, "Welcome to my bookstore. Are you—" Martin nodded. The man looked at him, turned, and disappeared through a doorway. A moment later he was holding a thick leatherbound volume, which he set on the counter. Martin looked at the binding, almost afraid to touch the heavy tome, and read the letters of gold on its cover:

COMMENTARY
ON THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS
IN ONE VOLUME
CONTAINING A CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF ALL
CULTURAL ISSUES
NEEDFUL TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE
AS DID ITS FIRST READERS

"You're sure you can afford it, sir? I'd really like to let it go for a lower price, but you must understand that a book like this is costly, and I can't afford to sell it the way I do most other titles."

"Finances will be tight, but I've found knowledge to cost a lot and ignorance to cost more. I have enough money to buy it, if I make it a priority."

"Good. I hope it may profit you. But may I make one request, even if it sounds strange?"

"What is your request?"

"If, for any reason, you no longer want the commentary, or decide to get rid of it, you will let me have the first chance to buy it back."

"Sir? I don't understand. I have been searching for a book like this for years. I don't know how many miles I've driven. I will pay. You're right that this is more money than I could easily spare—and I am webmaster to a major advertising agency. I would have only done so for something I desired a great, great deal."

"Never mind that. If you decide to sell it, will you let me have the first chance?"

"Let's talk about something else. What text does it use?"

"It uses the *Revised Standard Version*. Please answer my question, sir."

"How could anyone prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

"I don't know. Please answer my question."

"Yes, I will come to you first. Now will you sell it to me?"

The old man rung up the sale.

As Martin walked out the door, the shopkeeper muttered to himself, "Sold for the seventh time! Why doesn't anybody want to keep it?"

Martin walked through the door of his house, almost exhausted, and yet full of bliss. He sat in his favorite overstuffed

armchair, one that had been reupholstered more than once since he sat in it as a boy. He relaxed, the heavy weight of the volume pressing into his lap like a loved one, and then opened the pages. He took a breath, and began reading.

INTRODUCTION

At the present time, most people believe the question of culture in relation to the Bible is a question of understanding the ancient cultures and accounting for their influence so as to be able to better understand Scripture. That is indeed a valuable field, but its benefits may only be reaped after addressing another concern, a concern that is rarely addressed by people eager to understand Ancient Near Eastern culture.

A part of the reader's culture is the implicit belief that he is not encumbered by culture: culture is what people live under long ago and far away. This is not true. As it turns out, the present culture has at least two beliefs which deeply influence and to some extent limit its ability to connect with the Bible. There is what scholars call 'period awareness', which is not content with the realization that we all live in a historical context, but places different times and places in sealed compartments, almost to the point of forgetting that people who live in the year 432, people who live in 1327, and people who live in 1987 are all human. Its partner in crime is the doctrine of progress, which says at heart that we are better, nobler, and wiser people than those who came before us, and our ideas are better, because ideas, like machines, grow rust and need to be replaced. This gives the reader the most extraordinary difficulties in believing that the Holy Spirit spoke through humans to address human problems in the Bible, and the answer speaks as much to us humans as it did to them. Invariably the reader believes that the Holy Spirit influenced a first

century man trying to deal with first century problems, and a delicate work of extrication is needed before ancient texts can be adapted to turn-of-the-millennium concerns.

Martin shifted his position slightly, felt thirsty, almost decided to get up and get a glass of water, then decided to continue reading. He turned a few pages in order to get into the real meat of the introduction, and resumed reading:

...is another example of this dark pattern.

In an abstracted sense, what occurs is as follows:

1. Scholars implicitly recognize that some passages in the Bible are less than congenial to whatever axe they're grinding.
2. They make a massive search, and subject all of the offending passages to a meticulous examination, an examination much more meticulous than orthodox scholars ever really need when they're trying to understand something.
3. In parallel, there is an exhaustive search of a passage's historical-cultural context. This search dredges up a certain kind of detail—in less flattering terms, it creates disinformation.
4. No matter what the passage says, no matter who's examining it, this story always has the same ending. It turns out that the passage in fact means something radically different from what it appears to mean, and in fact does not contradict the scholar at all.

This dark pattern has devastating effect on people from the reader's culture. They tend to believe that culture has almost any influence it is claimed to; in that regard, they are very gullible . It is almost unheard-of for someone to say, "I'm sorry, no; cultures can make people do a lot of things, but I don't believe a culture could have *that* influence."

It also creates a dangerous belief which is never spoken in so many words: "If a passage in the Bible appears to contradict what we believe today, that is because we do not adequately understand its cultural context."

Martin coughed. He closed the commentary slowly, reverently placed it on the table, and took a walk around the block to think.

Inside him was turmoil. It was like being at an illusionist show, where impossible things happened. He recalled his freshman year of college, when his best friend Chaplain was a student from Liberia, and come winter, Chaplain was not only seared by cold, but looked betrayed as the icy ground became a traitor beneath his feet. Chaplain learned to keep his balance, but it was slow, and Martin could read the pain off Chaplain's face. How long would it take? He recalled the shopkeeper's words about returning the commentary, and banished them from his mind.

Martin stepped into his house and decided to have no more distractions. He wanted to begin reading commentary, now. He opened the book on the table and sat erect in his chair:

Genesis

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

1:3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" If someone asks, "Why is there this life that we see?" and someone answers, "Evolution," it is like someone saying, "Why is the kitchen light on?" and someone else answering, "Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?" These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

Martin took a deep breath. Was the text advocating a six-day creationism? That was hard to tell. He felt uncomfortable, in a much deeper way than if Bible-thumpers were preaching to him that evolutionists would burn in Hell.

He decided to see what it would have to say about a problem passage. He flipped to Ephesians 5:

5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.

5:22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.

5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

5:24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.

5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

5:26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

5:27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

5:28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

5:29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,

5:30 because we are members of his body.

5:31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

5:32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;

5:33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The reader is at this point pondering what to do with this problem passage. At the moment, he sees three major options: first, to explain it away so it doesn't actually give husbands authority; second, to chalk it up to misogynist Paul trying to rescind Jesus's progressive liberality; and third, to take this as an example of why the Bible can't really be trusted.

To explain why the reader perceives himself caught in this unfortunate choice, it is necessary to explain a powerful cultural force, one whose effect cannot be ignored: feminism. Feminism has such a powerful effect among the educated in his culture that the question one must ask of

the reader is not "Is he a feminist?" but "What kind of feminist is he, and to what degree?"

Feminism flows out of a belief that it's a wonderful privilege to be a man, but it is tragic to be a woman. Like Christianity, feminism recognizes the value of lifelong penitence, even the purification that can come through guilt. It teaches men to repent in guilt of being men, and women to likewise repent of being women. The beatific vision in feminism is a condition of sexlessness, which feminists call 'androgyny'.

Martin stopped. "What kind of moron wrote this? Am I actually supposed to believe it?" Then he continued reading:

This is why feminism believes that everything which has belonged to men is a privilege which must be shared with women, and everything that has belonged to women is a burden which men must also shoulder. And so naturally, when Paul asserts a husband's authority, the feminist sees nothing but a privilege unfairly hoarded by men.

Martin's skin began to feel clammy.

The authority asserted here is not a domineering authority that uses power to serve oneself. Nowhere in the Bible does Paul tell husbands how to dominate their wives. Instead he follows Jesus's model of authority, one in which leadership is a form of servanthood. Paul doesn't just assume this; he explicitly tells the reader, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The sigil of male headship and authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns.

Martin was beginning to wish that the commentary had said, "The Bible is misogynistic, and that's good!" He was beginning to

feel a nagging doubt that what he called problem passages were in fact perfectly good passages that didn't look attractive if you had a problem interpretation. What was that remark in a theological debate that had gotten so much under his skin? He almost wanted not to remember it, and then—"Most of the time, when people say they simply cannot understand a particular passage of Scripture, *they understand the passage perfectly well*. What they don't understand is how to explain it away so it doesn't contradict them."

He paced back and forth, and after a time began to think, "The sword can't always cut against me, can it? I know some gay rights activists who believe that the Bible's prohibition of homosexual acts is nothing but taboo. Maybe the commentary on Romans will give me something else to answer them with." He opened the book again:

1:26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural,

1:27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

The concept of 'taboo' in the reader's culture needs some explanation. When a person says, "That's taboo," what's being said is that there is an unthinking, irrational prejudice against it: one must not go against the prejudice because then people will be upset, but in some sense to call a restriction a taboo is *de facto* to show it unreasonable.

The term comes from Polynesia and other South Pacific islands, where it is used when people recognize there is a line which it is wiser not to cross. Thomas Aquinas said, "The peasant who does not murder because the law of God is deep in his bones is greater than the theologian who can derive, 'Thou shalt not kill' from first principles."

A taboo is a restriction so deep that most people cannot offer a ready explanation. A few can; apologists and moral philosophers make a point of being able to explain the rules. For most people, though, they know what is right and what is wrong, and it is so deeply a part of them that they cannot, like an apologist, start reasoning with first principles and say an hour and a half later, "and this is why homosexual acts are wrong."

What goes with the term 'taboo' is an assumption that if you can't articulate your reasons on the drop of a hat, that must mean that you don't have any good reasons, and are acting only from benighted prejudice. Paradoxically, the term 'taboo' is itself a taboo: there is a taboo against holding other taboos, and this one is less praiseworthy than other taboos...

Martin walked away and sat in another chair, a high wooden stool. What was it that he had been thinking about before going to buy the commentary? A usability study had been done on his website, and he needed to think about the results. Designing advertising material was different from other areas of the web; the focus was not just on a smooth user experience but also something that would grab attention, even from a hostile audience. Those two goals were inherently contradictory, like mixing oil and water. His mind began to wander; he thought about the drive to buy the commentary, and began to daydream about a beautiful woman clad only in—

What did the commentary have to say about lust? Jesus said it was equivalent to adultery; the commentary probably went further and made it unforgivable. He tried to think about work, but an almost morbid curiosity filled him. Finally, he looked up the Sermon on the Mount, and opened to Matthew:

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, `You shall not commit adultery.'

5:28 But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There is a principle here that was once assumed and now requires some explanation. Jesus condemned lust because it was doing in the heart what was sinful to do in the hands. There is a principle that is forgotten in centuries of people saying, "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't harm you," or to speak more precisely, "I can do whatever I want as long as I don't see how it harms you." Suddenly purity was no longer a matter of the heart and hands, but a matter of the hands alone. Where captains in a fleet of ships once tried both to avoid collisions and to keep shipshape inside, now captains believe that it's OK to ignore mechanical problems inside as long as you try not to hit other ships—and if you steer the wheel as hard as you can and your ship still collides with another, you're not to blame. Heinrich Heine wrote:

Should ever that taming talisman break—the
 Cross—then will come roaring back the wild madness
 of the ancient warriors, with all their insane,
 Berserker rage, of whom our Nordic poets speak and
 sing. That talisman is now already crumbling, and the

day is not far off when it shall break apart entirely. On that day, the old stone gods will rise from their long forgotten wreckage and rub from their eyes the dust of a thousand years' sleep. At long last leaping to life, Thor with his giant hammer will crush the gothic cathedrals. And laugh not at my forebodings, the advice of a dreamer who warns you away from the . . . *Naturphilosophen*. No, laugh not at the visionary who knows that in the realm of phenomena comes soon the revolution that has already taken place in the realm of spirit. For thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. There will be played in Germany a play compared to which the French Revolution was but an innocent idyll.

Heinrich Heine was a German Jewish poet who lived a century before Thor's hammer would crush six million of his kinsmen.

The ancient world knew that thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. They knew that purity is an affair of the heart as well as the hands. Now there is grudging acknowledgment that lust is wrong, a crumbling acceptance that has little place in the culture's impoverished view, but this acknowledgment is like a tree whose soil is taken away. For one example of what goes with that tree, I would like to look at advertising.

Porn uses enticing pictures of women to arouse sexual lust, and can set a chain of events in motion that leads to rape. Advertising uses enticing pictures of chattels to arouse covetous lust, and exists for the sole reason of setting a chain of events in motion that lead people to waste resources by buying things they don't need. The fruit is less bitter, but the vine is the same. Both operate by arousing impure desires that do not lead to a righteous fulfillment. Both porn and advertising are powerfully unreal, and bite

those that embrace them. A man that uses porn will have a warped view of women and be slowly separated from healthy relations. Advertising manipulates people to seek a fulfillment in things that things can never provide: buying one more product can never satisfy that deep craving, any more than looking at one more picture can. Bruce Marshall said, "...the young man who rings at the door of a brothel is unconsciously looking for God." Advertisers know that none of their products give a profound good, nothing like what people search for deep down inside, and so they falsely present products as things that are transcendent, and bring family togetherness or racial harmony.

It has been asked, "Was the Sabbath made for man, or was man made for the Sabbath?" Now the question should be asked, "Was economic wealth made for man, or was man made for economic wealth?" The resounding answer of advertising is, "Man was made for economic wealth." Every ad that is sent out bears the unspoken message, "You, the customer, exist for me, the corporation."

Martin sat in his chair, completely stunned.

After a long time, he padded off to bed, slept fitfully, and was interrupted by nightmares.

The scenic view only made the drive bleaker. Martin stole guiltily into the shop, and laid the book on the counter. The shopkeeper looked at him, and he at the shopkeeper.

"Didn't you ask who could prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

Martin's face was filled with anguish. "How can I live without my darkness?"

Open

How shall I be open to thee,
O Lord who is forever open to me?
Incessantly I seek to clench with tight fist,
Such joy as thou gavest mine open hand.
Why do I consider thy providence,
A light thing, and of light repute,
Next to the grandeur I imagine?
Why spurn I such grandeur as prayed,
Not my will but thine be done,
Such as taught us to pray,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come:
Thy will be done?
Why be I so tight and constricted,
Why must clay shy back,
From the potter's hand,
Who glorifieth clay better,
Than clay knoweth glory to seek?
Why am I such a small man?
Why do I refuse the joy you give?
Or, indeed, must I?

And yet I know,
Thou, the Theotokos, the saints,
Forever welcome me with open hearts,
And the oil of their gladness,
Loosens my fist,
Little by little.

God, why is my fist tightened on openness,
When thou openest in me?

Death

In the time of life,
Prepare for death.

Dost thou love life?
Be thou of death ever mindful,
For the remembrance of death,
Better befits thee,
Than closing fast thine eyes,
That the snares before thee may vanish.
All of us are dying,
Each day, every hour, each moment,
Of death the varied microcosm,
The freedom given us as men,
To make a decision eternal,
The decision we build and make,
In each microcosm of eternity,
Until one day cometh our passing,
And what is now fluid,
Forever fixed will be made,
When we will trample down death by death,
Crying out from life to death,
O Death, where is thy victory?
O Grave, where is thy sting?

So even death and the grave,
Claim us to their defeat,
Or else,
After a lifetime building the ramp,
Having made earth infernal,
Closing bit by bit the gates of Hell,
Bolting and barring them from the inside,
We seal our decision,
Not strong enough to die rightly in life,
We sink to death in death,
Sealing ourselves twice dead.
Chooseth thou this day,
Which thou shalt abide.

Seekest thou a mighty deed,
Our broken world to straighten out?
Seek it not! Knowest thou not,
That the accursed axe ever wielded in the West,
To transform society, with a program to improve,
Is a wicked axe, ever damned,
And hath a subtle backswing, and most grievous?
Wittest thou not that to heal in such manner,
Is like to bearing the sword,
To smite a dead man to life therewith?
Know rather the time-honeyed words,
True and healthgiving when first spoken,
Beyond lifesaving in our own time:
Save thyself,
And ten thousand around thee shall be saved.

We meet death in microcosm,
In the circumstances of our lives and the smallest decisions,
The decision, when our desire is cut off,
In anger to abide, or to be unperturbed.
Politeness to show to others, little things,

A rhythm of prayer to build up,
Brick by brick, even breath by breath,
Our mind to have on the things of Heaven or on earth,
A heart's answer of love and submission,
To hold when the Vinedresser takes knife to prune,
The Physician takes scalpel to ransack our wounds,
With our leave, to build us up,
Or to take the gold,
The price of our edification,
And buy demolition in its stead.
Right poetic and wondrous it may sound right now,
Right poetic and wondrous it is in its heart,
But it cometh almost in disguise,
From a God who wishes our humility never to bruise,
To give us better than we know to ask,
And until we see with the eyes of faith,
Our humble God allows it to seem certain,
That he has things wrong,
That we are not in the right circumstances for his work,
When his greatest work is hid from our eyes,
Our virtue not to crush,
Knowing that we are dust,
And not crushing our frame dust to return.
Right frail are we,
And only our Maker knows the right path,
That we may shine with his Glory.

Canst thou not save thyself even?
Perchance thou mayest save another.
Be without fear, and of good cheer:
He saved others, himself he cannot save,
Is but one name of Heaven.
Canst not save thyself?
Travail to save another.
Can God only save in luxury?

Can God only save when we have our way?
Rather, see God his mighty arm outstretched in disaster,
Rather, see glory unfurl in suffering.
Suffering is not what man was made for,
But bitter medicine is better,
And to suffer rightly is lifegiving,
And to suffer unjustly has the Treasure of Heaven inside,
Whilst comfort and ease sees few reach salvation:
Be thou plucked from a wide and broad path?
Set instead on a way strait and narrow?
Give thanks for God savest thee:
Taking from thee what thou desirest,
Giving ever more than thou needest,
That thou mightest ever awaken,
To greater and grander and more wondrous still:
For the gate of Heaven appears narrow, even paltry,
And opens to an expanse vast beyond all imagining,
And the gate of Hell is how we imagine grandeur,
But one finds the belly of the Wyrn constricting ever tighter.

Now whilst the noose about our necks,
Tightens one and all,
Painful blows of the Creator's chisel stern and severe,
Not in our day, nor for all is it told,
That the Emperor hears the words,
In this sign conquer,
The Church established,
Persecutions come to an end,
And men of valor seeking in monastery and hermitage,
Saving tribulations their souls to keep,
The complaint sounded,
Easy times rob the Church of her saints,
Not in our day does this happen:
For the noose is about our necks,
More than luxury is stripped away;

A Church waxen fat and flabby from easy living,
Must needs be sharpened to a fighting trim,
Chrismated as one returning to Orthodoxy,
Anointed with sacred oil for the athlete,
And myrrh for the bride.
And as Christian is given gifts of royal hue,
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh:
Gold for kingship,
Frankincense for divinity,
Myrrh for anointing the dead,
A trinity of gifts which are homooousios: one,
Gold and frankincense which only a fool seeks without myrrh,
Myrrh of pain, suffering, and death,
Myrrh which befits a sacrifice,
Myrrh which pours forth gold and frankincense.
And as the noose tightens about our neck,
As all but God is taken from us,
And some would wish to take God himself,
The chisel will not wield the Creator,
The arm of providence so deftly hid in easy times,
Is bared in might in hard times,
And if those of us who thought we would die in peace,
Find that suffering and martyrdom are possible,
We must respond as is meet and right:
Glory to God in all things!

Be thou ever sober in the silence of thine heart:
Be mindful of death, and let this mindfulness be sober.
Wittest thou not the hour of thy death:
Wete thou well that it be sooner than thou canst know.
Put thy house in order, each day,
Peradventure this very night thy soul will be required of thee.
Be thou prepared,
For the hour cometh like a thief in the night,
When thou wilt be summoned before Christ's dread judgment

seat.

If thou wilt not to drown,
 Say thou not, I can learn to swim tomorrow,
 For the procrastinator's tomorrow never cometh,
 Only to-days, to use right or wrong.
 If thou wilt not to drown,
 Learn, however imperfectly, to swim today,
 A little better, if thou canst:
 Be thou sober and learn to swim,
 For all of our boats will sink,
 And as we have practiced diligently or neglected the summons,
 So will we each sink, or each swim,
 When thy boat is asink, the time for lessons is gone.

For contemplation made were we.
 Unseen warfare exists because contemplation does not.
 Yet each death thou diest well,
 A speck of tarnish besmircheth the mirror no more,
 The garden of tearful supplication ever healeth,
 What was lost in the garden of delights:
 Ever banished our race may be from the garden of delights:
 'Til we find its full stature in vale of tears,
 'Til we find what in death God hath hid,
 'Til each microcosm of death given by day to day,
 Is where we seek Heaven's gate, ever opening wide.

The Lord shepherdeth me even now,
 And nothing shall be wanting:
 There shall be lack of nothing thou shalt need,
 In a place of verdure, a place of rest, where the righteous dwell,
 Hath he set my tabernacle today,
 He hath nourished me by the waters of rest,
 Yea, even baptism into Christ's lifegiving death.
 My soul hath he restored from the works of death,
 He hath led me in the paths of righteousness,

That his name be hallowed.
Yea though my lifelong walk be through the valley of the shadow
of death,
I will fear no evils;
Thy rod and thy staff themselves have comforted me:
Thy staff, a shepherd's crook,
A hook of comfort to restore a sheep gone astray,
Thy rod a glaive, a stern mace,
The weapon of an armed Lord and Saviour protecting,
Guarding the flock amidst ravening wolves and lions,
Rod and staff both held by a stern and merciful Lord.
Thou preparest before me table fellowship,
In the midst of all them that afflict me:
Both visible and invisible, external and internal.
Thou hast anointed me with oil,
My head with the oil of gladness,
And thy chalice gives the most excellent cheer.
Thy mercy upon me, a sinner, shall follow me,
All my days of eternal life even on earth,
And my shared dwelling shall be in the house of the Lord,
Unto the greatest of days.

Death may be stronger than mortal men, yet:
Love is stronger than death.

Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: *Anatomy of a Passion*

It's exotic, right?

The website for the Ubuntu Linux distribution announced that Ubuntu is "an ancient African word" meaning humanity to others. It announced how it carried forward the torch of a Linux distribution that's designed for regular people to use. And this promotion of "an ancient African word" has bothered a few people: one South African blogger tried to explain several things: for instance, he mentioned that "ubuntu" had been a quite ordinary Xhosa/Zulu word meaning "humanity," mentioned that it had been made into a political rallying cry in the 20th century, and drew an analogy: saying, "'Ubuntu' is an ancient African

word meaning 'humanity'" is as silly as saying, in reverential tones, "'People' is an ancient European word meaning, 'more than one person.'" There is an alternative definition provided in the forums of Gentoo, a technical aficionado's Linux distribution: "Ubuntu. An African word meaning, 'Gentoo is too hard for me.'"

The blogger raised questions of gaffe in the name of the distribution; he did not raise questions about the Linux distribution itself, nor would I. Ubuntu is an excellent Linux distribution for nontechnical users, it gets some things very much right, and I prefer it to most other forms of Linux I've seen—including Gentoo. I wouldn't bash the distribution, nor would I think of bashing what people mean by making "ubuntu" a rallying-cry in pursuing, in their words, "Linux for human beings."

The offense lay in something else, and it is something that, in American culture at least, runs deep: it was a crass invocation of an Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom. It is considered an impressive beginning to a speech to open by recounting an Archetypal Exotic Culture's Awesome Nugget of Profound Wisdom: whether one is advertising a Linux distribution, a neighbor giving advice over a fence in *Home Improvement*, or a politician delivering a speech, it is taken as a mark of sophistication and depth to build upon the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom.

At times I've had a sneaking suspicion that the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Awesome Nugget of Profound Wisdom is the mouthpiece for whatever is fashionable in the West at the time. Let me give one illustration, if one that veers a bit close to the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom:

One American friend of mine, when in Kenya, gave a saying that was not from any of the people groups she was interacting with, but was from a relatively close neighboring people group: "When you are carrying a child in your womb, he only belongs to you. When he is born, he belongs to everyone." The proverb speaks out of an assumption that not only parents but parents'

friends, neighbors, elders, shopkeepers, and ultimately all adults, stand *in parentis loco*. All adults are ultimately responsible for all children and are responsible for exercising a personal and parental care to help children grow into mature adulthood. As best I understand, this is probably what a particular community in Africa might mean in saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

What is a little strange is that, if these words correspond to anything in the U.S., they are conservative, and speak to a conservative desire to believe that not only parents but neighbors, churches, civic and local organizations, businesses and the like, all owe something to the moral upbringing of children: that is to say, there are a great many forces outside the government that owe something to local children. And this is quite the opposite of saying that we need more government programs because it takes a full complement of government initiatives and programs to raise a child well—because, presumably, more and more bureaucratic initiatives are what the (presumably generic) African sages had in mind when they gave the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom and said, "It takes a village to raise a child." There is some degree of irony in making "It takes a village" a rallying-cry in pushing society *further away* from what, "It takes a village to raise a child," *could* have originally meant—looking for advice on how to build a statist Western-style cohort of bureaucratic government programs would be as inconceivable in many traditional African cultures as looking for instructions on how to build a computer in the New Testament.

My point in mentioning this is not *primarily* sensitivity to people who don't like hearing people spout about a supposedly "ancient African word" such as, "Ubuntu." Nor is my point really about how, whenever a saying is introduced as an ancient aboriginal proverb, the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom ends up shanghaied into being an eloquent statement of whatever fads are blowing around in the West today. My deepest concern is that the Archetypal Exotic Culture's

Nugget of Profound Wisdom hinges on something that is bad for us spiritually.

The Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is tied to what the Orthodox Church refers to as a "passion," which means something very different from either being passionately in love, or being passionate about a cause or a hobby, or even religious understandings of the passion of Christ. The concept of a passion is a religious concept of a spiritual disease that one feeds by thoughts and actions that are out of step with reality. There is something like the concept of a passion in the idea of an addiction, a bad habit, or in other Christians whose idea of sin is mostly about spiritual state rather than mere actions. A passion is a spiritual disease that we feed by our sins, and the concern I raise about the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is one way—out of many ways we have—that we feed one specific passion.

The Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is occult, and we cannot give the same authority to any source that is here and now. If we listen to the wise voices of elders, it is only elders from faroff lands who can give such deeply relevant words: I have never heard such a revered Nugget of Wisdom come from the older generation of our own people, or any of the elders we meet day to day.

By "occult" I mean something more than an Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom that might note that the word "occult" etymologically signifies "hidden"—and still does, in technical medical usage—and that the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom has been dug up from someplace obscure and hidden. Nor is it really my point that the Nugget may be dug up from an occult source—as when I heard an old man, speaking with a magisterial voice, give a homily for the (Christmas) Festival of Lessons and Carols that begun by building on a point from a famous medieval Kabbalist. These are at best tangentially related. What I mean by calling the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom occult is

that the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is the fruit of the same tree as explicitly occult practices—and they are tributaries feeding the same river.

Occult sin is born out of a sense that the way things are in the here and now that God has placed us in are not enough: Gnosticism has been said to hinge, not so much on a doctrine, but something like a mood, a mood of despair. (You might say a passion of despair.) Gnostic Scripture is a sort of spiritual porn that offers a dazzling escape from the present—a temptation whose power is much stronger on people yearning for such escape than for people who have learned the virtuous inoculation of contentment.

It takes virtue to enjoy even vice, and that includes contentment. As a recovering alcoholic will tell you, being drunk all the time is misery, and, ultimately, you have to be at least somewhat sober even to enjoy getting drunk. It takes humility to enjoy even pride, and chastity to enjoy even lust. Contentment does not help us escape—it helps us find joy where we were not looking for it, precisely in what we were trying to escape. We do not find a way out of the world—what we find is really and truly a way into where God has placed us.

One can almost imagine a dialogue between God and Adam:

Adam: I'm not content.

God: What do you want me to do?

Adam: I want you to make me contented.

God: Ok, how do you want me to do that?

Adam: First of all, I don't want to have to engage in ardent, strenuous labor like most people. I don't want to do that kind of work at all.

God: Ok.

Adam: And that's not all. I want to have enough bread to feel full.

God: Ok.

Adam: Scratch that. I want as much *meat* as I want.

God: Ok, as much meat as you want.

Adam: And sweet stuff like ice cream.

God: Ok, I'll give you Splenda ice cream so it won't show up on your waistline.

Adam: And I don't like to be subject to the weather and the elements you made. I want a home which will be cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

God: Sure. And I'll give you hot and cold running water, too!

Adam: Speaking of that, I don't like how my body smells—could we do something to hide that?

God: I'll let you bathe. Each day. In as much water as you want. And I'll give you deodorant to boot!

Adam: Oh, and by the way, I want to make my own surroundings—not just a home. I want electronics to put me in another world.

[*Now we're getting nowhere in a hurry!*]

This may be a questionable portrayal of God, but it *is* an accurate portrayal of the Adam who decided that reigning as King an immortal in Paradise wasn't good enough for him.

Have all these things made us content?

Or have we used them to feed a passion?

We have a lot of ways of wishing that God had placed us someplace else, someplace different. One of the most interesting books I've glanced through, but not read, was covered in pink rosy foliage, and said that it was dealing with the #1 cause of unhappiness in women's relationships. And that #1 cause was a surprise: romantic fantasies. The point was that dreaming up a romantic fantasy and then trying to make it real is a recipe, not for fulfillment, but for heartbreaking disappointment *in circumstances where you could be truly happy*. (When you have your heart set on a fantasy of just how the perfect man will fulfill all your desires and transform your world, no *real* man can seem anything but a disappointing shadow next to your fantasy.)

This is not just a point about fantasies in romance. It is also a point that has something to do with technological wonders, secret societies, fascination with the paranormal, Star Trek, World of Warcraft, television, Dungeons and Dragons, sacramental shopping, SecondLife, conspiracy theories, smartphones, daydreams, Halloween, Harry Potter, Wicked, Wicca, The Golden Compass, special effects movies, alienated feminism, radical conservatism, Utopian dreams, political plans to transform the world, and every other way that we tell God, "Sorry, what you have given me is not good enough"—or what is much the same, wish God had given us something quite different.

Why, in my life, is _____ so difficult to me about _____? (I don't know; why has she forgiven every single one of the astonishingly stupid things I've done over the years?) Why can't I lose a couple of pounds when I want to? (I don't know; why do I have enough food that I wish I could lose pounds?) Why am I struggling with my debts? (I don't know; why do I have enough for now?) Why did I have to fight cancer? (I don't know; why am I alive and strong now?) Why does I stand to lose so much of what I've taken for granted? (I don't know. Why did I take them all for granted? And why did I have so many privileges growing up?) Why _____? (Why not? Why am I ungrateful and discontent with so many blessings?)

Contentment is a choice, and it has been made by people in much bleaker circumstances than mine.

I write this, not as one who has mightily fought this temptation to sin and remained pure, but as one who has embraced the sin wholeheartedly. I know the passion from the inside, and I know it well. Most of my cherished works on this site were written to be "interesting", and more specifically "interesting" as some sort of escape from a dreary here and now.

There is enough of this sin that, when I began to repent, I wondered if repenting would leave anything left in my writing. And after I had let go of that, I found that there was still something left to write. C.S. Lewis, in *The Great Divorce*, alluded to the Sermon on the Mount (where Christ said that if our right hand or our right eye causes us to sin, we should rip it out and enter Heaven maimed rather than let our whole body be thrown into the lake of burning sulfur): Lewis said that the journey to Heaven may cost us our right hand and our right eye—but when we arrive in Heaven, we will find that what we have left behind is precisely *nothing*. Continuing to repent has meant changes for me, and it will (I hope) mean further changes. But I let go of writing only to find that I still had things to write. I gave up on trying to be "interesting" and make my own interesting private

world and found, by the way, that God and his world are really *quite* interesting.

When we are repenting, or trying to, or trying not to, repentance is the ultimate terror. It seems unconditional surrender—and it is. But when we do repent, we realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell," and we realize that repentance is also a waking up, a coming to our senses, and a coming to joy.

What we don't want to hear

I would like to say a word on the politically incorrect term of "unnatural vice." Today there is an effort on some Christians to not distinguish that sharply between homosexuality and straight sexual sins. And it is always good practice to focus on one's own sins and their gravity, but there are very specific reasons to be concerned about unnatural vice. Let me draw an analogy.

It is a blinding flash of the obvious that a well-intentioned miscommunication can cause a conflict that is painful to all involved. And if miscommunications are not necessarily a sin, they can be painful enough, and not the sort of thing one wants to celebrate. However, there is a depth of difference between an innocent, if excruciatingly painful, miscommunication on the one hand, and the kind of conflict when someone deliberately gives betrayal under the guise of friendship. The Church Fathers had a place for a holy kiss as a salute among Christians, but in their mind the opposite of a holy kiss was not a kiss that was what we would understand "inappropriate," but when Judas said, "Master," saluted the Lord with a kiss, and by so doing betrayed him to be tortured to death. A painful miscommunication is bad enough, but a betrayal delivered under the guise of friendship is a problem with a higher pay grade.

Lust benefits no one, and it is not just the married who benefit from beating back roving desire, but the unmarried as well. But when Scripture and the Fathers speak of unnatural vice,

they know something we've chosen to forget. And part of what we have forgotten is that "unnatural vice" is not just something that the gay rights movement advocates for. "Unnatural vice" includes several sins with higher pay grades, and one of them is witchcraft.

To people who have heard all the debates about whether, for instance, same-sex relationships might be unnatural for straight people but natural for gays, it may be a bit of culture shock to hear anything *besides* queers sex called "unnatural vice." But the term is there in the Fathers, and it can mean other things. It might include contraception. And it definitely includes what we think of as a way to return to nature in witchcraft.

Adam reigned as an immortal King and Lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, Paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And, he was like a little boy with a whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."* And lest we look down on Adam, we should remember that I am Adam, and you are Adam.

We have not lost all his glory, but we are crippled by his passion.

Adam wanted something beyond what he was given, something beyond his ken. An Orthodox hymn says, "Wanting to be a god, Adam failed to be god." More on that later. Adam experienced the desire that draws people to magic—even if the magic's apparent promise is a restored harmony with nature. This vice shattered the original harmony with nature, and brought a curse on not only Adam but nature itself. It corrupted nature. It introduced death. It means that many animals are terrified of us. It means that even the saints, the holiest of people, are the most aware of how much evil is in them—most of us are disfigured enough that we can think we don't have any *real* problem. There is tremendous good in the human person, too; that should be remembered. But even the saints are great

sinners. All of this came through Adam's sin. How much more unnatural of a vice do you ask for than that?

Trying to restore past glory, and how it further estranges us from the past

When I was visiting a museum promising an exhibit on the Age of Reason, I was jarred to see ancient Greek/Roman/... items laid out in exhibits; what was being shown about the Enlightenment was the beginning of museums as we have them today. I was expecting to see coverage of a progressive age, and what I saw was a pioneering effort to reclaim past glory. Out of that jarring I realized something that historians might consider a blinding flash of the obvious. Let me explain the insight nonetheless, before tying it in with harmony with nature.

When people have tried to recover past glory, through the Western means of antiquarian reconstruction, the result severs continuity with the recent past and ultimately made a deeper schism from the more remote past as well.

The Renaissance was an attempt to recover the glory of classical antiquity, but the effect was not only to more or less end what there was in the Middle Ages, but help the West move away from some things that were common to the Middle Ages and antiquity alike. The Reformation might have accomplished many good things, but it did not succeed in its goal in resurrecting the ancient Church; it created a new way of being Christian. The Protestants I know are moral giants compared to much of what was going on in Rome in Luther's day, and they know Scripture far better, but Protestant Christianity is a decisive break from something that began in the Early Church and remained unbroken even in corrupt 16th century Rome. And it is not an accident that the Reformers dropped the traditional clerical

clothing and wore instead the scholar's robes. (Understanding the Scripture was much less approached through reading the saints, much more by antiquarian scholarship.) The Enlightenment tried again to recover classical glory, and it was simultaneously a time, not of breaking with unbroken ways of being Christian, but of breaking with being Christian itself. Romanticism could add the Middle Ages to the list of past glorious ages, and it may well be that without the Romantics, we would not have great medievalists like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. But it was also something new. Every single time that I'm aware of that the West has tried to recover the glory of a bygone age, the effect has been a deeper rift with the past, both recent and ultimately ancient, leaving people much further alienated from the past than if they had continued without the reconstruction. I remember being astonished, not just to learn that two Vatican II watchwords were *ressourcement* (going back to ancient sources to restore past glory) and *aggiornamento* (bringing things up-to-date, which in practice meant bringing Rome in line with 1960's fads), nor that the two seemed to be two sides of the same coin, but that this was celebrated without anybody seeming to find something of a disturbing clue in this. The celebrations of these two watchwords seemed like a celebration of going to a hospital to have a doctor heal an old wound and inflict a new wound that is more fashionable.

The lesson would seem to be, "If you see a new way to connect with the past and recover past glory, be very careful. Consider it like you might consider a skilled opponent, in a game of chess, leaving a major piece vulnerable. It looks spiritually enticing, but it might be the bait for a spiritual trap, and if so, the consequences of springing for the bait might be a deeper rift with the past and its glory."

Not quite as shallow an approach to translate the past into the present...

Here is what you might do one day to live a bit more like prehistoric Grecians, or ancient Celts, or medieval Gallic peasants, or whatever. Keep in mind that this is at best half-way to its goal, not a full-fledged return to living like an ancient in harmony with nature to a day, but making a rough equivalent by using what is closest from our world:

1. However exotic the setting may seem to you, remember that it is a fundamental confusion to imagine that the setting was exotic *to those inside the experience*. We not only meet new people frequently; we see new technologies invented frequently. In The Historic Setting, people most likely were born, lived, and died within twenty miles, and even meeting another person who was not part of your village was rare. A new invention, or a new idea, would be difficult to imagine, let alone point to. So, for one day, whatever you're doing, if it feels exotic, avoid it like the plague. Stop it immediately. Don't read anything new; turn off your iPod; don't touch Wikipedia. Don't seek excitement; if anything, persevere in things you find boring.
2. Remembering that there was a lot of heavy manual labor, and stuff that was shared, spend your nice Saturday helping a friend move her stuff into her new apartment. Remember that while stairs were rare in antiquity, it would be an anachronism to take the elevator. Be a good manual laborer and do without the anachronism.

3. Remembering how the Sermon on the Mount betrays an assumption that most people were poor enough that houses would only have one room, spend your time at home, as much as possible, in one room of your house.
4. Remembering that the ancient world had no sense of "Jim's trying to lose weight and is on an old-fashioned low-fat diet, Mary's a vegan, Al's low carb...", but rather there was one diet that everybody day ate, go to McDonald's, order a meal with McDonald's McFries McSoaked in McGrease, and a sugary-sweet, corn-syrup-powered shake.
5. If you just said to yourself, "He didn't say what size; I'll order the smallest I can," order the biggest meal you can.
6. Remembering that in the ancient world the company you kept were not your eclectic pick, spend time with the people around you. Go to your neighbor Ralph who blears bad '80s rock because he thinks it's the best thing in the world, and like a good guest don't criticize what your host has provided—including his music. Spend some time playing board games with your annoying kid sister, and then go over to visit your uncle Wally and pretend to tolerate his sexist jokes.
7. Lastly, when you head home do have a good night's sleep, remember that a bed with sheets covering a smooth mattress was only slightly more common than a Frank Lloyd Wright home is today, go to sleep on a straw pallet in your virtual one room house. (You can use organic straw if you can find any.)

This may seem, to put it politely, a way you would never have thought to live like an age in harmony with nature. But let me ask a perfectly serious question:

What *did* you expect? Did you imagine dressing up as a bard, dancing on hilltops, and reciting poetry about the endless knot while quaffing heather ale?

G.K. Chesterton said that there is more simplicity in eating caviar on impulse than eating granola on principle. In a similar fashion, there is more harmony with nature in instinctively pigging out at McDonald's than making a high and lonely spiritual practice out of knowing all the herbs in a meadow.

The vignette of harmony with nature as dancing on hilltops is an image of a scene where harmony with nature means fulfilling what we desire for ourselves. The image of hauling boxes to help a friend is a scene where harmony with nature means *transcending* mere selfish desire. There is a common thread of faithfulness to unadvertised historical realities running through the six steps listed above. But there is another common thread:

Humility.

It chafes against a passion that people in ages past knew they needed to beat back.

Living according to nature in the past did not work without humility, and living in harmony with nature today did not work with humility.

There is a great deal of difference between getting help in living for yourself, and getting help in living for something more for yourself, and living for something more than yourself—such as people needed to survive in ancient communities close to nature—is the real treasure. It is spirituality with an ugly pair of work gloves, and it is a much bigger part of those communities that have been in harmony with nature than the superficially obvious candidates like spending more time outside and knowing when to plant different crops. If you clarify, "Actually, I was really more interested in the *spirituality* of a bygone age and its

harmony with nature," you are missing something. Every one of those humbling activities is pregnant with spirituality—and is spiritual in a much deeper way than merely feeling the beauty of a ritual.

Perhaps we would be wise to remember the words of the Delphic Oracle, "Know thyself," which does not say what we might imagine today. Those words might have been paraphrased, "Know thy place, O overreaching mortal!"

And, in terms of humility, that has much more to give us than trying to reach down inside and make a sandcastle of an identity, and hope it won't be another sandcastle.

Should I really be patting myself on the back?

I try to follow a diet that is closer to many traditional diets, has less processing and organic ingredients when possible, and I believe for several reasons that I am right in doing so: medical, animal welfare, and environmental. But before I pat myself on the back too hard for showing the spirit of Orthodoxy in harmony with nature, I would be well advised to remember that there is far more precedent in the Fathers and in the saint's lives for choosing to live on a cup of raw lentils a week or a diet of rancid fish.

Saints may have followed something of a special diet, but that is because they believed and acted out of the conviction that they were unworthy of the good things of the world, including the common fare what most people ate. My diet, like other diets in fashion, is a diet that tells me that the common fare eaten by most people is simply unworthy of *me*. This may well enough be true—I have doubts about how much of today's industrially produced diet is fit for human consumption at all—and I may well enough answer, "But *of course* the Quarter Pounder with 'Cheese' eaten by an inner-city teen is unworthy of me—it's just as

unworthy, if not more unworthy, of the inner-city teens who simply accept it as normal to eat." Even so, I have put myself in a difficult position. The saints thought they were unworthy of common fare. I believe that common fare is unworthy of me, and trying to believe that without deadly pride is trying to smoke, but not inhale.

In the Book of James, the Lord's brother says that the poor should exult because of their high position while the rich should be humble because of their low position. The same wisdom might see that the person who eats anything that tastes good is the one in the high position, and the person who avoids most normal food out of a special diet's discrimination is in a position that is both low and precarious.

The glory of the Eucharist unfurls in a common meal around a table, and this "common" meal is common because it is shared. To pull back from "common" food is to lose something very Eucharistic about the meal, and following one more discriminating diet like mine is a way to heal one breach of harmony with nature by opening up what may be a deeper rift.

If evil is necessary, does it stop being evil?

Orthodoxy in the West inherits something like counterculture, and there is something amiss when Orthodox carry over unquestioned endeavors to build a counterculture or worldview or other such Western fads. If Orthodoxy *in the West* is countercultural, that doesn't mean that counterculture is something to seek out: if Orthodoxy is countercultural, that is a cost it pays. Civil disobedience *can* be the highest expression of a citizen's respect for law. Amputation *can* be the greatest expression of a physician's concern for a patient's life. However, these things are not basically good, and there is fundamental confusion in seeking out occasions to show such measures.

Another basis to try and learn from the past

To someone in the West, Orthodoxy may have a mighty antiquarian appeal. Orthodox saints, for the most part, speak from long ago and far away. However, this isn't the point; it's a side effect of a Church whose family of saints has been growing for millennia. Compare this, for instance, to a listing of great computer scientists—who will all be recent, not because computer science in an opposite fashion needs to be new, but because computer science hasn't been around nearly long enough for there to be a fourth century von Neumann or Knuth.

Some people wanting very hard knife blades—this may horrify an antiquarian—acquire nineteenth century metal files and grind them into knife blades. The reason for this is that metallurgists today simply do not know how to make steel as hard as the hardest Victorian-era metal files. The know-how is lost. And the hobbyists who seek a hard metal file as the starting point for their knife blades do not choose old metalwork because it is old; they choose old metal files because they are the hardest they can get. And there is something like this in the Orthodox Church. The point of a saint's life is not how exotic a time and place the saint is from; the point of a saint's life is holiness, a holiness that is something like a nineteenth century adamantium-hard metal file.

If there are problems in turning back the clock, the Orthodox Church has some very good news. This good news is not exactly a special way to turn back the clock; it is rather the good news that the clock can be lifted up.

There is a crucial difference between trying to restore the past, and hoping that it will lift you into Heaven, and being lifted up into Heaven and finding that a healthy connection with the past comes with it. The Divine Liturgy is a lifting up of the people and their lives up to Heaven: a life that begins here and now.

The hymn quoted earlier, "Adam, trying to be a god, failed to be god," continues, "Christ became man that he might make Adam god." The saying has rumbled down through the ages, "God (the Son of God) became a Man (the Son of Man) that men (the sons of men) might become gods (the Sons of God)." The bad news, if it is bad news, is that we cannot escape a present into the beauty of Eden. The good news is that the present can itself be lifted up, that the doors to Eden remain open.

In some ways our search for happiness is like that of a grandfather who cannot find his glasses no matter how many places he looks—because they are right on his nose.

Men are not from Mars!

I was once able to visit a Mars Society conference—a conference from an organization whose purpose is to send human colonists to Mars.

To many of the people there, the question of whether we are "a spacefaring race" is much weightier than the question of whether medical research can find a cure for cancer. It's not just that a human colony on Mars would represent a first-class triumph of science and humanity; it is rather that the human race is beyond being a race of complete, unspeakable, and obscene *losers* if we don't come to our senses and colonize Mars so the human race is not just living on this earth and living the kind of life we live now. The question of whether we colonize Mars is, in an ersatz sense, the religious question of whether we as a race have salvation. The John 3:16 of this movement is, "Earth is the cradle of mankind, but one does not remain in a cradle forever."

The Mars Society holds an essay contest to come up with essays about why we should colonize Mars; the title of the contest, and perhaps of the essays, is, "Why Mars?" And, though I never got around to writing it, there was something I wanted to write.

This piece, having a fictional setting, would be written from the perspective of a sixteen year old girl who was the first person to be raised on Mars, and would provide another comparison of life on Mars to life on earth. And the essay would be snarky, sarcastic, angry, and bitter, because of something that people looking with starry eyes at a desired Mars colony miss completely.

What does the Mars Society not get about what they hope for?

When I was a student at Wheaton College, one of my friends told of a first heavy snowfall where students from warmer climates, some of whom had never experienced such a snowfall personally, were outside and had a delightful snowball fight. And they asked my friend, "How can you *not* be out here playing?" My friend's answer: "Just wait four months. You'll see."

One's first snowball fight is quite the pleasant experience, and presumably one's first time putting on a spacesuit is much better. But what my unattractively cynical friend didn't like about Wheaton's winter weather is a piece of cake compared to needing to put on a spacesuit and go through an airlock on a planet where the sum total of places one can go without a bulky, heavy, clumsy, uncomfortable, and hermetically sealed spacesuit, is dwarfed by a small rural village of a thousand people, and dwarfed by a medium sized jail. If you are the first person to grow up on Mars, the earth will seem a living Eden which almost everyone alive *but* you is privileged to live in. And the title of the snarky, sarcastic, and bitterly miserable essay I wished I could write from the perspective of the first human raised on Mars was, "Why Earth?"

I'm used to seeing people wish they could escape the here and now, but the Mars Society took this to a whole new level—so much so that I was thinking, "This is not a job for science and engineering; this is a job for counseling!" People were alienated from the here and now they had on earth, and the oomph of the drive to go to Mars seemed to be because of something else

entirely from the (admittedly very interesting) scientific and engineering issues. Having the human race not even try to live on Mars was so completely unacceptable to them because of their woundedness.

If you don't know how to be happy where God has placed you, escape will not solve the problem. In the case of Mars, the interesting issue is not so much whether colonization is possible, but whether it is desirable. Escape may take you out of the frying pan and into the thermite. (What? You didn't know that astronauts do not feel free, but like tightly wedged "spam in a can," with land control micromanaging you more than you would fear in a totalitarian regime, down to every bite of food you take in? Tough; a real opportunity to colonize Mars won't feel like being in an episode of *Star Trek* or *Firefly*.)

This is the playing out of a passion, and what the Mars Society seeks will not make them permanently happy. Success in their goals will not cure such misery any more than enough fuel will soothe a fire.

Confucius said, "When I see a virtuous man, I try to be like him. When I see an evil man, I reflect on my own behavior." Assuming you're not from the Mars Society (and perhaps offended), do you see anything of yourself in the Mars Society?

I do.

A more satisfying kind of drink

I talked with a friend about a cookbook, *Nourishing Traditions*, which I like for the most part but where there was a bit of a burr: the author ground an axe against alcoholic beverages fermented by yeast. The stated position of the book is a report of a certain type of traditional nutrition, and the author overrode that when it came to traditions that used rum and such.

My friend said that what I said was accurate: certain more alcoholic drinks were traditional, and the principles of *Nourishing Traditions* did not support all the ways the author

was grinding an axe against yeast-fermented alcohol, just as I thought. However, my friend suggested, the author was right about this. Lacto-fermented beverages, fermented by another ancient process that gives us cheese, sourdough, sauerkraut, corned beef, and the like, which *Nourishing Traditions* did promote, satisfy in a way that yeast-fermented beverages do not. People, it seems, use beer, wine, and liquor because they remind them of the satisfaction of the more ancient method of fermentation.

I'm not looking at giving up the occasional drink, but something of that rings true—and parallels a spiritual matter. People turn to a quest for the exotic, and that is illicit. But the Orthodox experience is that if you stay put, in the here and now, and grow spiritually, every year or so something exotic happens that is like falling off a cliff, when you repent. And that may be what people are connecting with in the wrong way in the pursuit of the exotic. If you give up on following the exotic, something beyond exotic may follow you.

The idiot

There was another piece that I was thinking of writing, but did not come together. The title I was thinking of was, *The Idiot*—no connection to Dostoevsky's work of the same name, nor to what we would usually think of as a lack of intelligence.

I was imagining a Socratic dialogue, along the same lines as “Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*” in which it unfolds that the person who doesn't get it is someone who has great success in constructing his own private world through technology, introspection, and everything else. Etymologically, the word “idiot” signifies someone who's off on his own—someone who does not participate in the life of civilization—and our civilization offers excellent resources to dodge civilization and create your own private world. And that is a loss.

And being an idiot in this sense is *not* a matter of low IQ. It is not the mentally retarded I have known who need to repent most, if at all. Usually it is the most brilliant I have known who best use their gifts and resources to be, in the classical sense, idiots.

Some adamantine-hard metal files that may hone us

At the risk of irony after opening by a complaint about words of wisdom from other lands selected for being exotic...

My mother recounted how a friend of hers was visiting one of her friends, a poor woman in Guatemala. She looked around her host's kitchen, and said, "You don't have any food around." Her hostess said, "No, I don't, but I will," and then paused a moment longer, and said, "And if I had the food now, what would I need God for?" That woman is wise. Those of us who live in the West pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," and probably have a 401(k) plan. Which is to say that "Give us today our daily bread" is almost an ornament to us. A very pious ornament, but it is still an ornament.

If we are entering hard times today, is that an end to divine providence?

St. Peter of Damaskos wrote, in *The Philokalia* vol. 3,

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvelous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.

- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

All these things, even if they are opposed to each other, are nevertheless good when used correctly; but when misused, they are not good, but are harmful for both soul and body.

The story is probably apocryphal, but I heard of an African pastor (sorry, I don't know his nationality) who visited the U.S. and said, "It's absolutely amazing what you can do without the Holy Spirit!" That is, perhaps, not what we want to hear as a compliment. But here in the U.S., if we need God, it's been easy to lose sight of the fact. Homeless people usually know where their next meal is coming from, or at least it's been that way, and homeless people have been getting much more appetizing meals than bread alone. Those of us who are not homeless have even more power than that.

An English friend of mine talked about how she was living in a very poor country, and one of her hosts said, "I envy you!" My friend didn't know exactly what was coming next—she thought it might be something that offered no defense, and her hosts said, "You have everything, and you still rely on God. We have *nothing*; we have no real alternative. So we rely on God. But you have *everything*, and you still rely on God!" The point was not about wealth, but faith. The friend's awe was not of a rich woman's treasures on earth, but a rich woman's treasures in Heaven. The camel really *can* go through the eye of the needle, and we may add to the list of examples by St. Peter of Damaskos, that we may thank God for first world wealth, because it gives us an opportunity to *choose* to rely on God.

Maybe we can add to St. Peter's list. But we would do well to listen to his wisdom before adding to his list. We have been given many blessings in first world economic conditions, and if our economy is in decline—perhaps it will bounce back in a year, perhaps longer, perhaps never—we no less should find where our current condition is on the list above.

To have the words "Give us this day our daily bread" unfortunately be an ornament is rare, and perhaps it is not the most natural condition for us to be in. Whatever golden age you may like, centuries or millennia ago, there was no widespread wealth like we experience. Our natural condition is, in part, to be under economic constraint, to have limits that keep us from doing things, and in some sense the level of wealth we have had is not the most natural condition, like having a sedentary enough job that you only exercise when you choose to, is not the most natural condition. Now I don't like being constrained any more than I have to, and I would not celebrate people losing their homes. However, if we have to be more mindful of what they spend, and don't always get what we want, that may be a very big blessing in disguise.

Dorothy Sayers, speaking of World War II in "The Other Six Deadly Sins" (found in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* and other essay collections), discussed what life was like when the economy was enormously productive but as much productivity as possible was being wasted by the war effort. What she pointed out was that when people got used to rationing and scarcity, they found that this didn't really mean that they couldn't enjoy life—far from it. People could enjoy life when most of their economy's productivity was being wasted by war instead of wasted by buying things that people didn't need. She argued that England didn't have a choice about learning to live frugally—but England could choose to apply this lesson once the war got out. England didn't, and neither did the U.S., but the lesson is still good.

A recent news story discussed how adult children moved in with their parents as a measure of frugality, where the family was being frugal to the point of planning meals a month in advance and grinding their own flour. And what they found was that living simply was something of an adventure.

An unlikely cue from science fiction?

Mary Midgley, in *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning*, says of science fiction and science fiction writers,

But the best of them have understood, as Wells and Stapleton did, that their main aim was imaginative. The were using 'the future' as a screen on which to project timeless truths for their own age. They were *prophets* primarily in the sense in which serious poets are so — spiritual guides, people with insight about the present and the universal, rather than literal predictors. For this purpose, it no more matters whether these supposedly future events will actually happen than it does for *Hamlet* and *MacBeth* whether what they show us actually happened in the past. The point of *The Time Machine* is not that the machine would work, nor that there might be Morlocks [a powerful, privileged technological elite] somewhere, some day. It is that there are Morlocks here now.

Note the last words. C.S. Lewis may quite directly and literally believe in a literal Heaven and a literal Hell, but Lewis understands Midgley's closing point well, even if he wrote *The Great Divorce* decades before. He offers an introduction that ends with, "The last thing I wish is to arouse curiosity about the details of the after-world." He may have no pretensions of knowing the details of the next life, but the reason he writes so compellingly about Heaven and Hell is not that someday, somewhere, we will experience Heaven or Hell. (Even if that is true.) He is able to write with such depth because Heaven and Hell are in us, here and now. And one of the cardinal spiritual

factors in *The Great Divorce* is a cardinal spiritual factor here now. It is called repentance.

In *The Sign of the Grail*, Fr. Elijah brings George, a Christian, into the communion of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox speak of this as a conversion, but this means something beyond merely straightening out George's worldview. Fr. Elijah may share wisdom with George, but he is interested in something fundamentally beyond getting George to accept a worldview. He is trying, in all of his various ways, to get George to wake up. It is the same as the blessed spirits in *The Great Divorce* who are in Heaven and keep saying to visitors from Hell, "Wake up! Wake up!" They do often discuss ideas with their visitors, but their goal is never merely to straighten out a tormented worldview; it is to open their visitors' spiritual eyes so they will wake up to the reality of Heaven.

In *The Great Divorce*, visitors come from Hell, visit Heaven, keep receiving invitations to wake up and live in Heaven, and mostly keep on choosing Hell. If it is put that way, it sounds like a very strange story, but it is believable not primarily because of C.S. Lewis's rhetorical powers, but because of the spiritual realities Lewis knows to write about. I have only heard one person claim to want to go to Hell, and then on the misunderstanding that you could enjoy the company of others in Hell. However, people miss something big about Hell if they think everybody will choose Heaven.

God does not send people to Hell, but the fires of Hell are nothing other than the light of Heaven experienced through the rejection of Christ. Hell appeared as a seed in the misery when, as I wrote earlier:

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And, he was like a little boy with a*

whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."

The Sermon on the Mount says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." But *everyone* will see God. God is love; his love is absolute and will flow absolutely. Because of that love, everybody will see God. And the saved will know this as blessing and as bliss beyond description. But to those who reject Christ, the light of Heaven, the light of seeing God, will be experienced as *Hellfire*. Hell is Heaven experienced through the rejection of the only ultimate joy that exists: Christ.

Repentance is recognizing that you are in a little Hell and choosing to leave by the one way you do not wish to leave. Elsewhere from the quotation from St. Peter, the *Philokalia* says, "People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them." The woman addicted to alcohol may be in misery, but she has alcohol to seemingly anesthetize the pain, and it is incredibly painful to give up the illusion that if you try hard enough and get just a bit of a solace, things will be OK. That's a mighty hard thing to repent of: it's easier to rationalize, decide to give it up by sheer willpower (perhaps tomorrow), or make a bargain to cut back to a more reasonable level—anything but wake up and stop trying to ignore that you're standing barefoot in something really gross, and admit that what you need is not a bigger fan to drive away the stench while you stay where you are, but to step out in a cleaning operation that lasts a lifetime and cuts to your soul.

An alcoholic walking this path craves just a little bit of solace, just for now, and it is only much later that two things happen. First, the cravings are still hard, but they are no longer *quite* so overpowering. Second, she had forgotten what it felt like to be clean—really and truly *clean*—and she had forgotten what it was like to be doing something else with her life than trying to hide in a bottle. She had forgotten what freedom was like. And long after she gave up on her way of escaping life, she found she had

forgotten what it was like to experience life, not as something to escape, but as something with joy even in its pain.

The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the **inside**. This much is true of passion: we think our sins adorn us, and we try to flee from the only place joy is to be found. Fleshly lust disenchants the entire universe; first everything else becomes dull and uninteresting, and ultimately stronger doses of lust lose even the semblance of being interesting. Spiritual lust, the passion that seeks escape from where God has placed us is, if anything, a sin with a higher pay grade than the fleshly lust that is bad enough, but spiritual lust too is the disenchantment of reality, a set of blinders that deflates all the beauty we are given in nature. Spiritual lust is the big brother of merely fleshly lust. Spiritual lust is something really, really, *really* gross that we need to step out of and get *clean*. We need to realize that the passion does not adorn us, that the sparkle of an exotic escape from a miserable here and now is, on a spiritual plane, spin doctoring for experiencing the here and now with despair. We do not see that we need not an escape from what God has given us, but gratitude and contentment.

But what if the here and now is not the best here and now? What if it's with an Uncle Wally who tells sexist jokes no matter how you ask him to stop? What if the people you are with have *real* warts? There are a couple of responses. You might also think of what your uncle has done that you might be grateful for. You know, like when he helped you find and buy your first car. Or you could learn the power of choosing to be joyful when others act unpleasantly. Or you might read C.S. Lewis, "The Trouble with X," and then look at how you might stand to profit from praying, with the Orthodox Church, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Once, when things went from hard times to easy times, one saint complained, saying that easy times rob the Church of her martyrs and her glory. If we are entering hard times, that does not place us outside of God's reach nor Christ's promise in the

Sermon on the Mount: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

I glorify Thee,
Who hast cast Adam out of Paradise,
That we might learn by the sweat of our brow
The joy and the life that Adam scorned
As King of Paradise.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.
Glory forever.
And glory be to Thee,
Thou who blessest us
For better or for worse,
In sickness and in health,
In the Eternal Light and Love
Who illuminest marriage.
Glory forever.
Glory be to thee whose blessings are here,
Not in an escape,
But in the place wherein Thou hast placed us.
Glory forever.
Glory be to Thee,
Who offerest Eden,
To us men who forever dodge our salvation.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both here and now, and in Eternal Life that beckons us
The Son of God became a man in his here and now in Bethlehem.
In your forever honored place,

From this very moment,
Become a Son of God.
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near,
Heaven awaits with open arms,
Step out of Hell.
Grieve for your sins,
That grief that holds more in her heart,
Than discovering that the scintillating escape from Hell
Scintillates only as a mirage.
And the repentance you fear,
So constricted it seems from outside,
Holds inside a treasure larger than the universe,
Older than time,
And more alive than life.
Glory beyond glory,
Life beyond life,
Light beyond life,
The Bread from Heaven,
The infinite Living Wine,
Who alone canst slake our infinite thirst,
Glory forever.

Glory be to God on high.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages,
Amen:
Glory forever.
Alleluia!

How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion

Introduction: A study of secularization

Thomas Dixon in “Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” offers a model of societal secularization intended to be a more robust than just seeing “theology vs. anti-theology,” “theology vs. theology in disguise,” or “theology vs. anti-theology in disguise.” He argues for a process that begins with full-blooded theism, such as offered by almost any strain of classic Christianity, and then moves to “thin theism,” such as Paley (today think Higher Powers), then “anti-theology” that is directly hostile to theism, then “atheology” which is alienated from theological roots but is merely un-theological, “in much the same way as a recipe in a cookery book is un-theological.”

Dixon, like a good scholar, provides a good case study explored at greater length in his dissertation, and I am very interested in the case study he chose. He looks at the formation of a secular category of psychology, and the steps that have been taken to depart from older religious understandings situating the concept of passions, to a secular concept of emotions. The development of the secular category of emotions serves as a microcosm of a study of a society's apostasy (a term Dixon does not use in his article) from understanding aspects of life as features of religion, to covering similar territory in terms of what is explained, but understanding things on secular terms, disconnected from religion. (Much prior to the transition Dixon documents, it's difficult to see what the West would make of psychobabble about "*Feelings aren't right. They aren't wrong. They're just feelings.*")

If I may summarize Dixon's account of the apostasy, while moving the endpoints out a bit, in the *Philokalia*, passions are loosely sin viewed as a state, with inner experience (and sometimes outer) related to how we live and struggle with our passions. Orthodox Christians have quite an earful to give (and sometimes the maturity not to give it) if someone from the West asks, "What are your *passions*?" In an Orthodox understanding, taken literally, that question has nothing to do with activities we enjoy and get excited about (unless they are wrong for us to engage in). It is more the matter of a habit of sin that has defaced their spiritual condition and that they are, or should be, repenting of. That is one of the more "Western-like" points we can take from the *Philokalia*; another foundational concept is that many of the thoughts we think are our own, and make our own (such as authentic handling of non-straight sexuality as is broadly understood today), are the unending attempted venomous injections of demons and we need to watchfully keep guard and destroy what seems to be our own thoughts. This is not present, nor would be particularly expected, in Dixon's account. However, the "before" in Dixon's "before and after" clearly

situates what would today be considered feelings as markers and features of spiritual struggle, spiritual triumph, and spiritual defeat. The oldest so-to-speak “non-influence” figure Dixon attends to lives well after the Orthodox eight demons, that attack us from without, were revised to become our own internal seven deadly sins.

The first alternative Dixon studies is a concept of emotion that is paper-thin. The specific text he studies, which is remarkably accurately named, is Charles Darwin’s *The Expressions of Emotion in Man and the Animals*. The title does not directly herald a study of *emotion*, but the *expressions* of emotion, with an a priori that diminishes or removes consideration of human emotional life being distinctive (contrast Temple Grandin, *Animals in Translation*; she believes very much that animals have a psyche, but takes a sledgehammer to all-too-easy anthromorphization of animal psyches). Furthermore, an emotion is something you feel. Emotion is not really about something, and emotional habits are not envisioned. Darwin’s study was a study of physiologically what was going on with human and animal bodies approached as what was really going on in emotion.

Later on, when atheology has progressed, this begins to change. After a certain point people could conceive that emotions are about something; another threshold crossed, and you could speak of emotional habits; another threshold crossed, and you could regard a person’s emotional landscape as healthy or unhealthy. All of this fits Dixon’s category of atheology if one is using his framework. There remain important differences from either the *Philokalia* or the earliest models Dixon studies: it is today believed that you should let emotions wash through you until they have run their course, an opinion not endorsed by any framing of passions that I know. However, I would recall G.K. Chesterton on why it was not provocative for him to call the Protestant Reformation the shipwreck of Christianity: the proof is

that, like Robinson Crusoe, Protestants keep on retrieving things from the Catholic ship.

Perhaps the fullest atheological rediscovery of the concept of a passion I am aware of is the disease model of alcoholism lived out in Alcoholics Anonymous. The passions are, in the *Philokalia*, spiritual wounds or diseases of some sort, and the dominant metaphor for a father confessor is that of a physician or healer. While the important term “repent” is not included in the wording of the twelve steps, the twelve steps paint in powerful and stark relief what repentance looks like when it puts on work gloves. The community is in many ways like a church or perhaps is a church. Steps may be taken to qualify strict doctrine, but the teaching and resources are a sort of practical theology to help people defeat the bottle. (One thinks of Pannenberg’s essay “How to Think About Secularism” suggests that secularism did not arise from people grinding an axe against all religion; it arose from people wanting to live in peace at a time when it was mainstream to wish that people on the other side of the divide would be burned at the stake.) There is a bit of haziness about “God as I understand him,” but this is decidedly not the result of hazy thinking. The biggest difference between Alcoholics Anonymous and the Orthodox Church may be that Alcoholics Anonymous helps with one primary disease or passion, and the Church, which could be called Sinners Anonymous, doesn’t say, “Hi. I’m Joe, and I’m an alcoholic.” It believes, “Hi. I’m Joe, and I’m the worst sinner in history.”

Where is the Orthodox Church in all of Dixon’s study?

At a glance, there may not be much visible. The Orthodox Church is not mentioned as such, the text seems to focus on English-speaking figures from the 17th century onwards, and the only figure claimed by the Orthodox Church is the Blessed Augustine, who is first mentioned in a perfunctory list of influences upon authors who retained significant grounding in older tradition. (The next stop seems to jump centuries forward to reach Thomas Aquinas.) The text does not seem to have even a

serious pretension to treat Orthodoxy as far as the case study goes. Furthermore, while passions were and are considered important in Orthodoxy, the theological *affections* that counterbalance theological passions in the “before” part of “before and after” are obscure or nonexistent in Orthodox faith.

However, there is something that would feel familiar to Orthodox. To the Orthodox student in a Roman university, there may be the repeated effect of a Catholic student conspiratorially explain that the Roman Catholic Church has been doing that was daft and wrong, but now Rome is getting its act together, has progressed, and has something genuinely better to offer. To Orthodox, this whole topos heralds something specific; it heralds the dismantling of one more continuity that Rome used to have with Holy Orthodoxy. And while Dixon does not discuss “Catholic” or “Protestant” as such and does not even have pretensions of treating Orthodoxy, he offers a first-class account of Western figures dismantling one more continuity with Holy Orthodoxy. To many Orthodox, the tune sounds all too familiar.

Quasi-Mystical-Theology

In Orthodoxy, all theology is “mystical theology”, meaning what is practically lived in the practice of Holy Orthodoxy. Systematic theology is off-limits, as a kind of formal book exercise that is not animated by the blood of mystical theology.

Clinical psychology offers what Dixon terms quasi-theology, and I would more specifically term quasi-mystical theology. Not all psychologists are clinical practitioners; there are a good number of academic research psychologists who explore things beyond the bounds of what a counselor would ordinarily bring up. For instance, academic psychology has developed theories of memory, including what different kinds of memory there are, how they work, and how they fit together. These are not only more detailed than common-sense understandings, but different:

learning a skill is considered a type of memory, and while it makes sense on reflection, the common, everyday use of “memory” does not draw such a connection.

This is a legitimate finding of research psychology, but it falls outside of common counseling practice unless the client has some kind of condition where this information is useful. Clinical practitioners attempt to inculcate aspects of psychology that will help clients with their inner state, how to handle difficulties, and (it is hoped) live a happier life. All of this is atheology that is doing something comparable to theology, and more specifically mystical theology; the speculative end is left for academics, or at least not given to clients who don't need the added information. In Dixon's framing, some atheology is additionally *quasi-theological*, meaning that it offers e.g. overarching narratives of life and the cosmos; he mentions science-as-worldview as one point. Clinical psychology offers a different, humbler, and vastly more powerful quasi-theological project. It offers an attempt at a secular common ground that will let people live their lives with the kind of resources that have been traditionally sought under religious auspices. As far as the *Philokalia* as the Orthodox masterwork for the science of spiritual struggle goes, at times the content of clinical psychology runs parallel to the *Philokalia* and at times it veers in a different and unrelated direction from the *Philokalia*, but it is almost a constant that clinical psychology is intended to do *Philokalia* work that will help overcome bad thoughts, preventable misery, regrettable actions, being emotionally poisoned by people who are emotionally poisonous, etc. There is of course an additional difference in that the works in the *Philokalia* are concerned with building people up for eternal glory, but clinical psychology is meant to build people up for a positive life, and that much is common ground.

What is a religion? Can religion be secular?

Q> *With so many religions [in India], how do you stay united?*

A: *A common hatred of stupid Americans.*

(An FAQ list written by an exasperated Indian)

The term “religion” etymologically comes from Latin, “religare”, which means to bind. It is the same root as in “ligament” in the human body, which do a job of connecting bones to each other. And while the FAQ list contains some astonishingly silly questions, there is some degree of insight reflected in a realization of many religions in India leading to a question of, “*How do you stay united?*”

I bristled when I read scholars saying that courtly love and chivalry was the real religion of knights and nobles late in the Middle Ages, but some years later, the claim makes a lot more sense to me. The medieval versions of Arthurian legend I read before and during *The Sign of the Grail* repeatedly talked about how people didn’t love (in courtly fashion) anything like the days of King Arthur, which is a signal warning that courtly love was present in a sense that was unthinkable in the claimed days of King Arthur’s court. The first widespread version of Arthurian legends outside of Celtic legend were in the twelfth century; the dates reported, with mention of St. Augustine of Canterbury, put Arthur as being in the sixth century. The number of intervening centuries is roughly the same as the number of years between our time and the tail end of the medieval world.

Furthermore, I have not read *Harry Potter* but I would offer some contrasts. First of all, Harry Potter is produced, offered, and among the more mentally stable members of the fan base, received as a work of fiction. The version of King Arthur that first swept through mainland Europe was a work of pseudohistory

produced mostly out of thin air, but was presented and received as literal history. Secondary, Harry Potter mania is not expected to be a fixture for all of a long lifetime: the cultural place we have is like nothing else in its heyday, but it is a candidate for a limelight that shone on many other things before it and is expected to shine on many things after it. The Arthurian legends were more of a Harry Potter without competition. Today one can walk in the bookstore and see fantasy novels representing many worlds; Arthurian legends tended to absorb anything beside them that was out there (like the story of Tristan and Yseult, included in Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*). It might be pointed out that the present Pope as of this writing is named after a medieval Western saint, Francis of Assisi, who was named under the inspiration of France and more specifically French troubadours. I am not sure where the troubadours' lyrics began and ended, but Arthurian legends entered the vulgar (i.e. common, instead of Latin) tongue in France and troubadours were part and parcel to what spread. Notwithstanding that the Arthurian legends take place in England, they are to this day as well-known, or better-known, in France, than the story of the (French) Roland and his paladins. The Roman Catholic Church forbade reading "idle romances," meaning, essentially, all Arthurian literature, but it seems that, in the circles of courtly love, the active endeavors of chivalry were much more on the front burner with Christianity assumed to be on the back burner, and chivalry was more of one's real religion to knights and nobles than Christianity.

One Orthodox student, perhaps not making himself particularly well-liked in a theology program by complaining about Karl Rahner's reliance on Western analytic philosophy (one particularly memorable cart-before-the-horse heading was "The presence of Christ in an evolutionary worldview"), and was answered by saying that it was to reach the unbeliever. He responded and said that he did not see why the common ground between all world religions was Western analytic philosophy. The

professor said that it was to reach the unbeliever in *us*. The student said that Western analytic philosophy did not speak to the unbeliever in him. (The conversation moved on from there, but without uncovering any particular reason why Western analytic philosophy should fit the job description Rahner was conscripting it to do.)

In psychology today, the common ground that is legitimately given the job of a secular and artificial religion in a sense of what common ground binds us together is material derived by Buddhism and Hinduism (whether or not their incarnations would be recognized by the religious communities). Jainism is omitted perhaps because of a lack of familiarity with Indian religion. (The term “yoga,” for instance, means a spiritual path, in which sense it would be natural for a Christian to claim to be practicing the Christian yoga, but yoga in the usual sense is lifted from Hinduism. As to whether Orthodox may practice yoga, as always, ask your priest; I do not see why Christians need yoga, but many priests are much more lenient than I would be.) What is presented in psychology today is a secular religion, not specifically requiring one to reverence certain deities or providing as complete a moral code as world religions, and for that matter expected to be markedly different than the secular religions offered ten years in the past and ten years in the future, and no less meant to do a religion’s job because it is concocted.

Why are we seeking mindfulness from the East?

Perhaps because we because we have dismantled it in the West.

Fr. Thomas Hopko’s “55 Maxims for the Christian Life”:

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.

4. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 or 30 minutes a day.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
23. Live a day, or even part of a day, at a time.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present wherever you are.
35. Flee imagination, analysis, fantasy, figuring things out.

34 is not the only item that exhorts us to be mindful.

But we are rediscovering mindfulness after having dismantled it at home. One friend talked about how his grandmother complained about Walkmans, that if you are running through natural surroundings and listening to music, you are not paying due attention to your surroundings. There has been a stream of technologies, from humble, tape-eating Walkmans to the iPod's apotheosis in an iPhone and Apple Watch pairing, whose marketing proposition is to provide an ever-easier, ever-more-seductive, ever-more-compelling alternative to mindfulness. Now an iPhone can be awfully useful (I have a still-working iPhone 7), but *using technology ascetically and rightly is harder than not using it at all*, and Humane Tech only reaches so far.

One CEO talked about how she wanted to share one single hack, and the hack she wanted to share was that her mother gave you her full attention no matter who you were or what you were doing. And evidently this was something the CEO considered important both to do and to invite others to do. However, her mother's behavior, however virtuous, and virtuously mindful, was nothing distinctive in her generation, nor was it presented as such. Even with no concept of mindfulness as such, people in her mother's generation were taught in life, faith, and manners to give mindful attention to everyone you dealt with.

G.K. Chesterton exposes the sadness of laboring in the prison of one idea, and something similar might be said by laboring in the prison of one virtue, especially if that is not a cardinal virtue that opens to a vista of other virtues. Mindfulness, for instance, is much more worthy of attention when viewed as part of an Eightfold Noble Path of interlocking virtues. A TED talk about what makes people beat the odds, presented as original research to a virtue the presenter calls "grit," which (however much research is done) is quickly recognizable as the standard virtue of perseverance.

There may be hope for a TED talk about an interlocking family of virtues. Tim Ferris's talk about Stoicism does not discuss virtue as such, but does introduce the oblong concept that life lessons learned in ancient times can be relevant and useful today, and discusses Stoicism as the substance of a play George Washington used to strengthen his troops, and discovered as a kind of ultimate power tool by some of the top coaches in the NFL.

The first book of the *Philokalia*, moved to an appendix by formerly Protestant editors, was misattributed to one saint and the stated reason for its banishment was that it was spiritually insightful but not written by a Christian; it was Stoic and not Christian in certain respects. That may be true, but the *Philokalia* is universally human and its authors have usually been quick to borrow from, and respect, Stoic virtue philosophy.

One influential book from the West is Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*. C.S. Lewis gives its reception a cardinal place in *The Discarded Image*, and contests a tendency to have to choose between Boethius's Christianity and his philosophy. Both should be taken seriously, and the book, among other excellences, shows a Christian who has profited from the best pagan philosophy had to offer, including important Stoic elements.

We've seen a TED talk that doesn't name virtues but shows enthusiasm for ancient philosophy in which virtues were important. Perhaps someday we may have a TED talk about an ancient or modern *family* of virtues.

“Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic,” is fundamentally not an “affirmation.”

I would like to look at the phrase, “Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic” to dismiss two ideas that might already be obviously ridiculous.

The first is that it's sadistic, Alcoholics Anonymous rubbing member's noses into the dirt because of some cruel glee. The practice of introducing yourself as an alcoholic is part and parcel of a big picture intended to free alcoholics from a suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy, perhaps reminding members that someone who has been fifteen years sober can return to bondage to alcohol. Furthermore, the main intended beneficiary of saying “Hi, my name's Joe, and I'm an alcoholic,” is simply the alcoholic who says it.

The second is that it's wishful thinking. Perhaps there are some confused people who believe that it would be nice to be drunk all the time and drink more and more. However, for someone who knows the incredibly destructive suffering alcoholism inflicts on oneself and those one loves, it is an

absurdity to think of “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic” as a way to talk something into being, for someone who’s been stone cold sober lifelong to wish to be in cruel slavery to alcohol. “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic” being an “affirmation” of wishful thinking belongs in a Monty Python sketch. The introduction as an alcoholic falls under the heading of facing already present reality.

“Here is a trustworthy saying which deserves acceptance: Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” Such said St. Paul, and such is enshrined in two brief prayers before communion. Confessing oneself the chief of sinners is not a positive affirmation: but it is a handmaiden to being one Christ died for, and another saying which has rumbled down the ages, “The vilest of human sins is but a smouldering ember thrown into the ocean of God’s love.” The confession as the chief of sinners is not an endpoint. It is a signpost lighting up the way to, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” However vile the sins one owns up to, they are outclassed in every possible way by the Lord who is addressed in, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (“Mercy” is said to translate *chesed*, a Hebrew word usually translated as “lovingkindness.”)

How do modern psychological affirmations look to a theist? A bit like trying to nourish yourself by eating cotton candy, but I’d really like to give more of an argument than an unflattering comparison. The introduction to *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* describe a shift in wisdom literature (written and other materials about how to live life well; the concept heavily overlaps both theology and psychology). The shift is from a *character ethic*, which says that you get ahead by moral character or moral virtue, to a *personality ethic* which does not call for submitting to inner transformation, and whose hallmarks include exhortations to “Believe in yourself.” (Since Covey wrote his introduction, the jobhunting world is not the only arena to undergo a second fall into a personal brand ethic, but

affirmations have not gotten to that point, or at least not that I'm aware of.)

Spirituality and organized religion

One Orthodox priest mentioned, for people who want to be spiritual but express distrust of organized religion, "If you don't like organized religion, you'll love Orthodoxy. We're about as disorganized as you can get." But he also had a deeper point to make.

That deeper point is that "objection to organized religion" is usually at its core "objection to someone else holding authority over me." And that is deadly, because someone else having authority over you is the gateway to much of spiritual growth.

Spirituality that is offered as neutral, and has been castrated enough not to visibly trample any mainstream demographic's religious and spiritual sensitivities, may have some effect, but true growth takes place outside of such spiritual confines.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World* almost opens on "spirituality." He discusses its vacuity, and how it exacerbates an already secular enough life. The reader is directed to him for what one might have that is better than taking a secular life and adding spirituality.

For lack of knowledge my people perish

I would like to take a moment to talk about mental illness.

The teaching of the Orthodox Church on what we understand as mental illness (see some "hard pill to swallow" prayers), as articulated by an Orthodox MD/PhD, is that the terrain we frame as mental illness has already been analyzed and addressed. Mental illnesses, or what are called such, are tangles

of passion. But the psychiatrist was clear that he could and did prescribe medications to lessen patients' suffering.

One bugbear that needs to be addressed is the idea that if you are suffering from mental illness, you need more faith, and/or you just need to snap out of it. Now all of us really need more faith, and if you suffer from a mental illness, you obviously should pray. *However*, trying to pray hard enough to make it go away may not work any better than trying to snap out of it.

Now, with caveats, I would recommend Orthodox Christians with mental illness to see a psychiatrist and/or a counselor. Their methods can be very effective, and for all my writing about ersatz religion, they can significantly reduce suffering.

The caveat I would give is not theologically motivated. It is that there are excellent psychiatrists and counselors, but psychology is a minefield, with counselors who will tell you to use pornography and masturbate. If I were looking for a provider, I would do research and/or ask someone you trust to do research for you (if, for instance, you are depressed enough that it's difficult to get out of bed). And if your provider seems to be acting inappropriately or displaying incompetence, it may be the entirely right decision to switch providers.

However, there is one piece more that the secular category of psychology does not understand. **Mental illness can improve dramatically when you delve into new layers of repentance.** While it doesn't work to just try harder to have more faith, as you walk the Orthodox journey of repentance you will see things to repent of, and some of that repentance can slowly help untangle the knot of passions that the Fathers of the *Philokalia* knew, and St. Isaac the Syrian, a saint who has benefitted many mentally ill people.

The reason this section is titled "For lack of knowledge my people perish" is that we usually don't see what we need to repent of to work at that level. We don't know the steps. The solution I would expect is to work hard to repent, and make your confession include that one sin that you are wishing to forget when you

confess. But walk on the journey of repentance: Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Monasticism is rightly called repentance, but the treasure of repentance is for everyone.

For those for whom this is a live option, the care of a spiritual director receives a central endorsement in *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, a classic which says that if patristic spiritual direction were to be introduced today, it would not likely be classified as religion so much as a therapeutic science. A good, experienced spiritual director who is familiar with mental illness as understood in Orthodoxy can be a much better alternative to fumbling around until you find out what sin you need to repent of and reject to turn your back on a particular point of mental illness. "For lack of knowledge my people perish" can be greatly alleviated by a spiritual director who understands classic Orthodox teaching on mental illness.

One more thing: a wise Orthodox protopresbyter said, "Avoid amateur psychologists. They usually have more problems than the rest of us!"

Et cetera

There are other things I do not wish to treat in detail. After it has been observed that clinical psychology often takes a person who is miserable and raise that person to feeling OK, but not rise above feeling OK, there has been a "positive psychology" meant for everyone, to help people rise above OK and make use of great talents. I would comment briefly that monasticism is both a supreme medicine for those of us who need some extra structure, *and* a school for positive excellence, and the latter is more central than the former.

In terms of "Christian psychology," Cloud and Townsend's *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No* is consistently violent to Biblical texts in the process of presenting secular boundaries as Christian. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is ludicrous hyperbole, and not properly understood

until it is recognized as ludicrous hyperbole, in which the Good Samaritan goes through a road infested by brigands, gambles with his life when he gives in to what would ordinarily be the bait to brigands' oldest and deadliest trick in the book, and so on. It was made to make the listener who asked Christ, "Who is my neighbor?" profoundly uncomfortable. Cloud and Townsend, however, present the Good Samaritan as giving a moderate and measured response, and asks us to imagine the rescued victim asking the Samaritan to give even *more*, and the Good Samaritan wisely saying, "No."

If you have to be that violent to the Bible to make it agree with you, you're almost certainly wrong.

And there are other things. I'm not going to try to detail life without thinking in terms of boundaries, beyond saying that Christianity, and almost certainly not only Christianity, has a concept of "Love your neighbor as yourself" that unfolds into right relations with other people, but without psychology's concept of boundaries.

Let me mention one more point.

Honest?

Perhaps most striking of all was a session under the heading of honesty, and showed a TED talk where a psychiatrist shared (in retrospect and in context, this seems like a deliberate name-drop) that he was named after his father, a Baptist minister. Then he came out as an illegitimate child, and I would like to repeat why my own parents do not like the term "bastard."

While they wanted to teach polite language, my parents did not object to the term "bastard" because it is forceful enough to be a rude word. They objected to the term "bastard" because the term refers to someone who did not and could not have any say or any agency in a wrong decision. If there is a term forceful enough to be a rude word in this context, and the relevant act was consensual, the abrasive word should refer to the parents and not

the child. And now that we've mostly retired the use of words like "adulterer" and "fornicator", we have an abrasive term for the victim who had no choice in a matter and not those who made the victimhood and the victim. If the worst TMI delivery in the TED talk was that the psychiatrist was an illegitimate child, one could have answered, "Well, Christ was also born from a scandalous pregnancy." But in fact this is not all the TMI psychiatrist was "sharing."

Back to the TED talk. Coming out as a bastard was a softening up of the audience for behavior in which the psychiatrist genuinely *did* have agency. He then came out as a philanderer; he did not use any negative terms, but talked about honesty and authenticity when he opened up to his wife, now his 2nd ex-wife whom he presents as not really harmed, and shared to her, of himself, that he was both *married* and *dating*. It was, to adapt a striking phrase from Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a confession with total absence of contrition or repentance.

No light bulbs went on above staff members' heads when patients complained that this was the most autistic version of honesty they had yet seen endorsed by a mental health professional, and explained that you don't open a coat and say "Here's all there is to see, whether or not seeing it will help you," or that you don't bleed all over a casual acquaintance who asks "How are you?" in passing; as sometimes has to be explained to the autistic patient, it is rarely a shirking of due honesty to withhold a full-strength informational answer in responding to a merely social question.

And perhaps no light bulbs should have gone on over staff heads because the session on honesty had nothing to do with honesty. Staff members were in fact not ignorant of the major concept of "negative politeness" and that right speech usually both conceals and reveals. Ostensible "honesty" was just how an unrelated payload was delivered.

To spell it out, the payload is that whatever sexual practices you find yourself most drawn to pursue, and others pursue, is your real, authentic self, and honesty takes that as a non-negotiable foundation. The lecture was devoid of any clear or even vague reference to any stripe of queers (or whatever they are called this week), and if the speaker's philandering tried out dating a guy, he did not disclose this point. But as much as coming out as an illegitimate child paved the way for coming out as a philanderer, accepting his coming out as a philanderer on the terms he presented was masterfully crafted to pave the way to saying the *only* real payload to that TED talk: "The sexual practices you are most drawn to engage in are your real, authentic self, and authenticity starts with accepting these practices as its foundation," and if one labors under the delusion that a successful straight marriage is what happens when one man, and one woman, lay the reins on the horse's neck, one is in a position that has little to no ground to dissent from a position of, "If you allow straight marriage to be authentic, you have to give queers the same right too."

The entire session ostensibly offered to teach honesty was itself treacherously dishonest.

(Queer advocacy has long since been baked into the societal common ground that psychology deems inoffensive to all religions.)

Conclusion: Beyond solipsism

The goal and lesson of psychology is quite often solipsistic. There are exceptions: positive psychology may cover three versions of the good life, the last and deepest version being the meaningful life, a non-solipsistic life of service to others. (Though this is seldom covered in psychology, service to others gives a real happiness). However, a session on boundaries covers how to establish and maintain our own boundaries, but probably does not cover respecting other boundaries, including when someone

draws a boundary when you think it would be so much better not to establish the boundaries. The further you go, the tighter the constriction of solipsistic self-care. The endgame approached by most pillars of counseling psychology is a client with self-contained happiness.

In Orthodoxy, we do one better: “Only God and I exist.”

“Only God and I exist.” What does that mean? In a nutshell, the only standing that ultimately matters is your standing before God. Now the Orthodox Church has various forms of mediated grace, and that mediation may be included. However, the only one you need seek to please is God; if you are pleasing God, it doesn't matter what people may do, or even the demons. Arrogance has a place; we are summoned to be rightly and properly arrogant towards the demons in pleasing God. And trample them.

One major difference between ancient Judaism and its neighbors was that, as God's people knew, there was only one God, and our problem before him was sin; if one has sinned, the one and only necessary remedy was atonement. The polytheistic neighbors believed in something much less rational, not to mention far less humane, was that one could do things that offended one or more gods, and the solution to this situation was to appease the offended deity, but unfortunately what appeased one deity could offend another. The unfortunate picture was much like the fool's errand of simultaneously pleasing everyone in a bickering junior high.

St. Moses is in fact one who confessed what Orthodox believe as “Only God and I exist.”

Once one has crossed that ground, and found that there is only one God to serve and offer our repentance, we move beyond the junior high of our life circumstances... and find that the one God is in fact the Lord of the Dance and the Orchestrator of all Creation. And this time everything besides oneself again becomes real, but not ultimately real. There are billions of people in the world whom we should love, and we should show virtue and

politeness to all we meet, but in the end only God has the last word.

Psychology offers a narrower and narrower constriction if you take it a guide to living with others. It offers happiness on the terms of a solipsist. By contrast “Only God and I exist,” opens wider and wider and wider, in a solipsism that is vaster than the Heavens that it, also, embraces. It is a solipsism in which you are summoned to dance the Great Dance with your neighbors and all Creation!

If you need psychology and psychiatry, by all means, use them. *But remember that only God and you exist!*

Much Love,
C.J.S. Hayward

The Damned Backswing

Kaine: What do you mean and what is the "damned backswing"?

Vetus: Where to start? Are you familiar with category theory?

Kaine: I have heard the term; explain.

Vetus: Category theory is the name of a branch of mathematics, but on a meta level, so to speak. Algebraists study the things of algebra, and number theorists study the things of number theory—an arrangement that holds almost completely. But category theory studies common patterns in other branches of mathematics, and it is the atypical, rare branch of mathematics that studies all branches of mathematics. And, though this is not to my point exactly, it is abstract and difficult: one list of insults to give to pet languages is that you must understand category theory to write even the simplest of all programs.

The achievements of category theory should ideally be juxtaposed with Bourbaki, the pseudonym of a mathematician or group of mathematicians who tried to systematize all of mathematics. What came out of their efforts is that trying to systematize mathematics is like trying to step on a water balloon and pin it down; mathematicians consider their discipline perhaps the most systematic of disciplines in academia, but the discipline itself cannot be systematized.

But the fact that Bourbaki's work engendered a realization that you cannot completely systematize even the most systematic of disciplines does not mean that there are patterns and trends that one can observe, and the basic insight in category theory is that patterns recur and these patterns are not limited to any one branch of mathematics. Even if it does not represent a total success of doing what Bourbaki tried and failed to do, it is far from a total loss: category theory legitimately observes patterns and trends that transcend the confines of individual subdisciplines in mathematics.

Kaine: So the "damned backswing" is like something from category theory, cutting across disciplines?

Vetus: Yes.

Kaine: And why did you choose the term of a damned backswing?

Vetus: Let me comment on something first. C.S. Lewis, in a footnote in *Mere Christianity*, says that some people complained about his light swearing in referring to

certain ideas as "damned nonsense." And he explained that he did not intend to lightly swear at all; he meant that the ideas were incoherent and nonsense, and they and anyone who believed in them were damned or accursed. And I do not intend to swear lightly either; I intend to use the term "damned" in its proper sense. Instead there is a recurring trend, where some seemingly good things have quite the nasty backswing.

Kaine: And what would an example be?

Vetus: In the U.S., starting in the 1950's there was an incredibly high standard of living; everything seemed to be getting better all the time. And now we are being cut by the backswing: the former great economic prosperity, and the present great and increasing economic meltdown, are cut from the same cloth; they are connected. There was a time of bait, and we sprung for it and are now experiencing the damned backswing.

Kaine: So the damned backswing begins with bait of sorts, and ends in misery? In the loss of much more than the former gain? Do you also mean like addiction to alcohol or street drugs?

Vetus: Yes, indeed; for a while drinking all the time seems an effective way to solve problems. But that is not the last word. The same goes from rationalism to any number of things.

Kaine: Do you see postmodern trends as the backswing of modern rationalism?

Vetus: All that and less.

Kaine: What do you mean by "and less"?

Vetus: The damned backswing did not start with Derrida. The understanding of "reason" that was held before the Enlightenment was a multifaceted thing that meant much more than logic; even as Reason was enthroned (or an actress/prostitute), Reason was pared down to a hollowed-out husk of what reason encompassed in the West before then. It would be like celebrating "cars", but making it clear that when the rubber hits the road, the truly essential part of "a set of wheels" is the *wheel*—and enthroning the wheel while quietly, deftly stripping away the rest of the car, including not just the frame but engine, and seats. The damned backswing of rationalism was already at work in the Enlightenment stripping and enthroning reason. And the damned backswing was already at work in economic boom times in the West, saying that yes, indeed, man can live by bread alone.

And perhaps the strongest and most visible facet of the damned backswing occurs in technology. There are other areas: a country erected on freedoms moves towards despotism, just as Plato said in his list of governments, moving from the best to the worst. But in technology, we seem to be able to be so much more, but the matrix of technology we live in is, among other things, a surveillance system, and something we are dependent on, so that we are vulnerable if someone decides to shut things off. Man does not live by bread alone, but it is better for a man to try to live by bread alone than live by

SecondWife alone, or any or all the array of technologies and gadgetry. The new reality man has created does not compare to the God-given reality we have spurned to embrace the new, and some have said that the end will come when we no longer make paths to our neighbors because we are entirely engrossed in technology and gadgetry.

Kaine: And are there other areas?

Vetus: There are other areas; but I would rather not belabor the point. Does this make sense?

Kaine: Yes, but may I say something strange?

Vetus: Yes.

Kaine: I believe in the damned backswing, and in full.

Vetus: You're not telling me something.

Kaine: I believe in the damned backswing, but I do not believe that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Vetus: What? Do you mean that you partly believe in the damned backswing, and partly not? Do you believe in the damned backswing "is true, from a certain point of view"?

Kaine: I understand your concern but I reject the practice of agreeing with everyone to make them feel better. If I believed in the damned backswing up to a point, I would call it such.

Vetus: How do you believe it, if you reject that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?

Kaine: Let me ask: do Calvinists believe in the Sovereignty of God?

Vetus: Is the Pope Catholic? (I mean besides John XXIII.)

Kaine: Let me suggest that the Reformed view of Divine Sovereignty could go further than it actually does.

Vetus: How? They are the most adamant advocates of Divine Sovereignty, and write books like *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*.

Kaine: There's an awfully strong clue in the title.

Vetus: That the author believes so strongly in the Divine Sovereignty that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom?

Kaine: Not quite.

Vetus: Then what is the clue? I don't want to guess.

Kaine: The clue is that the author believes in the Divine Sovereignty so weakly that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom, and that if there is one iota of creaturely freedom, there is not one iota of Divine Sovereignty.

His is a fragile Divine Sovereignty, when in actual fact God's Sovereignty is absolute, with the

last word after every exercise of creaturely freedom. There is no exercise of freedom you can make that will impede the exercise of the Divine Sovereignty.

Vetus: I could sin. In fact, I *do* sin, and I keep on sinning.

Kaine: Yes, but God is still Sovereign and can have the last word where there is sin. To get back to Lewis for a second, "All of us, either willingly or unwillingly, do the will of God: Satan and Judas as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons." The Divine Sovereignty is the Alpha and the Omega, the Founder of the beginning, and works in and through all: "even Gollum may have something yet to do."

Vetus: *But what?*

Kaine: "*But what?*", you ask?

For starters, there is Christmas. Good slips in unnoticed. God slips in unnoticed. True, it will become one of the most celebrated holidays in the Western world, and true, the Western world will undertake the nonsensical task of keeping a warm, fuzzy Christmas without Christ or Christmas mentioned once. But us lay aside both Christian bloggers speaking in defense of a secularized Christmas, and bloggers telling retailers, "You need Christmas, but Christmas doesn't need you." You speak of the damned backswing coming from an unexpected place; this is nothing next to God slipping in unnoticed.

There will be a time when God will be noticed by all. At the first Christmas, angel hosts announced

good news to a few shepherds. When Christ returns, he will be seen by all, riding on the clouds with rank upon rank of angels. At the first Christmas, a lone star heralded it to the Magi. When he returns, the sky will recede as a vanishing scroll. At the first Christmas, a few knees bowed. When he returns, every knee will bow. And the seed for this victory is planted in Christmas.

And the same seeds of glory are quietly planted in our lives. You are not wrong to see the damned backswing and see that it is real: but one would be wrong to see it and think it is most real. Open one eye, and you may see the damned backswing at work. Open both eyes wide, and you may see God at work, changing the game.

And God will work a new thing in you. Not, perhaps, by taking you out of your sufferings or other things that you may pray for; that is at his good pleasure. But you have heard the saying, "We want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us." Whole worlds open up with forgiveness, or repentance, or any virtue. If you are moulded as clay in the potter's hands, unsought goods come along the way. The best things in life are free, and what is hard to understand is that this is not just a friend's smile, but suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. It was spiritual eyes wide open that left the apostles rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame [and violence] for Christ's name. And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." This

newness begins here and now, and it comes when in circumstances we would not choose God works to give us a larger share in the real world. We enter a larger world, or rather we become larger ourselves and more able to take in God's reality. And all of this is like the first Christmas, a new thing and unexpected. We are summoned and do not dare disobey: Sing unto the LORD a new song; sing unto the LORD all the earth. And it is this whole world with angels, butterflies, the Church, dandylions, energetic work, friends, family, and forgiveness, the Gospel, holiness, the I that God has made, jewels, kairos, love, mothers, newborn babes, ostriches, preaching, repentance from sins, singing, technology, unquestioning obedience, variety, wit and wisdom, xylophones, youth and age, and zebras.

The damned backswing is only a weak parody of the power of God the Gamechanger.

**Maximum Christ,
Maximum
Ambition,
Maximum
Repentance**

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!
That is how the way was paved,
For the coming of the Son of God,
Perfect God and Perfect Man:
Maximum God and Maximum Man,
Maximally united,
Yet the Divine and human natures,
Maximally unconfused:
This is what the Church proclaims,
In her maximum Christology,
Proclaiming the Maximum Christ.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!
Repent, and believe the Gospel.
The *Revelation to St. John* tells,
Words that bear hard truth in hard times:
And I heard the altar cry,
"Yea, Lord God the Almighty,
True and just are thy judgments!"
The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun,
And it was allowed to scorch men with fire;
Men were scorched by the fierce heat,
And they cursed the name of God,
Who had power over these plagues,
And they did not repent and give him glory.
The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast,
And its kingdom was in darkness;
Men gnawed their tongues in anguish,
And cursed the God of heaven
For their pain and sores,
And did not repent of their deeds.
If our time looks like a time of plagues,
Do not be like these.
Repentance is not intended,
For a more ideal time:
Do not pray as the Blessed Augustine:
"O Lord, give me chastity and continence,
But not yet,"
Do not seek to repent later,
But keep on struggling to repent *now*.
Do you live in tough times,
And do you fear for even worse disasters?
Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Do you not see?
Are your eyes closed?
God is not gone in a global financial crisis:

Do you not see,
 The hand of God,
 Working to give in hard times,
 What we overlooked in a comfortable age?
 Can you not see a God
 Who whispers in our pleasures,
 Shouts in our pains,
 Whispers also, in times of comfort and ease,
 And shouts in a time of crisis,
 Crisis,
 Κρισις,
 A Greek word meaning,
 "Judgment."
 If we experience judgment,
 Do we need to assume the Judge has abandoned his post?
 Do we really need to try and escape him?
 Make friends quickly with your accuser!

Would you rather know God as your friend or accuser?
 It hurts you to kick against the goads.
 Are you terrified to face what you have to repent of?
 Take courage:
 Repentance terrifies like nothing else,
 An unconditional surrender,
 Terrifying to a saint as much as to either of us,
 Only afterwards does it show its true nature,
 As an awakening and more:
 As Heaven's best-kept secret.

God has ambitions for you,
 Beyond your wildest dreams,
 And commands you to want the best for yourself.
 And if it seems that God only gives you,
 Things that are harder and worse,
 Then you do not understand this:

God's desires for you are beyond your wildest dreams:
Your wildest dreams are yet not wild enough,
To see the true good that God holds in store for you.

And if you say,
"Beautiful words, but I have a tough life,"
Know that words like these come from tough lives,
Hard realities where something great shines so brightly:
The Light of God in Heaven.
Do you fear the loss of your treasures on earth,
Are you afraid you do not have enough to survive?
Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,
where neither moth nor rust consumes,
and where thieves do not break in and steal,
Nor do global economic meltdown or hyperinflation
Do anything but strip away a mask,
That makes it look as if we can live by bread alone,
Or comfort ourselves with a "rising standard of living,"
Like as to moving from an ancient, rounded, nourishing diet,
To "upgrade" to cotton candy,
Seeking a Utopia of spoiled children,
Because what we need is not what a child wants to spoil him,
But to grow to be men:
And this crisis, κρισις, may do much more,
Than separate the men from the boys:
It will help some boys learn to be men,
Learning under the iron yoke of law,
What we kept putting off under the freedom of grace,
As we curse the cruel judgment of a Judge,
Who "cruelly" shouts,

"Sorry, son, it is time for you now,
To move on to better things.
I have real ambitions for you,
And I want what is truly good as you cannot,

And I know what is truly good as you cannot.

Try again.

Try again about what you really want.

I want you to taste the River of Life,

And you keep on trying to drink filth,

Like your dog drinking from your toilet:

Please try again.

I want you to have real treasure,

And if what it takes is my taking away every treasure on earth,

Everything that you want,

And everything you turn to for security,

So that you lose your job,

And your possessions begin to wear out,

And some of your technologies come to fail,

In ways you had never even imagined,

And your investments become worthless,

And your luxuries vanish one by one,

And the government does everything people want it to,

But the results get worse and worse,

And maybe you even pray,

Give us this day our daily bread,

Because you do not know,

Where your next meal is coming from,

Who knows?

Perhaps you will listen to me shout,

When you found my whisper easy to ignore,

Perhaps you will stop chasing after shadows.

Perhaps you will grasp reality:

Perhaps you will know real treasure,

Real treasure,

Next to which a bull market,

Is but mist, vapor, and shadow."

Repent, and believe the Gospel.

Our entire understanding of what it means to be God,

And our entire understanding of what it means to be man,
Is the Maximum Christ.
For man is created for maximum glory,
And God ever beckons us to reach higher,
When we in confusion reach far below,
Far less than the glory we were made for.
Every sin does this,
Even pride.
What do we want in pride?
Inevitably something that sparkles and shimmers,
But is cotton candy and mirage,
Next to the humble things we turn our nose up at.
In pride we turn up our nose,
At abundant health,
And do not want the freedom of movement,
Of a body in health,
But clingingly cherish,
Our "extra-special" movement of broken bone,
And yet we wonder why we hurt,
And why we are not satisfied,
Even though we have what we clingingly cherish,
Not knowing it is the seed of Hell.
You do not understand the measure of man,
Until you know in Christ,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
But emptied himself,
Taking the form of a servant,
Being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form,
He humbled himself,
And became obedient unto death,
even death on a cross.
Therefore God has highly exalted him,
And bestowed on him the name which is above every name,

that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

We do not understand greatness except in Christ,
And in Christ we understand that greatness is humble,
For there is something missing in our lives,
Until they are oriented by Christ,
And we know that pride cannot be enough:
God summons us to the heights of humility.
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Repent, and live real life in a virtual world.
Industrial food is not like the food of ancient times:
It is tasty on the outside,
Manipulated like plastic on the inside,
A cherry flavored drink engineered that the palate may reminisce
of cherry taste,
While holding nothing of the nourishment and sustenance,
That comes with cherry sweetness in nature,
Almost like eating an "apple" molded of styrofoam,
Injected with Splenda,
Sprayed with petroleum-based fragrance,
And sprinkled with vitamin extract,
So it may be marketed as health food.
Do not think that this be isolated as a phenomenon:
It is a microcosm of our virtual world,
Where so much of our reality is virtual,
That "virtual reality" neither begins nor ends with SecondLife.
Christ knew a life of technologies,
The son of a carpenter with tools and wood,
But never like techno-pagans,
Was his technology
The technology of molding nature to man's every whim,
Seeking HumanLife version 2.0:

Or if you believe that Christ's technology was exactly that,
But less advanced,
At least know that it is different,
As a pint of beer,
From a pint of rum:
As today we mold nature to our whims,
Graduating from pint of rum to pint of absinthe,
Our TV's always on, and stronger brew,
Placing before our souls, our mind's eyes,
The strange brew of HumanLife 2.0... 3.0... 4.0...
Trying to improve on timeless reality,
And failing,
And failing.
Entranced by technology with its flickering screens,
Twice imprisoned in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave,"
The gate to the timeless way of human life,
Lies open, and if the path be narrow and hard,
It has always been narrow and hard:
Our hindrances may be our aids,
If we use them rightly,
In ascesis,
If we go against the flow,
Of technologies ever more brittle,
From appliances, cookware, and clothing built to last,
To possessions that keep wearing out,
To more and more disposable possessions,
When we abandon glass plates for the convenience of paper.
From computers discarded because they are obsolete,
To computers whose solid state drives become something you use
up,
From physical computers that are in your control,
To virtual cloud computers,
That you may easily use now,
But can be taken away by any number of human actions,
Or system failures:

"Systems integration is when your computer will not work,
Because of a problem on a computer you've never heard of;"
"If builders built buildings the way programmers wrote
programs,
The first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."
Use technology but don't trust it.
We are digging a pit,
In how we use technology,
And the progress we embrace,
Is digging ourselves in deeper.
And what is true of technology,
Is also true of much more:
The story of our culture, our world, our economy,
Is as a game of chess against a demonic adversary,
Where we have greedily captured:
An unguarded pawn here, and a bishop there,
Never heedful of the trap we were stepping into,
Taking seeming advantage of our opponent's cunning bait,
All the way to sealing his checkmate against us,
Until our world and society have lost the game,
And yet still redemption is open to us,
Redemption open to every one who repents,
Living real life even in a virtual world.
But if we repent, the Kingdom of God ever remains nigh.

You have already met Christ.
So have I,
Both of us many times,
And yet we forget this central fact.
Wonder when you have met him?
Hear Christ's own words,
Hear Christ's own Christology unfold:
When the Son of man comes in his glory,
And all the angels with him,
Then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations,
And he will separate them one from another,
As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
And he will place the sheep at his right hand,
But the goats at the left.
Then the King will say to those at his right hand,
"Come, O blessed of my Father,
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you,
From the foundation of the world;
For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you clothed me,
I was sick and you visited me,
I was in prison and you came to me."
Then the righteous will answer him,
"Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee,
Or thirsty and give thee drink?
And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee,
Or naked and clothe thee?
and when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?"
And the King will answer them,
"Truly, I say to you,
As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren,
You did it to me."
Then he will say to those at his left hand,
"Depart from me, you who are damned,
Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
For I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,
I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,
naked and you did not clothe me,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me."
Then they also will answer,
"Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty,

Or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison,
 And did not minister to thee?"
 Then he will answer them,
 "Truly, I say to you,
 as you did it not to one of the least of these,
 you did it not to me."
 Could this be irrelevant to survival?
 People survived the Great Depression by sharing:
 If you don't share because you have little,
 You simply don't get it.
 The less you have,
 The more you need to be generous, and believe,
 Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,
 But righteousness delivers from death.
 If you want to survive,
 Help others survive:
 Lend to the Lord and he will repay you,
 In his time:
 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,
 And he will repay him for his deed.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
 saith our God:
 Fear not: for, behold,
 I bring you good tidings of great joy,
 which shall be to all people:
 Christ wills to be incarnate in us,
 Not in some other circumstance, but now.
 The Son of God became a man,
 That men might become the sons of God:
 The Incarnation,
 Is for us today.
 If our earthly hope is stripped away,
 Our heavenly hope beams brighter:
 The mighty arm of God in divine providence,

Rippling with muscle such as easy times rarely know.
If our cherished neighborhood frisbee is shut down,
Perhaps it is because we are summoned,
To reach for gold at spiritual Olympics,
To become men,
And as in the great hymn to love,
Put childish ways behind us.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!
Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light.
Awaken to God's maximum ambitions for you.
But the door to the heart can only be opened from the inside,
And the door of the heart that opens to God,
Is called repentance,
The door we are terrified to open:
The door we must open:
Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.
The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!

Glory

Glory,
Wonder,
World without end.

World without end:
Have I sought Thee,
When I fled afar off from Thee,
Thou alone whose Glory slaketh thirst,
World without end?

To Thee belongeth worship,
To Thee belongeth praise,
To Thee belongeth glory,
To the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Both now and ever, and unto ages of ages.
Amen.

Why am I athirst,
I who seek water any place,
But from Thine own hand?

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,

Shall never thirst;
But the water that I shall give him,
Shall be in him a well of water,
Springing up into everlasting life.

I seek my glory,
In thinly gilt traps,
And turn my back,
On the unadorned portals,
Through which Thou hast glorified me,
Ever seeking my glory,
While forbidding me to quest,
For my glory along accursed routes.

For we have committed two evils:
We have forsaken Thee,
The fountain of living waters,
And hewed ourselves out cisterns,
Broken cisterns that can hold no water.

We have committed this evil;
I must repent of it.

Glory and wonder, majesty and power,
Thou forbiddest us to seek our own glory,
That Thou mightest rightly glorify us,
With the maximum glory that could ever be ours.

Glory, glory, glory:
Glory surroundeth thee—
And drencheth those who humbly seek,
Thine own glory to magnify.
No man who seeketh,
Thine own glory to magnify,
Can far pursue his quest,

Before an invisible trickle comes before thy Throne,
And drencheth him,
In the glory he seeketh not,
Not for himself.

After this I looked, and,
Behold, a door was opened in heaven:
And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet,
Talking with me;
Which said,
Come up hither,
And I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.
And immediately I was in the spirit:
And, behold, a throne was set in heaven,
And one sat on the throne.
And he that sat was to look upon,
Like a jasper and a sardine stone:
And there was a rainbow round about the throne,
In sight like unto an emerald.
And round about the throne were four and twenty seats:
And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,
Clothed in white raiment;
And they had on their heads crowns of gold.
And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and
voices:
And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,
Which are the seven Spirits of God.
And before the throne,
There was a sea of glass like unto crystal:
And in the midst of the throne,
And round about the throne,
Were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.
And the first beast was like a lion,
And the second beast like a calf,
And the third beast had a face as a man,

And the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.
And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him;
And they were full of eyes within:
And they rest not day and night, saying,
"Holy, holy, holy,
LORD God Almighty,
Which was, and is, and is to come."
And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks
To him that sat on the throne,
Who liveth for ever and ever,
The four and twenty elders,
Fall down before him that sat on the throne,
And worship him that liveth for ever and ever,
And cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and
power:
for thou hast created all things,
and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

There is more glory in Heaven and earth,
Than I ever dream of in my grasping:
Honor,
Majesty,
Glory,
Praise.
Let me seek this Thy glory,
And leave to Thee the seeking of mine own glory.
Thou hast said,
The greater thou art,
The more humble thyself,
And thou shalt find favour before the Lord.

Wonder.
Glory.
Help me forsake the quest,

To slake my thirst for mine own glory,
That thou mightest slake my thirst,
With a draught that infinitely eclipseth,
Such things as I have grasped.

Eye hath not seen,
Nor ear heard,
Neither have entered into the heart of man,
The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,
Things that begin in this here and now,
In ways beyond human reckoning.

Eye hath not seen,
Nor ear heard,
Neither have entered into the heart of man,
The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,
The eternity that is here now,
That which was from the beginning,
Which we have heard and still rings in our ears,
Which we have seen with our eyes and can still see how it looks,
Which we have looked upon,
Which we have touched with our very own hands,
Of the Word of God:

The Lord is King!
He hath clothed Himself in glory!

God the Spiritual Father

I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty...

The Nicene Creed

All of us do the will of God. The question is not whether we do God's will or not, but whether we do God's will as *instruments*, as Satan and Judas did, or as *sons*, as Peter and John did. In the end Satan may be nothing more than a hammer in the hand of God.

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.

Proverbs

My precious, precious child, I love you and will never leave you. When you see one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.

Footprints, paraphrased

Look to every situation as if you were going to bargain at the market, always looking to make a spiritual profit.

The Philokalia, paraphrased

For it was fitting that God, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make Christ the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Hebrews

There are a lot of concerns on people's minds. For those of us in the U.S., we've been facing an economic disaster. Is "the decade from Hell" over and done? Or has the economic depression just begun? Has the *real* nightmare just *begun*? People have faced unemployment, and some are worried about hyper-inflation. And the big question on almost everyone's mind is, "Can I survive this? And if so, how?" And these quotes have something to say to the billion dollar question on almost everyone's mind.

Let's turn the clock back a bit, to 1755. There was a catastrophic earthquake in Lisbon in Portugal, and its untold misery shook people's faith in the goodness of the world we live in. In the questioning that came afterwards, Voltaire wrote *Candide* in which the rather ludicrous teacher Pangloss is always explaining that we live in "the best of all possible worlds:" no matter what misfortune or disaster befell them, the unshakable Pangloss would always find a way to explain that we still lived in the best of all possible worlds. And Voltaire's point is to rip that preposterous idea apart, giving a dose of reality and showing what the misery in Lisbon made painfully clear: we do *not* live

in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But there is another shoe to drop.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods, and it is a more profound truth, a more vibrant truth, a truth that goes much deeper into the heart of root of all things to say that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but *we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods*.

Once we have truly grasped that God the Spiritual Father is the best of all possible Gods, it becomes a mistake to focus on how, in fact, we simply do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Perhaps we all need to repent and recognize that we ourselves are far from being the best of all possible people. But we need to raise our eyes higher: raise our eyes and see that our lives and our world are under the love of the best of all possible Gods: God the Spiritual Father.

The Orthodox Church has understood this since ancient times. Let's read some longer quotes:

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvelous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.

- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

All these things, even if they are opposed to each other, are nevertheless good when used correctly; but when misused, they are not good, but are harmful for both soul and body.

The Philokalia

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Eccclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of

trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, while the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

The Philokalia

All These Things Were From Me

(The new St. Seraphim, of Viritsa was born in 1866. He married and had three children. In 1920, at the age of 54, he and his wife quietly separated and each entered monastic life. Eventually he became the spiritual father of the St. Alexander Nevsky Lavra in St. Petersburg, where, as a clairvoyant staretz, he also confessed thousands of laity. He said, "I am the storage room where people's afflictions gather." In imitation of his patron saint, he prayed for a thousand nights on a rock before an icon of

St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000.)

The following is (slightly abridged) from a letter sent by St. Seraphim to a spiritual child of his, a hierarch who was at that time in a Soviet prison. It is in the form of consolation given by God to a troubled man's soul.

Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for his reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there - I placed you precisely in the "school" where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, "Do not believe in your Lord and God." Have you ever spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort.

Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the "contradiction of the nations." I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist. Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know That this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply, through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people's souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children

are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, That whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn In all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul.

All these things were from Me.

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all

creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans

We may be entering an economic depression. We live in hard times, and things may get much harder. It is becoming more and more clear that this is no mere recession: it looks more and more like a depression. We see people asking, "Where is God when it hurts?" And there is something important about the answer to "Where is God when it hurts?": something very important, something profoundly important.

I believe in one God, the *Spiritual* Father Almighty.

I'm not sure how to explain this without saying something about Orthodox monasticism, but the Orthodox concept of a *spiritual father* is of someone one owes obedience in everything, and who normally assigns some things that are very difficult to do, unpleasant, and painful. And this seems a strange thing to be getting into. But there is method to what may seem mad: we do not reach our greatest good, we do not flourish, we do not reach our highest heights, if we are the spiritual equivalent of spoiled children. And the entire point of this duty of obedience is to arrange things for the good of the person who obeys in this situation. *The entire point of obedience in what the spiritual father arranges is for the spiritual father as a spiritual physician to give health and freedom through the disciple's obedience.*

In that sense, only monks and nuns are expected to have spiritual fathers to shape them. The rest of us have God as our Spiritual Father, and we can kick against the goads, but God the Spiritual Father is at work in every person we meet. *God the Spiritual Father is God the Great Physician, working everything for our health and freedom if we will cooperate.* People and situations he sends us may be part of his will for us as instruments, or they may be part of his will for us as sons of God,

but God's will unfolds in each person who acts in our lives: kind people and cruel, having excess and having lack, getting our way and having our will cut short as a spiritual father does to form a monk under his care, becomes part of the work of God the Spiritual Father. Even economic nightmares become part of "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

When God gives us our true good, *nothing* can take it away.

What exactly is our true good unfolds in the saints' lives, which are well worth reading: many of them lived in great hardship. Some were martyred; the beloved St. Nectarios lost his job repeatedly for reasons that were not just unfortunate, but completely and absolutely unfair. God was still at work in his life, and he is now crowned as a saint in Heaven. God allowed things to happen, terrible things to happen, but not one of them took him away from God giving him everything he needed and ultimately working in him the glory of one of the greatest saints in recent times.

The *Sermon on the Mount* says some harsh words about how we use money, but these words set the stage for a profound treasure that we can still have, even in an economic depression:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, [or, today, where economic havoc can ruin our financial planning] but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal [or, today, where your treasures cannot be taken away even by a complete economic meltdown].

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also...

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'

For the godless seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.

Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have its own worries. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

The life of St. Philaret the Merciful speaks volumes:

Righteous Philaret the Merciful, son of George and Anna, was raised in piety and the fear of God. He lived during the eighth century in the village of Amneia in the Paphlagonian district of Asia Minor. His wife, Theoseba, was from a rich and illustrious family, and they had three children: a son John, and daughters Hypatia and Evanthia.

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about

the dread Last Judgment and about "these least ones" (Mt. 25:40); the the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means "lover of virtue," was famed for his love for the poor.

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. "I have hidden away riches and treasure," he told his family, "so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working."

The saint's gifts always brought good to the recipient. Whoever received anything from him found that the gift would multiply, and that person would become rich. Knowing this, a certain man came to St Philaret asking for a calf so that he could start a herd. The cow missed its calf and began to bellow. Theoseba said to her husband, "You have no pity on us, you merciless man, but don't you feel sorry for the cow? You have separated her from her calf." The saint praised his wife, and agreed that it was not right to separate the cow and the calf. Therefore, he called the poor man to whom he had given the calf and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so St Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you

choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

Now the man was unable to lift the six bushels of wheat, so Theoseba told her husband to give him the donkey so he could carry the wheat home. Blessing his wife, Philaret gave the donkey to the man, who went home rejoicing. Theoseba and the children wept because they were hungry.

The Lord rewarded Philaret for his generosity: when the last measure of wheat was given away, a old friend sent him forty bushels. Theoseba kept most of the wheat for herself and the children, and the saint gave away his share to the poor and had nothing left. When his wife and children were eating, he would go to them and they gave him some food. Theoseba grumbled saying, "How long are you going to keep that treasure of yours hidden? Take it out so we can buy food with it."

During this time the Byzantine empress Irene (797-802) was seeking a bride for her son, the future emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitos (780-797). Therefore, emissaries were sent throughout all the Empire to find a suitable girl, and the envoys came to Amneia.

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

The envoys were impressed by the saint's daughters and granddaughters. Seeing their beauty, their deportment, their clothing, and their admirable qualities, the envoys agreed that Philaret' granddaughter, Maria was exactly what they were looking for. This Maria exceeded all her rivals in quality and modesty and indeed became Constantine's wife, and the emperor rewarded Philaret.

Thus fame and riches returned to Philaret. But just as before, this holy lover of the poor generously distributed alms and provided a feast for the poor. He and his family served them at the meal. Everyone was astonished at his humility and said: "This is a man of God, a true disciple of Christ."

He ordered a servant to take three bags and fill one with gold, one with silver, and one with copper coins. When a beggar approached, Philaret ordered his servant to bring forth one of the bags, whichever God's providence would ordain. Then he would reach into the bag and give to each person, as much as God willed.

St Philaret refused to wear fine clothes, nor would he accept any imperial rank. He said it was enough for him to be called the grandfather of the Empress. The saint reached ninety years of age and knew his end was approaching. He went to the Rodolpheia ("The Judgment") monastery in Constantinople. He gave some gold to the Abbess and asked her to allow him to be buried there, saying that he would depart this life in ten days.

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth day he summoned his family, he exhorted them to imitate his love for the poor if they desired salvation. Then he fell asleep in the Lord. He died in the year 792 and was buried in the Rodolpheia Judgment monastery in Constantinople.

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the sainthood of Righteous Philaret. As they bore the body of the saint to the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the

devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

After the death of the righteous Philaret, his wife Theoseba worked at restoring monasteries and churches devastated during a barbarian invasion.

This merciful saint trusted God the Spiritual Father. He cashed in on the promise, "Seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be given to you as well."

In terms of *how* to survive an economic depression, the right question to ask is *not*, "Do I have enough treasures stored up on earth?" but "Do I have enough treasures in Heaven?" And the merciful St. Philaret lived a life out of abundant treasure in Heaven.

The biggest thing we need right now is to know the point of life, which is to live the life of Heaven, not starting at death, but starting here on earth. C.S. Lewis lectured to students on the eve of World War II when it looked like Western civilization was on the verge of permanent collapse. I won't try to repeat what he said beyond "Life has never been normal" and add that God's providence is for difficult circumstances every bit as much as when life seems normal. God's providence is how we can survive an economic depression. The Sermon on the Mount is no mere wish list only for when life that is perfect; it is meant for God's work with us even in circumstances we would not choose, *especially* in circumstances we would not choose, and speaks of the love of God the Spiritual Father who can and will work with us in an economic depression, if we will let him, and work with us no less than when life is easy.

(Some have said not only that God provides in rough times as well as easy times, but that God's providence is in fact clearer

in rough times, such as an economic depression, than when things go our way and we can forget that we need a bit of help from above.)

God the Spiritual Father wants to use everything for our good. Everything he allows, everything in our lives, is either a blessing or a temptation that has been allowed for our strengthening. His purpose even in allowing rough things to happen is to help us grow up spiritually, and to make us Heavenly. *The Great Divorce* imagines a busload of people come from Hell to visit Heaven, and what happens is something much like what happens in our lives: they are offered Heaven and they do not realize Heaven is better than the seeds Hell that they keep clinging to because they are afraid to let go. Heaven and Hell are both real, but God does not send people to Hell. C.S. Lewis quotes someone saying that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done," respecting their choice to choose Hell after Heaven has been freely offered to them. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. Hellfire is nothing other than the Light of Heaven as experienced by those who reject the only possibility for living joy there is. And neither the reality of Heaven nor the state of mind we call Hell begins after death; their seeds grow on us in this training ground we call life. We can become saints, heavenly people like St. Philaret, or we can care only about ourselves and our own survival. God the Spiritual Father wants to shape us to be part of the beauty of Heaven, and everything he sends us is intended for that purpose. But in freedom he will let us veto his blessings and choose to be in Hell.

Heaven is generous, and that generosity was something Heavenly that shone during the Great Depression. People who had very little shared. They shared money or food, if they had any. (And even if you have no money to share, you can share time; if you do not have a job, you can still volunteer.) St. Philaret shared because he knew something: "Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior

about the dread Last Judgment and about 'these least ones' (Mt. 25:40)..." In this part of the saint's life, the reference is to some of the most chilling words following *The Sermon on the Mount* in the Gospel:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?"

And the King will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

St. Philaret the Merciful will be greeted before Christ's awesome judgment seat and hear, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I came to you and asked for a little wheat, and you gave me all six bushels you had, and your only donkey with them." God did provide, but the reward is not just that a friend gave him forty bushels of wheat. The ultimate reward is that Christ regards how St. Philaret treated other people as how he treated Christ himself, and because St. Philaret was merciful, there is a reward for him in Heaven, a reward so great that next to it, the forty bushels of wheat from his friend utterly pale in comparison.

Remember this next time you see a beggar. If you can't give a quarter, at least see if there is a kind word or a prayer you can give. This has everything to do with *how* to survive an economic depression.

We are at a time with terrible prospects for earthly comfort, but take heart. Let me again quote Lewis: "Heaven cannot give earthly comfort, and earth cannot give earthly comfort either. In the end, Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had. To quote from my own "Silence: Organic Food for the Soul:"

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard
to get all your ducks in a row,
to get yourself to a secure place
where you have prepared for what might happen?
Or does it look like you might lose your job,
if you still have one?
The Sermon on the Mount
urges people to pray,
"Give us this day our daily bread,"

in an economy
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,
it was not obvious to many
where they would get their next meal.
And yet it was this *Sermon on the Mount*
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,
and tells us not to worry:
what we miss
if we find this a bit puzzling,
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments
even if they are jeopardized right now,
is that we are like a child with some clay,
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,
we ignore and maybe fear
the finger tapping us on our shoulder
until with great trepidation we turn,
and listen to the voice say,
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"
and follow our father
as he gives us a warhorse.

This life is an apprenticeship, and even now, when we may be in situations we do not like, God is asking us to be apprentices, learning to be knights riding the warhorse he gives us *even in the situations we might not like. The life of Heaven begins on earth*, even in an economic depression.

However much power world leaders may have, God the Spiritual Father is sovereign, and their summits pale in comparison for the work God the Spiritual Father is working even now.

Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?

The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the LORD and his Christ, saying,
"Let us rip apart their religious restrictions,
and throw off their shackles."
He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the LORD has them in derision.

Psalms

For the conqueror says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped."

Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!

Isaiah

World leaders may work his will as instruments or as sons, but they will always work his will. This is true in an economic depression as much as any other time. God the Spiritual Father rules the world as sovereign on a deeper level than we can imagine, and he works good out of everything to those who love him and are called according to his purpose to make them sons of God.

Some people really hope that if the right government programs are in place, we can get back on track to a better life.

But even if governments have their place, "Put not your trust in princes," or rather, "Do not put your trust in governments," is not obsolete. Far from it: government initiatives cannot make everything better, even in the long haul, even with lots of time, sacrifices, and resources. But having given that bad news, I have good news too. Even if government initiatives fail to do what we want them to, we have God the Spiritual Father trying to give us the greatest good, and the time he offers us his will does not start sometime in the future: it is for here, and it is for now. He works his will alike through instruments like Satan and Judas, and sons like Peter and John, but in either case he works his will now, not sometime in the future when some human effort starts achieving results. Again, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will."

God and the Son of God became Man and the
Son of Man that man might become god and the sons
of God.

St. Maximus Confessor

There was one time when two theology professors were talking when the weather was very rough. One of them said, "This is the day that the Lord has made," and the other said, "Well, he's done better!" And the joke may be funny, but sun and rain, heat and cold, are all given by God. We miss something if we only think God is working with us if it is warm and sunny, if we find ourselves in a violent storm and assume God must have abandoned us, if it seems that God can't or won't help us because the weather is so bad.

And we are missing something if we look at the news and the world around us, and want to say, "This is the day that the Lord has made... he's done better!"

If we are in an economic depression, say, "This is the day that the Lord has made." You're missing something if you need to add, "Well, he's done better!"

A friend quoted to me when I was in a rough spot,

"Life's Tapestry"

Behind those golden clouds up there
the Great One sews a priceless embroidery
and since down below we walk
we see, my child, the reverse view.
And consequently it is natural for the mind to see mistakes
there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
and you shall see the embroidery of God
from the good side
and then... everything will seem to you to be a system and
order.

And it is true. It is not just, as some have said, that *God's address is at the end of your rope*. That is where you meet God best. It may be easier, not harder, to find God and his providential care in an economic depression. God is working a plan of eternal glory. Westminster opens with the great question, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." But there is a deeper answer. *The chief end of man is to become Christ*. The chief end of man is to become by grace what Christ is by nature. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God. The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human that the human might become divine. This saying has rumbled down through the ages: not only the entire point of being human, but the entire point of each and every circumstance

God the Spiritual Father allows to come to us, as a blessing or as a temptation allowed for our strengthening, as God's will working through instruments or sons, is to make us share in Christ's divinity, and the saints' lives show few saints who met this purpose when everything went their way, and a great many where God worked in them precisely in rough and painful circumstances. If we watch the news and say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Well, he's done better," try to open your eyes to the possibility that "Well, he's done better" is what people want to say when, in the words of C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "Aslan is on the move."

Christ's Incarnation is humble. It began humbly, in the scandalous pregnancy of an unwed teen mother, and it unfolds humbly in our lives. Its humble unfolding in our lives comes perhaps best when we have rough times and rough lives, in circumstances we would not choose, in an economic depression above all. You do not understand Christ's Incarnation unless you understand that it is an Incarnation in humility, humble times, and humble conditions. You do not understand Christ's humble Incarnation until you understand that it did not stop when the Mother of God's scandalous pregnancy began: Christ's humble Incarnation unfolds and unfurls in the Church, in the Saints, and Christ wishes to be Incarnate in every one of us. Christ wishes to be Incarnate in all of us, not in the circumstances we would choose for ourselves, but in the circumstances we are in, when God the Spiritual Father works everything to good for his sons.

Take heart if this sounds hard, like a tall order to live up to. It is hard for me too. It is hard, very hard, or at least it is for me. But it is worth trying to live up to. Even if we do not always succeed.

God became man that man might become God. In whatever circumstances God gives us to train us, as God the Spiritual Father, let us grow as sons of God.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

God the Game Changer

Some people wince at terms like *game changer* today the same way they winced in earlier years when they heard, "paradigm shift".

But the terms overuse suggests there might be something that triggered the buzz. When Apple introduced the Macintosh, they changed the scene, not only by causing a few Macintoshes to be sold, but by pushing a permanent shift for mainstream computers to be sold with Macintosh-style Windows, not the older command line MS-DOS. Apple may never have sold the same number of units as Microsoft, and they survived due to a Microsoft bailout, but once Apple introduced the Macintosh, Microsoft considered it non-negotiable to release Windows to compete with the Macintosh environment (even if Vista was a painful enough imitation MacOS to earn the scorn of Microsoft's usual fans). It may be in the end that Apple's biggest gift to the world of desktop computing is Windows: Apple's gift to desktop computing today is that you can now buy, as a mainstream choice, Windows 7 instead of something more like MS-DOS.

It is no longer a provocative statement that Apple's introduction of the iPhone may be a more profound game changer than the Macintosh. It may turn out, in the end, that

Apple's gift to mobile computing may be the Droid and Google-based smartphones—Verizon's "Before you choose a phone, choose a map", and, "iDon't"/"Droid does" marketing campaigns certainly reflect a realization on Verizon's part that shooing Apple away when Apple wanted Verizon to be the iPhone's exclusive carrier was perhaps not Verizon's best decision. But the iPhone changed the game profoundly enough that it was the gold standard everyone was trying to beat, and at least before the Droid, no "iPhone killer" even came close.

In both of these cases, Apple didn't offer their own brand of the existing options: while it was not the first graphical user interface, the Macintosh did not offer an attempt to improve on MS-DOS; it showed what a graphical user interface done right for desktop computing could look like. Likewise, the iPhone did not offer a miniaturized standard desktop environment like Windows Mobile, but it showed what mobile computing done right could look like. While the iPhone may no longer be the only phone that does mobile computing right, the Droid underscores that if you're going to beat Apple now, you need to beat it by the same game as Apple is playing in the iPhone. In neither of these cases did Apple try to beat Microsoft at its own game by providing a better MS-DOS, or a better Windows Mobile. Instead, *they changed the game.*

In our lives, we want God to help us struggle better at the games we are playing. What God wants to do is something different: to change the game.

God the Game Changer at work: A story

Every Lent, Orthodox remember a great saint with a great story. There was a very accomplished priest and monk who was troubled by the idea that no one had gotten as far as him in

asceticism (spiritual work). And he was sent to a monastery by the Jordan, where as the custom was, every Lent monks would go out into the desert. And after a while, he saw a person, and chased this person; after a time he asked for the other person to stop fleeing; the other person called him by name and asked for his cloak, since her clothes were long since gone. He was terrified.

She asked why a great ascetic like him could want to speak with a sinful woman like her. They bowed down and asked each other for a blessing; then she told him that he was a priest and he should bless her, terrifying him even more by knowing that he was a priest. Then they spoke, and the woman called herself a sinner without any single virtue, and asked him to pray. So they began to pray, and a long time the priest looked up and saw her above the ground, levitating. He fell to the ground, weeping in prayer. Then he asked her story.

The woman asked his prayers for her shamelessness; in modern terms, she was a sorority girl who majored in men, money, and margaritas, except worse. Much worse. She went to a religious festival, got to church, and a force kept her from going in. She tried to go around it, then prayed before an icon of Mary the Mother of God asking to be let in and then saying she would do whatever she was told. Then she was able to enter in; she worshipped, and returned to the icon and asked to be told what to do. Then a voice from on high said, "If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest."

She was given some money and purchased three loaves of bread as she left, and then went, and struggled and struggled and struggled in what seemed like endless temptations and struggles. She had given free reign to her vices for seventeen years, and for seventeen years in the desert she wanted men, wanted wine and lewd songs, wanted meat, and just kept on struggling. After a time—a long, *long* time—things got easier. And she had been living for almost half a century in the desert, eating desert plants and at the mercies of the elements. It came up in the conversation that she quoted from the Bible with understanding. The monk

asked her if she had read them. She said she had never seen another person since making the journey, had no one to read holy books to her, and like most people then, she didn't know how to read. Then she alluded to Scripture and suggested that Christ the Word may teach by himself.

She told him he wouldn't be able to come the next year, but to come the year after and give her communion. The next year illness pinned him down, and the year after he went, then saw her on the other side of the river. She crossed herself and walked over the water. They met again like the first, and she asked him to come again in a year.

He returned in a year to find her dead, kissed her feet and washed them with his tears, and found written next to her her last request and her name, Mary. He didn't see how he would bury her, as per her request, but when he took a piece of wood and began to dig, an enormous lion approached, and at his command dug her grave. Then he and the lion went their separate ways, and per an earlier request, the monk addressed numerous things that needed correction. Somewhere along the way, he asked in perfectly good faith if she would return to the city. Her answer was that no, she would be returning to temptation and ruin all her work. Old woman as she was, she still couldn't handle the temptation of having all those young men around.

What can we learn from all this? In the Parable of the Talents, a master calls his servants and entrusts one with five "talents" (70 pound silver bars), one with two, and one with one talent. He returns and calls an account. The master commends the servant who was given five talents because he has earned five more, and likewise commends the servant given two talents who has earned two more. Then the we hear a different tune (Matthew 25:24-27):

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping

where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest..."

This is a bit of a hard passage. The master represents God quite clearly, and this parable not only has the servant say that his master is (to use different words) cruel, but he harvests where he did not plant seeds and gathers where he has not scattered. Worse than that, the master, i.e. God, seems to endorse the portrayal. What are we to make of this?

One thought is that this is rhetorically abstaining from pressing a point. In other words, we could paraphrase the master's reply, "You wicked and slothful servant! Let's say for the sake of argument that I harvest where I did not plant seeds and gather where I have not scattered. Shouldn't you at least have invested it so I could have it back with interest?"

But in fact a deeper understanding is available, and it hinges on a question. What has God not sown? He created Heaven and earth, all things that can be seen and all things that cannot be seen. The demons themselves were created by God; everything from the highest of the angels to the lowest grain of sand, from the greatest saint to the Devil is a creation of God. What then could there be that God hath not sown?

The answer is that God has not sown sin, nor suffering, nor evil, nor pain, nor sickness, nor death. He created the Devil, but not the rebellion of angels once created pure. God has not sown this; he has not scattered us out of the glory he intended for us. And he has not planted sin, nor suffering, nor evil, nor pain, nor sickness, nor death, but he harvests them.

The servant's accusation, which the master repeats, is that God is so intent on harvest that he harvests whether or not he has sown. The priest, monk, and *Saint Zosima* is among the greatest of saints, and he lived a life of spiritual work and spiritually sober living before God. His life was full of seeds that God sowed, and probably from childhood. And God harvested Saint Zosima's good works. But Saint Zosima needed something. He needed to be knocked completely flat on his back.

But to stop here is to miss the glory of God the Game Changer. The woman in the desert did a great many things that God would never sow. She was a worse sinner than a prostitute. But God harvested her and her sins too, and when Zosima had reached a point where he did not know if there was his equal on earth, God showed Saint Zosima, "Here is someone who leaves you completely in the dust."

Saint Mary wondered how many souls she ensnared. The answer is certainly, "Many," and this is tragic. But God harvested her sins, many as they were, and out of her person, her story, and her intercession God has helped innumerable more people reach salvation. She is one of the greatest saints the Orthodox Church knows. And something is really destroyed in the story if you omit her numerous sins of sexual self-violation.

And in all this, God changed the game. He did not tear up the fabric of time, but he harvested what was planted in her even more than what was planted in Saint Zosima. God harvests where he has sown, and God the Game Change also harvests where he has never sown. And when he does, he pushes the game to another level entirely.

A present-day example of God's game-changing, this time not with sin but with injury, is in the life of Joni Erickson. At a young age, Erickson dove the wrong way into shallow water and broke her neck, instantly paralyzing her in all four limbs. And she assuredly prayed what everybody who has such an accident prays if prayer is even considered: "Lord, heal me." And some people are healed, miraculously. But an entirely different, in a way

deeper, miracle occurred with her. She adjusted to her loss and is a woman who has not only discovered that her life is still worth living, but has become a vibrant and well-known ambassador for the claim, "Even after a tragedy like mine, *life is still worth living*." None of this would have happened if she had not suffered an injury that cost her the use of all four limbs. For that matter, none of this would have happened if God answered her prayers by giving her the supernatural healing she wanted. Instead, God changed the game. He answered her prayers, not by giving what she asked for, but by moving the game to the next level. God did not plant her injury, but he has harvested where he did not plant and gathered in where he never scattered.

More than a game change

The Gospel is the story of God changing the game. It was much more than Pharisees who did not recognize Christ; his own disciples seemed to have their eyes equally wide shut.

Christ's people looked for a military Messiah who would deliver the Jews from Roman domination. Christ changed the game; he did not offer salvation as military deliverance, but salvation from sin. He didn't give people what they were looking for; he pushed the game to the next level.

Darkness reigned in the crucifixion of Christ. Something like a quarter to a third of the Gospels are devoted to Christ's passion. The message appears to be very clear: "But this is your hour—when darkness reigns" (Luke 22:53 NIV). *Game over. All hope is lost.*

Yet this profound evil is precisely what God harvested treasure beyond all beauty. In I Corinthians 15 Saint Paul writes,

But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you

sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is

swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

And Saint Paul knew a game change in his own life. English translations seem to put this point much more delicately, but Saint Paul, earlier in this chapter, compares himself to a miscarried child, as the least of the Apostles. He almost seems to be saying, "If there's hope for me, there's hope for anybody." And yet God harvested from what was sown in this persecutor of the Church.

The Resurrection is the ultimate game-changing move. Saint John Chrysostom's famous resurrection homily proclaims:

Let no one bewail his poverty,
 For the universal Kingdom has been revealed.
 Let no one weep for his iniquities,
 For pardon has shown forth from the grave.
 Let no one fear death,
 For the Saviour's death has set us free.
 He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it.

By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.
 He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.
 And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:
 Hell, said he, was embittered
 When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

It was embittered, for it was abolished.
 It was embittered, for it was mocked.
 It was embittered, for it was slain.
 It was embittered, for it was overthrown.
 It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains.
 It took a body, and met God face to face.
 It took earth, and encountered Heaven.
 It took that which was seen, and fell upon the unseen.

O Death, where is thy sting?
 O Hell, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!
 Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!
 Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!
 Christ is risen, and life reigns!
 Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in the grave.
 For Christ, being risen from the dead,
 Is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

To Him be glory and dominion
 Unto ages of ages.
 Amen.

We would do well to remember the scene a short distance after the funereal scene of joy turned to weeping at the death of King Caspian in *Prince Caspian*:

"Look here! I say," he stammered. "It's all very well. But aren't you—? I mean didn't you—"

"Oh, don't be such an ass," said [King] Caspian.

"But," said Eustace, looking at Aslan. "Hasn't he—er—died?"

"Yes," said the Lion in a very quiet voice, almost (Jill thought) as if he were laughing. "He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are very few who haven't."

Earlier in the Gospel, in Luke chapter 7, there is a scene where a widow's only son is carried out on a bier, and Christ says something truly strange: before doing anything else, he tells her not to weep. He is speaking to a woman who has been twice bereaved, and with her last bereavement went her source of

support. And he tells her, "Weep not!" He then goes on to raise her son from the dead. That isn't what is happening in Christ's resurrection.

Christ, the firstborn of the dead, opened death as one opening the womb. And he himself was sown a natural body and is raised a spiritual body. And God did more than simply flip the switch and make Christ's body like it was before death. The marks of crucifixion remain imprinted on his body as Joni Eareckson Tada remains quadriplegic. But Christ moved forward in triumph. He remains forever imprinted with the marks of death suffered for our sakes, and he bears them as his trophy. His victory as God the Game Changer takes us, harvesting what he has sown in our good deeds and our repentance, and what he has not sown in our sins and in evils that happen to us, and alike transforms us as trophies in his wake. Christ God is victor over both sin and death, and this victory is not just something that could be ours at Judgment Day; it is the central reality of day to day life. Saint Seraphim would greet people with the Paschal greeting year round: "Christ is risen, my joy!" While that is not the usual Orthodox custom, that he did so is entirely fitting and not in any sense an exaggeration of the Resurrection's importance. The Resurrection, the greatest act yet of God the Game Changer, is what God will do on a smaller scale in our lives. God sometimes gives us victory in the game we are playing, and sometimes changes the game and pushes us to the next level. It may be a painful and difficult process; it may involve loss and any amount of bewilderment. But when we seem to have lost, it may just be God the Game Changer's power at work.

Christ is risen, His joy!

**An Author's Musing
Memoirs About his
Work:
*Retrospective
Reflections,
Retractions, and
Retracings***

**Taking a second look at some of
what I wrote**

Dear Reader,

Years back, when I was a math grad student, I wrote a short essay entitled, "Why study mathematics?" The basic thought was

connected with the general education math class I was taking, and it is not really an article for why to specialize in mathematics through intensive study, but why a more basic knowledge of math can be a valuable part of liberal arts education. Much like how I taught my class, I did not speak favorably of memorizing formulas—pejoratively called "mindless symbol manipulation" by mathematicians—but spoke of the beauty of the abstractions, the joy of puzzles and problem solving, and even spoke of mathematics as a form of weight lifting for the mind: if you can do math, I said, you can do almost anything. I was sincere in these words, and I believe my obscure little piece captures something that a lot of math students and faculty sensed even if they did not explain their assumption. Since then, there are some things I would say differently. Not exactly that I was incorrect in what I said, but I worked hard to climb a ladder that was leaning against the wrong building.

One famous author in software development, who wrote a big book about "software engineering", had said, "What gets measured gets improved," and began to express second thoughts about his gung-ho enthusiasm for measurement. He didn't exactly *take back* his words of, "What gets measured gets improved," but he said that the most important things to understand are rarely things that are easy or obvious to measure: the mantra "What gets measured gets improved," is a mantra to ruthlessly optimize things that often are less important than you might think. His second thoughts went further: the words "software" and "engineering" have been joined at the hip, but however hard software developers have tried to claim to be engineers, what they do is very different from engineering: it's an apples and oranges comparison.

I would pretty well stand by the statement that if you can deal with the abstraction in math, you can deal with the abstraction in anything: whether chemistry, analytic philosophy, engineering, or sales, there isn't much out there that will call for more abstract thinking than you learn in math. But to pick sales,

for instance, not many people fail in sales because they can't handle the deep abstraction. Sales calls for social graces, the ability to handle rejection, and real persistence, and while you may really and truly learn persistence in math, I sincerely doubt that mathematical training is a sort of industrial strength preparation for social graces and dealing with rejection. And even in engineering, social graces matter more than you might think; it's been said that being good at math gets you in the door, but social influence and effectiveness are what make a *real* superstar. I would still stand by a statement that if you can handle the abstraction in math, you can probably handle the abstraction in anything else. But I'm somewhat more wary of implying that if you have a mathematical mind, you just have an advantage for everything life may throw at you. *That's simply not true.*

There are some things I have written that I would like to take back, at least in part, but even where my works are flawed I don't believe mass deletions are the best response. I would rather write what might be called "Retractions and retracings" and leave them available with the original works. "Why study Mathematics?", whatever its flaws, gives a real glimpse into the beauty that draws mathematicians to mathematics. I may be concerned with flaws here, but they are not the whole truth. However, there are some things I would like to comment on, some flaws to point out. In many cases, I don't believe that what I said is mainly wrong, but I believe it is possible to raise one's eyes higher.

HOW to HUG

Mathematics may be seen as a skill, but it can also be how a person is oriented: jokes may offer a caricature, but a caricature of something that's *there*. One joke tells of a mathematician who finds something at a bookstore, is delighted to walk home with a thick volume entitled *HOW to HUG*, and then, at home, is dismayed to learn he purchased volume 11 of an encyclopædia. And I mention this as a then-mathematician who wrote "A

Treatise on Touch,” which may be seen as interesting, may be seen as deep, and may have something in common with the mathematician purchasing a book so he could know how to hug.

Part of what I have been working on is how, very slowly, to become more human. This struggle is reflected in *Yonder*, which is at its most literal a struggle of philosophers to reach what is human. There is an outer story of disembodied minds set in a dark science fiction world, who are the philosophers, and there is a story within a story, an inner story, of the tragic beauty of human life. When I showed it to a science fiction guru, he suggested that I cut the philosophical dialogues down by quite a bit. The suggestion had a lot of sense, and quite possibility a traditional publisher would want to greatly abbreviate the sections that he suggested I curtail. But I did not follow his advice, and I don't think this was just author stubbornness. When literature builds up to a success, usually the path to success is filled with struggles and littered with failures. This is true of good heroic literature, and for that matter a lot of terrible heroic literature as well. (Just watch a bad adventure movie sometime.) *Yonder* is a story that is replete with struggles and failures, only the failures of the disembodied minds have nothing to do with physical journeys or combat. They begin stuck in philosophy, mere philosophy, and their clumsy efforts to break out provide the failures, and therefore to greatly abridge the philosophical discussion would be to strip away the struggle and failure by which they reach success: a vision of the grandeur of being human. Like much good and bad literature, the broad sweep was inspired by *The Divine Comedy*, opening with a vision of Hell and building up to a view of our painful life as a taste of Heaven, and you don't tell *The Divine Comedy* faithfully if you replace the *Inferno* with a brief summary stating that there are some gruesome images and a few politically incorrect ideas about sin. The dark science fiction world and its mere philosophy provides the vision of Hell that prepares the reader to see the humanness of Heaven and the Heaven of humanness. The inner

story can be told by itself; it is for that matter told independently in *A Wonderful Life*. But there is something in *Yonder*, as it paints the stark, dark, disturbing silhouette of the radiant, luminous splendor and beauty of human life.

While I was a math undergrad, I read and was deeply influenced by the *Tao Te Ching*; something of its influence may be seen in *The Way of the Way*. That work has its flaws, and I may have drunk too deeply of Taoism, but there was a seed planted that I would later recognize in fuller forms in the Orthodox Way. I had in full my goals of studying and thinking, but I realized by the way that there was some value to be had in stillness. Later I would come to be taught that stillness is not an ornament to put on top of a tree; it is the soil from which the tree of life grows.

After I completed my studies in math, and having trouble connecting with the business world, I took stock, and decided that the most important knowledge of all was theology. I had earlier planned to follow the established route of being a mathematician until I was no longer any good for mathematics and then turning out second rate theology. My plans shifted and I wanted to put my goal up front and, I told my pastor, "I want to think about theology in community." (If you are wincing at this, good.) So, in this spirit, I applied to several schools and began the study of academic theology. If you are an astute reader, I will forgive you if you ask, "But isn't this still a mathematician looking for a book on how to hug?" The goal I had, to teach at a university or even better train Orthodox priests at a seminary, was a laudable enough goal, and perhaps God will bless me with that in the future. Perhaps he wants the same thing, but perhaps God first wants to free me from the chain of being too much like a mathematician wanting to learn how to hug by reading a book.

During my time studying theology at Cambridge, I was received into the Orthodox Church. I am grateful to God for both a spiritual father whose lenience offered a corrective to my legalistic tendencies, and for a godfather who was fond of reading

Orthodox loose cannons and who helped me see a great many things that were invisible to me at the time. For instance, I asked him for help on some aspect of getting my worldview worked out correctly, and I was caught off guard when he explained, "You aren't being invited to work out the Orthodox worldview. You're being invited to worship in the right glory of Orthodoxy, and you are being invited to walk the Orthodox way." In that sense Orthodoxy is not really a system of ideas to work out correctly that, say, a martial art: there may be good books connected to martial arts, but you learn a martial art by practicing it, and you learn Orthodoxy by practicing it. And in that response, my godfather helped me take one step further away from being a mathematician trying to find a book that will teach him how to hug. (He also gave me repeated corrections when I persisted in the project of trying to improve Orthodox practices by historical reconstruction. And eventually he got through to me on that point.)

Becoming Orthodox for me has been a matter of becoming really and truly human, or at least beginning to. There is a saying that has rumbled down through the ages in different forms: in the second century, St. Irenaeus wrote, "For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God." I have not read this in much earlier sources, but I have read many later phrasings: "God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God." "The divine became human that the human might become divine." "The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God." And one real variation on this has been quoted, "Christ did not just become man so that I might become divine. *He also became man that I might become a man.*"

If Christ became man that I might become human, this is manifest in a million ways in the Orthodox Church. Let me give

one way. When I was preparing to be received into the Orthodox Church, I asked my godfather some question about how to best straighten out my worldview. He told me that the Western project of worldview construction was not part of the Orthodox Way: I had been invited to walk the Orthodox Way but not work out the Orthodox worldview. If there is in fact an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from worldvish endeavors: it arises out of the practices and life of the Orthodox Church, much in line with, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Not just corrections, but being caught off-guard by effectively being told, "Here are some of many rules; there is no need for you to know all of them. They are important, and you need to strive for strict excellence, but you are not treating them in the right spirit if you hold them rigidly and legalistically. (Work out with your priest how you will best bend them.)" The Orthodox Church's nature as essentially an oral tradition has helped cure me of silly things like meticulously studying ancient texts to put my mind to an antiquarian reconstruction and answer the question, "How should we live?" (The Orthodox Church is ancient, but it is not really infected with antiquarian reconstruction efforts.) The rhythm of the liturgy and its appointed seasons, the spiritual housecleaning involved with preparing for confession, the profoundly important community of the faithful: all of these are part of how it works out in the Orthodox Church that God became man not only so that I might become divine, but also so that I might become more truly man.

Part of this becoming human on my part also has to do with silence, or as Orthodox call it, hesychasm. Part of the disorder of life as we know it is that our minds are scattered about: worrying about this, remembering that pain, and in general not gathered into the heart. Mathematical training is a training in drawing the mind out of the heart and into abstract thinking. The word "abstract" itself comes from the Latin *abstrahere*, meaning to pull back (from concrete things), and if you train yourself in the

habit of abstraction you pull yourself back from silence and from what is good about the *Tao Te Ching*.

In *Silence: Organic Food for the Soul*, I all but closed with the words, "Be in your mind a garden locked and a fountain sealed," which speaks about having a mind that is gathered together and is in the fullest sense mind: which is not when abstract thinking is its bread and butter. Perhaps some of the saints' wisdom is abstract, but it does not come from building an edifice of abstractions.

The terms *intellect* and *mind* mean something very different in Orthodox classics than they do in today's English. The difference is as great as the difference between using *web* to mean a physical object woven out of spider's silk and *web* to mean interconnected documents and media available over the internet. Today you might say, "The intellect is what an IQ test measures." An Orthodox saint who had been asked might have said, "The intellect is where you meet God." The mind is an altar, and its proper thought flows out of its being an altar: in *Within the Steel Orb*, a visitor from our world steps into a trap:

"And your computer science is pretty advanced, right? Much more advanced than ours?"

"We know things that the trajectory of computer science in your world will never reach because it is not pointed in the right direction." Oinos tapped the wall and arcs of pale blue light spun out.

"Then you should be well beyond the point of making artificial intelligence."

"Why on a million, million worlds should we ever be able to do that? Or even think that is something we *could* accomplish?"

"Well, if I can be obvious, the brain is a computer, and the mind is its software."

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—"

"All right, all right! I get the idea, and that's some pretty lovely poetry. (What's a kairometer?) These are all very beautiful metaphors for the mind, but I am interested in what the mind is literally."

"Then it might interest you to hear that your world's computer is also a metaphor for the mind. A good and poetic metaphor, perhaps, but a metaphor, and one that is better to balance with other complementary metaphors. It is the habit of some in your world to understand the human mind through the metaphor of the latest technology for you to be infatuated with. Today, the mind is a computer, or something like that. Before you had the computer, 'You're

just wired that way' because the brain or the mind or whatever is a wired-up telephone exchange, the telephone exchange being your previous object of technological infatuation, before the computer. Admittedly, 'the mind is a computer' is an attractive metaphor. But there is some fundamental confusion in taking *that* metaphor literally and assuming that, since the mind is a computer, all you have to do is make some more progress with technology and research and you can give a computer an intelligent mind."

That litany of metaphors summarizes much of my second master's thesis. Which is not really the point; but my point here is that on an Orthodox understanding, intellect is *not* something you measure by an IQ test and a mind is *not* the spitting image of a computer. The mind, rightly understood, finds its home in prayer and simple silence. The intellect is where one meets God, and its knowing flows out of its contact with God and with spiritual reality. And, in the metaphors of the *Song of Songs*, the mind as it is meant to be is "a garden locked, a fountain sealed", not spilled out promiscuously into worry, or grudges, or plans for the future that never satisfy. And this gathering together of the mind, this prayer of the mind in the heart, is one that was not proposed to me by my mathematical training.

Now I should mention that I have a lot to be grateful for as far as math goes. There are a lot of people who gave of themselves in my training; there are a lot of people who gave of themselves in the various math contests I was involved in. And, not to put too fine a point of it, I have a computer job now which is a blessing from God and in which I build on a strong mathematical foundation. It would be silly for me to say, "I am not grateful for this" as God has provided me many blessings through math. But I need to place things like "I have a lot of math awards" alongside what a monk said to a maid and to me: she was fortunate in the job she had, as manual labor that allowed her mind to pray as she

was working in inner stillness, while I as a computer person was less fortunate because my job basically required me to be doing things with my mind that don't invite mental stillness. My job may be a profound blessing and something not to take for granted. But he was pointing out that the best jobs for spiritual growth may not be the ones higher on the pecking order.

A streak of escapism

There is a streak of escapism in much of my work. If you read *Within the Steel Orb*, I believe you will find insight expressed with wonder, and I would not take back any of that. But the wisdom, which is wisdom from here and now, is expressed as the alien wisdom of an alien world that panders to a certain escapism. Wisdom and wonder can be expressed without escapism; *Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth* and *Doxology* both express wisdom and wonder in a way that does not need to escape from a disdained here and now. But there is a thread of escapism in much of my work, even as I have sought to reject it.

During or shortly after I was in high school, I wrote a note in an online forum arguing that *Terminator 2* had shot itself in the foot. The movie had a scene with two little boys angrily playing with toy guns and the voiceover complained about how tragic this was, and at the end the message was made even more explicit: "If a machine, a terminator, can learn the value of human life, maybe we can too." But the movie was an action-adventure movie, meaning a movie whose attraction was built on glorified violence with guns blazing. In terms of a movie that would speak out against violence, contrast it with a movie idea I had, for a movie that would rush along at an action-adventure clip for the first few minutes and then slow down like a European art film; from *Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art*:

What I did do was to outline a film idea for a film that would start out indistinguishably from an action-adventure movie. It would have one of the hero's friends held captive by some cardboard-cutout villains. There is a big operation to sneak in and deftly rescue him, and when that fails, all Hell breaks loose and there is a terrific action-adventure style firefight. There is a dramatic buildup to the hero getting in the helicopter, and as they are leaving, one of the villain's henchmen comes running with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

The camera surprisingly does not follow the helicopter in its rush to glory, but instead focuses on the henchman for five or ten excruciating minutes as he curses and writhes in agony. Then the film slows down to explore what that one single gunshot means to the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he nursed a spiritual wound of lust for vengeance that was infinitely more tragic than his devastating physical wound.

By contrast, it may be clearer what might be called shooting yourself in the foot in the *Terminator 2* syndrome, and as far as escapism goes, I have a couple of pieces that shoot themselves in the foot with something like a *Terminator 2* syndrome. In *The Voyage*, the miserable young Jason is an escapist and, when he meets an old man, asks the old man's help in an escape he doesn't believe is possible. The old man deftly opens Jason's eyes to the beauty of this world, the beauty of the here and now, that are simply invisible to him. I stand by everything I wrote in that regard. But the closing line, when thanks to the old man Jason triumphs over escapism, is, "And Jason entered another world." Which is to say that the story shot itself in the foot, like *Terminator 2*.

There may be a paradoxical link between escapism and self-absorption. Self-absorption is like being locked in your room and sensing that it is constricting, and so you wish that you could be teleported up to a spaceship and explore the final frontier, or maybe wish for a portal to open up that would take you to the Middle Ages or some fantasy world. And maybe you can get a bit of solace by decorating your room like someplace else and imagining that your room is that other place, and maybe you can pretend and do mind games, but they don't really satisfy. What you miss is what you really need: to unlock the door, walk out, visit a friend, go shopping, and do some volunteering. It may not be what you could arrange if you were controlling everything, but that's almost exactly the *point*. It may not what you want, but it is what you need, and it satisfies in a way that a quest to become a knight, at least in your imagination, cannot. And my own concerns to escape self-absorption and escapism play out in my writing: *The Spectacles* is more successful than *The Voyage* in telling of an escape from the Hell of self-absorption and escapism; I've been told it's my best short story. But it still has the imprint of self-absorption even as it tells of someone finding way out of self-absorbed escapism. And something of that imprint affects my writing: there are some good things about my fiction, but I have been told that my characters are too similar and are only superficially different. I do not think I will ever receive the kind of compliment given to Charles Dickens, that he envisions a complete universe of different characters. People may say that my satire like *Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary* shows a brilliant wit and is bitingly funny, but you can be pretty full of yourself and still write good satire. By contrast, it takes humble empathy to make a universe of characters worthy of Dickens.

A door slammed shut: *God's severe mercy*

I earned a master's in theology, and entered into a doctoral program. I thought for a long while about how to say something appropriate about that program, and I think the best I can do is this:

I've been through chemotherapy, and that was an experience: overall, it was not as bad as I feared, and I enjoyed life when I was going through chemotherapy. I still cherish *The Spectacles*, the first piece written after a long dry spell because I was drained by illness. I'm not sure it is a nice thing to have powerful cytotoxins injected into your body, and the rough spots included the worst hour of (purely physical) pain in my life, but on the whole, a lot of progress has been made in making chemotherapy not as bad as it used to be, and I had good people to care for me.

And then there are experiences that, to put it politely, put chemotherapy into perspective. My entering this doctoral program and trying to please the people there was one of those experiences into perspective: during that time, I contacted a dean and wrote, "I found chemotherapy easier than dealing with [a professor I believed was harassing me]," and received no response beyond a secretary's brush-off. After this ordeal, my grades were just below the cutoff to continue, and that school is not in any way going to give me nice letters of reference to let me finish up somewhere else. I suppose I could answer spam emails and get a diploma mill Ph.D., but I don't see how I am in a position to get the Ph.D. that I wanted badly enough to endure these ordeals.

And if I ask where God was in all this, the answer is probably, "I was with you, teaching you all the time." When I was in middle

school, I ranked 7th in the nation in the 1989 MathCounts competition, and I found it obvious then that this was because God wanted me to be a mathematician. For that matter, I didn't go through the usual undergraduate panic about "What will I major in?" Now I find it obvious that God had something else in mind, something greater: discipleship, or sonship, which may pass through being a mathematician, or may not. Not straying too far from this, I wanted a Ph.D., and I thought that this would be the best way to honor him with my abilities. Again I was thinking too narrowly; I was still too much of the mathematician looking for a book to teach him how to hug; again the answer seemed to be, "That's not the issue. Aim higher and be my servant." As it turns out, I have four years' graduate work in theology; that has some use in my writings, and even if it didn't, the issue is not whether I am a good enough achiever, but whether I am faithful.

During this time I read quite a lot of medieval versions of the legends of King Arthur. There were a couple of things that drew me to them, both of them rather sad. The first was pride, both pride at thinking I was going to be an Arthurian author, and pride at sometimes reading medieval legends in the original.

But the second reason I kept reading them was that compared to what I was covering in theology class, reading the legends almost seemed like I was actually studying *theology*. (At least by comparison.) Whether a course in theological foundations that assumed, "We need to work from the common ground that is shared by all the world's religious traditions, and that universal common ground is Western analytic philosophy," or reading that theologians are scientists and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called "hard sciences" like physics, or a course in "philosophy and contemporary theology" that was largely about queer matters and such topics as ambiguous genitalia, the whole experience was like "Monty Python teaches Christian theology." And it would be a funny, if tasteless joke, but it was really something much more tragic than

a Monty Python riff on theology. And in all this the Arthurian legends, which are really quite pale if they are held next to the grandeur of Christian theology, none the less seemed to give respite for me to study.

In the light of all this, there are three basic things that I wrote. The first is the Arthurian book I wanted to write out of all the medieval books I was reading:

- The Sign of the Grail

The second thing is a group of pieces that were written largely as rebuttals to things I ran into there. (The university was a "Catholic" university, so they were generous to us Orthodox and treated us like liberal Catholics.) I've had enough contact with Catholics outside that university; those pieces are not written just in response to being at a "Catholic" university.

- Dissent: Lessons From Being an Orthodox Theology Student at a Catholic University
- An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism
- Religion and Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

I believe there is some merit in these pieces, but not that much: if they say something that needs to be said, they are limited to winning an argument. Theology can win an argument and some of the best theology is meant to win an argument, but the purpose of real theological writing is to draw people into the presence of God. These pieces may say something valuable, but they do not really do the job of theology: *beckon the reader to worship before the throne of God.*

But that leaves the third group of pieces written in the wake of that un-theological theology program, and that is precisely pieces which are written to draw the reader to bask in the glory of God. The ones I would pick as best are:

- Doxology
- God the Spiritual Father
- Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art
- Silence: Organic Food for the Soul
- Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis

So where does this leave me now?

I think I've made real progress but I still have a lot in common with that mathematician who bought a book so he could learn how to hug. Be that as it may, I have a lot to be thankful for.

I had my heart set on completing my program, but in 2005 I started a Ph.D. program that was estimated to take eight years to complete. And since then, the economy tanked. And in this, a gracious and merciful God didn't give me what I *wanted*, but what I *needed*. Actually, more than that. In the aftermath of the program, I took some anthropology and linguistics coursework which on the one hand confirmed that I was already good at learning languages (the woman who scored the MLAT for me said, "I've scored this test for thirty years and I've never seen a score this high,") and on the other hand, paradoxically provided good remedial understanding of things I just didn't *get* about my own culture. And there's something I'd like to point out about that. God provided academic coursework to teach me some things that most people just pick up as they grow, and perhaps

studying academic theology was what God provided to help me get on to something that is at once more basic, greater, and more human: entering the Orthodox Church, and entering real, human theology.

But back to after the anthropology courses. Then the economy took a turn for the worse, and I found a good job. Then the economy got worse than that, and my job ended, and I had my fast job hunt yet and found an even better than that. There's no way I'm entitled to this; it is God's gracious providence at work. These are blessings covered in the divine fingerprints.

I still have failings to face: rather spectacular failings which I'd rather not detail. And it God's grace that I am still learning of my clumsiness and my sin, and realize I really need to face ways I don't measure up. But that is really not the issue.

Does God work with flawed people?

Who else does he have to work with?

He has glorious, majestic, awesome, terrifying holy angels. But there is another glory when God works in and through flawed people.

Even the sort of mathematician who would read a book on how to hug (or maybe write one). The worst of our flaws is like an ember thrown into the ocean of God's transforming power.

And the same God wills to work in you, whatever your flaws may be.

Much Love,
Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward

***QUICK!* What's Your Opinion About Chemistry?**

QUICK! What's your opinion about chemistry?

Readers who also read the popular usability author Jakob Nielsen may have read him give a popularized version of "the query effect," which is essentially that even if people don't have an opinion on something before you ask, if you ask their opinion they will very quickly come to an opinion, share the newly formed with you, and walk away thoroughly convinced of the opinion they just shared.

I haven't actually done this, but if I were to waste people's time and perhaps get in trouble with clergy by taking a survey at church and ask them what their opinion of chemistry was, I would expect some hesitation and befuddlement, people being perhaps a bit uncertain about where the question was coming from or my motives for asking, but given a bit of time to answer, something like the following might be expected:

- It's hard.

- It's boring.
- It's fascinating.
- I think it's really cool that a chemist can take two beakers full of clear liquid and pour them together and have it turn colors.
- Our lives are so much better for things that need chemistry for us to be able to manufacture them.
- Chemistry is foundational to how we as a society have raped the environment.
- What difference chemistry makes depends on how you make use of it.
- Chemistry came from alchemy—I'm a bit more curious about alchemy!
- ...

Now what about an answer of "There are not hundreds of elements, e.g. *hydrogen*, *helium*, *lithium*, etc., but the original four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. Chemistry is intrinsically atheistic, and no Orthodox should believe it."?

Most readers may be even further confused as to where I may be going this, and suspect that the source of the opinion is occult, or deranged, or on drugs, or some combination of the above. But in fact that is the position of Church Fathers, although I will only investigate one of the Three Holy Heirarchs. In St. Basil's *Hexaëmeron*, in which we read:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of

the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

Now a chemist who communicated well would be hard pressed to summarize chemistry (*not* alchemy) better in so few words as the opponents' position as summarized by St. Basil. Even if modern chemistry is developed in a great deal more detail and scientific accuracy than St. Basil's opponents. Compare the words of Nobel Prize laureate Richard Feynman, in the *Feynman Lectures* which are considered exemplars of excellent communication in teaching the sciences, in words that might as well have come from a chemist trying to explain chemistry in a single sentence:

If, in some cataclysm, all of scientific knowledge were to be destroyed, and only one sentence passed on to the next generation of creatures, what statement would contain the most information in the fewest words? I believe it is the atomic hypothesis that *all things are made of atoms – little particles that move around in perpetual motion, attracting each other when they are a little distance apart, but repelling upon being squeezed into one another*. In that one sentence, you will see, there is an enormous amount of information about the world, if just a little imagination and thinking are applied.

Feynman and St. Basil's summary of his opponents are saying the same thing, and almost with the same economy. St. Basil's description could be used as a pretty effective surrogate if Feynman's words here were lost.

If that is the case, what should we make of it? Well, let me mention one thing I hope *doesn't* happen: I *don't* want to see even one pharmacist (or as is said in the U.K., "*chemist*"), weeping, make the confession of a lifetime, stop using chemistry to ease the sick and the suffering, after the sobbing confession, "I thought I was an Orthodox Christian, but it turns out I was really an atheist all along!"

A sane reading of the Fathers would take a deep breath—or simply not *need* to take a deep breath—and recognize that something other than legalism is the wisest course for dealing with occasional passages in the Fathers that condemn chemistry, just like with the passages that claim a young earth.

Just like the passages that claim a young earth?

People in the U.S. who are not connected with Hispanic culture will often wonder that Mexicans, either in Mexico or the U.S., do not really celebrate Cinco de Mayo, and probably make less of a hubbub of what is assumed to be the the Mexican holiday. But, as my brother pointed out, "*Cinco de Mayo* legitimately is a Mexican holiday, but it's not on par with the U.S.'s Independence Day; it's on par with [the U.S.'s] Casimir Pulaski Day."

It is helpful in dealing with passages from the Fathers to recognize what are genuinely Independence Day topics and what are only Casimir Pulaski Day topics. Independence Day topics include *repentance*, *theosis*, *Grace*, *hesychasm*, and there tend to be numerous treatises devoted to them. Casimir Pulaski Day topics like rejection of chemistry as atheistic, or insisting on a young earth, may be agreed on, but I have not read or heard in thousands of pages of patristic writing where either topic is front and center. So far I have only found brief passages, generally among other passages condemning various opinions in ways that,

when they touch scientific subjects, are a bit scattershot—much as when one is proceeding the wrong way—as regards contributing to any useful and coherent way of evaluating modern science.

I'm not going to condemn believing in a young earth as it is a very easy conclusion to reach and it is shared among many saints. But I will suggest that even the conceptual framework of having an origins position is strange and not helpful, as it is spiritually really not that helpful to weigh in on whether chemistry makes you an atheist. *We're making a really big deal of a Mexican Casamir Pulaski Day, much to the confusion of those connected with Méjico!*

Mainstream origins positions

Let me briefly comment on the mainstream origins positions held by Orthodox. Some things are non-negotiable; among them being that God created the world and that the human race is created in the image of God. Atheism, naturalism or materialism is not acceptable, with or without connection to evolution. The Ancient Near East and pagan Greek philosophy hold to various opinions which are not to be accepted: among these are that a hero or god fought a dragon or demon and ripped her body in half, making half into the sky and half into the earth; that the universe was created by divine sexual activity in a fashion that need not be described to Orthodox Christians; that the world has always existed and is as uncreated as God; and that the world is an emanation from God (divine by nature in a diluted form), in classical pantheistic fashion. All of these are to be rejected, but I am not aware of a camp among today's Orthodox, nor have I encountered a single Orthodox follower, for these kinds of positions. And none of these seem to really overlap any mainstream position.

Among mainstream positions, let me enumerate the following. This excludes being completely not sure, finding the

whole question messy and hesitating between two or more basic options (where I am now), and a few others. As far as I know, this list covers all encounters where I have seen a definite position taken by Orthodox. (Some or all of these positions may admit varieties and clarification.)

1: The saints believed in a young earth and that's how I read Genesis.

If you believe this, and don't go further or mix it with *anything* non-Orthodox, this is *fine*.

2: I believe in an old earth where God miraculously intervened by creating new life forms over time.

This position is now backed by intelligent design movement texts, such as Philip Johnson's *Darwin on Trial*. The downside, at least as explained to me by two very hostile Orthodox theistic evolutionists who shut me down before I could make my point instead of letting me make my point and then refuting it, is that the new intelligent design movement was concocted by the Protestant creationist Discovery Institute *to attract people not attracted by young earth creationism's handling of science*. Like the position that follows, *most* of its followers don't jackhammer people who disagree.

3: I'm not a scientist, but I believe God could have done it through evolution.

This option, theistic evolution, is perfectly permissible, but I wince as it usually means "I'm coming to terms with the science of a hundred years ago."

One hundred years ago, *evolution* was a live option in the academy. Now people still use the term, but its meaning

has been gutted and any belief that life forms slowly *evolve* into different life forms has been dead so long that it has long since stopped even smelling bad. The evidence (the "evolutionary" term being "punctuated equilibrium" or "punk eek") is that the fossil record shows long periods of great stability without real change in what kind of organisms there, abruptly interrupted by geological eyeblinks and the sudden appearance and disappearance of life forms. Or as my "University Biology" teacher at the Illinois Mathematics and *Science* Academy said, "Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by brief moments of intense excitement."

This option registers to me as a genuinely comfortable assent to science, but without awareness that the science in question has changed profoundly in the past hundred years.

But I wish to underscore: theistic evolution is (usually) an "I won't drop the hammer on you" signal, and that is an *excellent* kind of signal.

4: I am a scientist, and I believe God probably worked through evolution.

My experience with this has not been the most pleasant; in one case behind the open hostility and efforts to shut me down from arguing (and rudely stop me before I could make my point at all instead of letting me make my point and then explain its flaws) may have lurked an uneasiness that I represented enough authority that I was intrinsically a threat to their certitude that scientific evidence pointed to "evolution" (as the term has been redefined in the sciences of today).

With that stated, I have known several Orthodox physicians, and I expect some of them after extensive

evolution-laden biology classes would lean towards theistic evolution. However, I'm not sure as they generally seemed more interested in knowing, for instance, if I was having a nice day, than convincing me of their views about origins.

(I don't remember any clergy or heirarch who was above me *bringing up* origins questions, although they have been willing to offer their thoughts if requested; "I'm not a scientist, but I believe God could have done it through evolution" is the most frequent opinion I've seen even among conservative clergy. Priests seem to be focused on bigger questions, like "What hast thou to confess?")

All four opinions above are at least tolerable, but there is one additional common opinion that takes "problematic" to a whole new level:

5: God created a young earth and we know because Creation Science proves it.

I am perhaps biased by my frustrating experience with this crowd. I've had people offer to straighten out my backwards understanding of science whose understanding of science was so limited that I could not lead them to see when I was making a scientific argument, as opposed to just arbitrarily playing around with words. I have an advanced degree from a leading institution and a lot of awards. I am not aware of any of the people who sought to do me the favor of straightening out my backwards views on science as having a community college "*learner's permit*" associate's degree in any of the sciences.

The assertion is made that Creation Science is just science (after all, how could it not, if it has "Science" in its name?). A slightly more astute reader might listen to artificial intelligence critic John Searle's rule of thumb that anything with the word "science" in its name is probably *not* a science: "military science," "food science,"

"Creation Science", "cognitive science." My best response to people who think Creation "Science" is science in the usual sense of the term, is to say that "Creation Science is real, legitimate science" is wrong, in the same way, for the same reason, as saying "Pro-choice Catholics are real, legitimate Catholics". Pro-choice "Catholics" do not understand, appreciate, respect, or accept what it means to be a Catholic; Creation "scientists" do not understand, appreciate, respect, or accept what it means to be a scientist. Not only do Scientists and Catholics not accept the obnoxious intrusion, but arguing is pointless and brings to mind Confucius's warning, "*It is useless to take counsel with those who follow a different Way.*"

The problem with Creation Science is not that it is not science. It is painfully obvious to those outside of the movement that it is a feature of the Protestant landscape, perhaps a Protestantism of yesteryear rather than Protestantism today: Wheaton College, which is quite arguably the Evangelical Vatican, has something like three young earth creationists on its faculty, and I have never heard the one I know even mention Creation Science—he only claims to accept a young earth from reading and trusting the Bible), and the origin and nature of Creation Science are well described by a leading Evangelical scholar of Evangelicalism, Mark Noll in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

Kiddies, if you're going to take one feature of Protestantism and incorporate it into Orthodoxy, take Bible studies, or *My Utmost for His Highest*, or some other genuine treasure that tradition has produced. It would be better to do neither, of course, but those are better choices. Taking Creation Science from Evangelicalism is like robbing Evangelicalism in a blind alley, and all you take away is its pocket lint!

More than one person who have held this last position *have called into question whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian at all because I didn't believe in a young earth*. And I really think that's a bit extreme. In twelve years of being Orthodox, I have on numerous occasions been told I was *wrong* by people who were often *right*. I have been told I was wrong many times by my spiritual father, by other priests, and by laity who usually have had a little bit more experience, and I suspect that future growth will be fueled partly by further instances of people pointing where I am wrong. However, when I was newly illumined and my spiritual father said that what I had just said sounded very Protestant, he did not thereby call into question whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian. The only context in the entirety of my dozen years of being Orthodox that anybody has responded to my words, faith, belief, practice, etc. by directly challenging whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian at **all**, was Seraphinians who were exceedingly and sorely displeased to learn I did not share their certain belief in a young earth. This seems to say little about my weaknesses (besides that I am the chief of sinners), and a great deal more about an unnatural idol that has blown out of all proportions. The Casimir Pulaski day represented by the theologoumenon of a young earth has completely eclipsed every Independence Day question on which I've been wrong, from the ecumenism of my younger days (ecumenism has been anathematized as a heresy), to a more-inappropriate-than-usual practice of the Protestant cottage industry of archaeologically restoring the early Church. In both cases my error was serious, and I am glad clergy out-stubborned me as I did not give in quickly. But they refrained from casting doubt on whether I should be calling myself an Orthodox Christian; they seem to have seen me as both a nascent Orthodox and wrong about several things they would expect from my background. Really, we *do* need Church discipline, but *isn't dropping that sledgehammer on people who don't believe a young earth a bit*

extreme?

I'll not return the insult of casting doubt on whether they're Orthodox; I don't see that this option is acceptable, but I believe it is coherent to talk about someone who is both Orthodox and wrong about something major or minor. I believe that Creation Science is a thoroughly Protestant practice (that it is not science is beside the point), and militantly embracing Creation Science is one of the ways that the Seraphinians continue a wrong turn.

But quite apart from that, the question of origins as I have outlined it is *itself* a heritage from Protestantism. Evangelicals once were fine with an old earth, before Evangelicals created today's young earth creationism; my article "Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy" talks with some sympathy about the Evangelical "line in the sand;" *Noll tells how it came to be drawn*. The fact that it can be a relatively routine social question to ask someone, "What is your opinion about origins?" signals a problem if this Protestant way of framing things is available in Orthodoxy. It's not just that the Seraphinian answer is wrong: the question itself is wrong, or at least not Orthodox as we know it now. Maybe the question "Did God create the entire universe from nothing, or did he merely shape a world that has always existed and is equally uncreated with him?" is an Independence Day question, or something approaching one. The questions of "Young or old earth?" and "Miraculous creation of new species or theistic evolution?" are Casimir Pulaski Day questions, and it is not helpful to celebrate them on par with Independence Day.

One friend and African national talked about how in her home cultural setting, you don't ask a teacher "What is your philosophy of education?" as is routinely done in the U.S. for teacher seeking hire who may or may not have taken a single philosophy class. In her culture, that question does not fit the list of *possibles et pensables*, what is possible and what is even thinkable in that setting. (This whole article has been made to introduce a concept not readily available in the *possibles et pensables* of our own cultural setting, that having a modern style

of "origins position" at all is not particularly Orthodox; and that some positions, even or especially among conservatives, are even more problematic. *A transposition to chemistry helps highlight just how strange and un-Orthodox certain positions really are.*) And let us take a look at Orthodox spiritual fathers. As advised in the *Philoikalia* and innumerable other sources, if you are seeking a spiritual father, in or out of monasticism, you should make every investigation before entering the bond of obedience; after you have entered it, the bond is inviolable. I don't know exactly how Orthodox have tried spiritual fathers, but I have difficulty imagining asking a monastic elder, "What is your personal philosophy of spiritual direction?" *Quite possibly there is none.* Even thinking about it feels uncomfortably presumptuous, and while theological opinion does exist and have a place, defining yourself by your opinions is not Orthodox.

If I were to ask someone in the U.S. "What are your family traditions for celebrating Casimir Pulaski Day?" the best response I could get would be, "Cas-Cashmere *WHO?*"

And now I will show you a more excellent way

I feel I may be sending a very mixed message by the amount I have written in relation to origins questions given that my more recent postings keep downplaying origins debates. Much of what I have written has been because I don't just think certain answers have flaws; the questions themselves have been ill-framed.

But that isn't really the point.

These pieces are all intended to move beyond Casimir Pulaski Day and pull out all of the stops and celebrate Independence Day *with bells on*. They may be seen as an answer to the question, "Do you have anything *else* to discuss besides origins?" **If you read one work, "Doxology" is my most-**

reshared.

1. **“Doxology”**

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,
Compareth to thy worth.
Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven
and on earth is named,
The Glory for whom all glory is named,

2. **“A Pilgrimage from Narnia”**

Wardrobe of fur coats and fir trees:
Sword and armor, castle and throne,
Talking beast and Cair Paravel:
From there began a journey,
From thence began a trek,
Further up and further in!

3. **“God the Spiritual Father”**

I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty...

The Nicene Creed

All of us do the will of God. The question is not whether we do God's will or not, but whether we do God's will as *instruments*, as Satan and Judas did, or as *sons*, as Peter and John did. In the end Satan may be nothing more than a hammer in the hand of God.

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

4: “**Akathist to St. Philaret the Merciful**”

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures! (Repeated thrice.)

5: “**A Pet Owner's Rules**”

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

6: “**Silence: Organic Food for the Soul**”

We are concerned today about our food, and that is good:
 sweet fruit and honey are truly good and better than raw sugar,
 raw sugar not as bad as refined sugar,
 refined sugar less wrong than corn syrup,
 and corn syrup less vile than Splenda.
 But whatever may be said for eating the right foods,
 this is nothing compared to the diet we give our soul.

7: “**Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret**”

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often,

or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the *Philokalia* well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now...

8: "Why This Waste?"

"Why this waste?" quoth the Thief,
 Missing a pageant unfold before his very eyes,
 One who sinned much, forgiven, for her great love,
 Brake open a priceless heirloom,
 An alabaster vessel of costly perfume,
 Costly chrism beyond all price anointing the Christ,
 Anointing the Christ unto life-giving death,
 Anointed unto life-giving death,
 A story ever told,
 In memory of her:

9: "Open"

How shall I be open to thee,
 O Lord who is forever open to me?
 Incessantly I seek to clench with tight fist,
 Such joy as thou gavest mine open hand.

10: "The Angelic Letters"

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

I am writing to you concerning the inestimable responsibility and priceless charge who has been entrusted to you. You have been appointed guardian angel to one Mark.

Who is Mark, whose patron is St. Mark of Ephesus? A man. What then is man? Microcosm and mediator, the midpoint of Creation, and the fulcrum for its sanctification. Created in the image of God; created to be prophet, priest, and king. It is toxic for man to know too much of his beauty at once, but it is also toxic for man to know too much of his sin at once. For he is mired in sin and passion, and in prayer and deed offer what help you can for the snares all about him. Keep a watchful eye out for his physical situation, urge great persistence in the liturgical and the sacramental life of the Church that he gives such godly participation, and watch for his asceticism with every eye you have. Rightly, when we understand what injures a man, nothing can injure the man who does not injure himself: but it is treacherously easy for a man to injure himself. Do watch over him and offer what help you can.

With Eternal Light and Love,
Your Fellow-Servant and Angel

Happy Independence Day! Enjoy the fireworks display.

Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough

Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism

If you read Genesis 1 and believe from Genesis 1 that the world was created in six days, I applaud you. That is a profound thing to believe in simplicity of faith.

However, if you wish to persuade me that Orthodox Christians should best believe in a young earth creation in six days, I am wary. *Every single time* an Orthodox Christian has tried to convince me that I should believe in a six day creation, I have been given recycled Protestant arguments, and for the moment the entire conversation has seemed like I was talking with a Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing. And if the other person claims to understand scientific data better than scientists who believe an old earth, and show that the scientific data instead support a young *earth*, this is a major red flag.

Now at least some Orthodox heirarchs have refused to decide for the faithful under their care what the faithful may believe: the faithful may be expected to believe God's hand was at work, but between young earth creationism, old earth creationism, and "God created life through evolution", or any other options, the heirarchs do not intervene. I am an old earth creationist; I came to my present beliefs on "How did different life forms appear?" before becoming Orthodox, and I have called them into a question a few times but not yet found reason to revise them, either into young earth creation or theistic evolution. I would characterize my beliefs, after being reconsidered, as "not changed", *and not* "decisively confirmed": what I would suggest has improved in my beliefs is that I have become less interested in some Western fascinations, such as getting right the details of how the world was created, moving instead to what might be called "mystical theology" or "practical theology", and walking the Orthodox Way.

There is something that concerns me about Orthodox arguing young earth creationism like a Protestant fundamentalist. Is it that I think they are wrong about how the world came to be? *That is not the point*. If they are wrong about that, they are wrong in the company of excellent saints. If they merely hold another position in a dispute, that is one thing, but bringing Protestant fundamentalism into the Orthodox Church reaches beyond one position in a dispute. Perhaps I shouldn't be talking because I reached my present position before entering the Orthodox Church; or rather I haven't exactly *reversed* my position but de-emphasized it and woken up to the fact that there are bigger things out there. But I am concerned when I'm talking with an Orthodox Christian, and *every single time* someone tries to convince me of a young earth creationism, all of the sudden it seems like I'm not dealing with an Orthodox Christian any more, but with a Protestant fundamentalist who always includes arguments that came from Protestant fundamentalism. And what concerns me is an issue of *practical* theology. Believing in a six

day creation is one thing. Believing in a six day creation like a Protestant fundamentalist is another matter *entirely*.

A telling, telling line in the sand

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the Article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

But, you may say, Genesis 1 and some important Fathers said six days, literally. True enough, but may ask a counterquestion?

Are we obligated to believe that our bodies are composed of earth, air, fire and water, and not of molecules and atoms including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen?

If that question seems to come out of the blue, let me quote St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, on a precursor to today's understanding of the chemistry of what everyday objects are made of:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

At this point, belief in his day's closest equivalent to our atoms and molecules is called an absolutely unacceptable "spider's web" that is due to "inherent atheism." Would you call Orthodox Christians who believe in chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil rejected atoms and molecules, and believed in elements, not of carbon or hydrogen, but of earth, air, fire, and water. The basic belief is one Orthodoxy understands, and there are sporadic references in liturgical services to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and so far as I know no references to modern chemistry. St. Basil seems clearly enough to endorse a six day creation, and likewise endorses an ancient view of elements while rejecting belief in atoms and molecules as implicit atheism.

Why then do Orthodox who were once Protestant fundamentalists dig their heels in at a literal six day creation and make no expectation that we dismiss chemistry to believe the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and possibly aether? The answer, so far as I can tell, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with Orthodoxy or any Orthodox Christians. It has to do with a line in the sand chosen by Protestants, the same line in the sand described in *Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy*, a line in the sand that is understandable and was an attempt to address quite serious concerns, but still should not be imported from Protestant fundamentalism into Holy Orthodoxy.

Leaving Western things behind

If you believe in a literal six day creation, it is not my specific wish to convince you to drop that belief. But I would have you drop fundamentalist Protestant "creation science" and its efforts to prove a young earth scientifically and show that it can interpret scientific findings better than the mainstream scientific community. Better to close your mouth than speak out of a Protestant praxis. And I would have you leave Western preoccupations behind. Perhaps you might believe St. Basil was right about six literal days. For that matter, you could believe he was right about rejecting atoms and molecules in favor of earth, air, fire, and water—or at least recognize that St. Basil makes *other* claims *besides* six literal days. But you might realize that really there are much more important things in the faith. Like how faith plays out in practice.

The fundamentalist idea of conversion is like flipping a light switch: one moment, a room is dark, then in an instant it is full of light. The Orthodox understanding is of *transformation*: discovering Orthodoxy is the work of a lifetime, and perhaps once a year there is a "falling off a cliff" experience where you realize you've missed something big about Orthodoxy, and you need to grow in that newly discovered dimension. Orthodoxy is not just the ideas and enthusiasm we have when we first come into the Church; there are big things we could never dream of and big things we could never consider we needed to repent of. And I would rather pointedly suggest that if a new convert's understanding of Orthodoxy is imperfect, much less of Orthodoxy can be understood from reading Protestant attacks on it. One of the basic lessons in Orthodoxy is that you understand Orthodoxy by walking the Orthodox Way, by attending the services and living a transformed life, and not by reading books. And if this goes for books written by Orthodox saints, it goes all the more for Protestant fundamentalist books attacking Orthodoxy.

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism could come to exist: but here I would recall *The Abolition of Man*: "It is Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." Someone who has taken years of effort may rightly criticize evolution for its scientific merits. Someone who has just read fundamentalist Protestant attacks on evolution and tries to evangelize evolutionists and correct their scientific errors *will be just as annoying to an atheist who believes in evolution*, as a fundamentalist who comes to evangelize the unsaved Orthodox and "knows all about Orthodoxy" from polemical works written by other fundamentalists. I would rather pointedly suggest that if you care about secular evolutionists at all, pray for them, but don't set out to untangle their backwards understanding of the science of it all. If you introduce yourself as someone who will straighten out their backwards ideas about science, all you may really end up accomplishing is to push them away.

Conversion is a slow process. And letting go of Protestant approaches to creation may be one of those moments of "falling off a cliff."

What Makes Me Uneasy About Fr. Seraphim (Rose) and His Followers

Uncomfortable and uneasy—the root cause?

There are things that make me uneasy about many of Fr. Seraphim (Rose)'s followers. I say *many* and not *all* because I have friends, and know a lovely parish, that is Orthodox today through Fr. Seraphim. One friend, who was going through seminary, talked about how annoyed he was, and appropriately enough, that Fr. Seraphim was always referred to as "that guy who taught the tollhouses." (*Tollhouses* are the subject of a controversial teaching about demonic gateways one must pass to enter Heaven.) Some have suggested that he may not become a canonized saint because of his teachings there, but that is not the end of the world and apparently tollhouses were a fairly common

feature of nineteenth century Russian piety. I personally do not believe in tollhouses, although it would not surprise me that much if I die and find myself suddenly and clearly convinced of their existence: I am mentioning my beliefs, as a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, and it is not my point to convince others that they must not believe in tollhouses.

It is with sympathy that I remember my friend talk about how his fellow seminarians took a jackhammer to him for his admiration of "that guy who taught the tollhouses." He has a good heart. Furthermore, his parish, which came into Holy Orthodoxy because of Fr. Seraphim, is much more than alive. When I visited there, God visited me more powerfully than any parish I have only visited, and I would be delighted to see their leadership any time. Practically nothing in that parish's indebtedness to Fr. Seraphim bothers me. Nor would I raise objections to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia's newsletter affectionately calling Fr. Seraphim "our editor." Nor am I bothered that a title of his has been floating around the nave at my present parish.

But with all that said, there is something that disturbs me about most devotees of Fr. Seraphim, or at very least most of his vocal devotees. The best way I can put it has to do with *subjectivism*, which says in essence, "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project." There is something that demands that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint regardless of whether he really should be, almost like "My country, right or wrong!" This isn't the only thing that smells disturbing, but it is one. And these followers who insist that Fr. Seraphim be canonized as a saint seem to quickly gloss over how a close associate in his inner circle broke away from canonical status in the Orthodox Church to dodge Church discipline. Now I do not wish to exceed my authority and speak *ex cathedra* to decisively say which sins should be a bar from sainthood; it is God's job to make saints out of sinners, and any sin that Fr. Seraphim has committed, there are canonized saints

who did something ten times worse. However, this is an example of something that needs to be brought to light if we are to know if Fr. Seraphim should be considered a saint, and in every conversation I've seen, the (vocal) devotees of Fr. Seraphim push to sweep such things under the rug and get on with his canonization.

To pull something from putting subjectivism in a word: "I will accept what I will accept, and I will reject what I will reject, and I will project what I will project" usurps what God, O ΩN, supremely declares: "I AM WHO I AM." Subjectivism overreaches and falls short in the same gesture; if you grasp it by the heart, it is the passion of pride, but if you grasp it by the head, it is called subjectivism, but either way it has the same stench. And it concerns me gravely that whenever I meet these other kinds of followers, Fr. Seraphim's most vocal advocates, it smells the same, and it ain't no rose.

Protestant Fundamentalist Orthodoxy

A second concern is that, in many of Fr. Seraphim's followers, there is something Protestant to be found in the Church. Two concerns to be mentioned are "Creation Science"-style creationism, and the fundamentally Western project of worldview construction.

On the issue of "Creation Science"-style creationism, I would like to make a couple of comments. First, the Fathers usually believed that the days in Genesis 1 were literal days and not something more elastic. I believe I've read at least one exception, but St. Basil, for instance, insists both that one day was one day, and that we should believe that matter is composed of earth, air, fire, water, and ether. The choice of a young earth and not any other point of the Fathers is not the fruit of the Fathers at all; it is something Protestant brought into the Orthodox Church, and at

every point I've seen it, Orthodox who defend a young earth also use Protestant Creation Science, which is entirely without precedent in the Fathers. One priest said, "It was easier to get the children of Israel out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the children of Israel." There have been many Orthodox who believe entirely legitimately in a young earth, but every single time I have met young earth arguments from a follower of Fr. Seraphim, they have drawn on recycled Protestant arguments and fundamentalist Protestant Creation Science. And they have left me wishing that now that God has taken them out of Egypt they would let God take Protestant Egypt out of them.

I observed something quite similar to this in a discussion where I asked a partisan of Fr. Seraphim for an example of his good teaching. The answer I was given was a call for Orthodox to work on constructing a worldview, and this was presented to me as the work of a saint at the height of his powers. But there's a problem.

The project of worldview construction, and making standalone adjustments to the ideas in one's worldview, is of Western origin. There is no precedent for it in the Fathers, nor in medieval Western scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas, nor for that matter in the Reformers. The widespread idea that Christians should "think worldviewishly", and widespread understanding of Christianity as a worldview, is of more recent vintage than the Roman proclamations about the Immaculate Conception and the Infallibility of the Pope, and the Protestant cottage industry of worldview construction is less Orthodox than creating a systematic theology. *If* there is an Orthodox worldview, it does not come from tinkering with ideas in your head to construct a worldview; it arises from walking the Orthodox Way for a lifetime. Protestants who come into Orthodoxy initially want to learn a lot, but after time spend less time with books because Orthodoxy has taken deeper root in their hearts and reading about the truth begins to give way to living it out. Devotional

reading might never stop being a spiritual discipline, but it is no longer placed in the driver's seat, nor should it be.

This tree: What to make of its fruit?

This is strong language, but in the *Sermon on the Mount*, Christ says:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

Not every one who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers."

Fr. Seraphim has borne fruit in his lifetime and after his death. In his lifetime, there was the one fruit I mentioned, a close tie to someone who broke communion with the Orthodox Church shortly after his death. After his death, he has brought Protestants into the Orthodox Church. But in the living form of his disciples, those who have been taken out of Egypt seem not to

have Egypt taken out of them; they have asked me to pay homage to Protestant calves they've brought with them.

Let me try to both introduce something new, and tie threads together here. Subjectivism can at its heart be described as breaking communion with reality. This is like breaking communion with the Orthodox Church, but in a way it is more deeply warped. It is breaking communion not only with God, but with the very cars, rocks and trees. I know this passion and it is the passion that has let me live in first world luxury and wish I lived in a castle. It tries to escape the gift God has given. And that passion in another form can say, "If God offers me Heaven, and Heaven requires me to open up and stop grasping Fr. Seraphim right or wrong, I will escape to a Hell that makes no such demand for me to open up to God or His reality." And it is a red flag of this passion that breaks communion with reality, that the people most devoted to Fr. Seraphim hold on to pieces of fundamentalism with a tightly closed fist. And these Protestant insistences are a red flag, like a plume of smoke: if one sees a plume of smoke coming from a house, a neighbor's uncomfortable concern is not that a plume of smoke is intolerable, but that where there's smoke, there's fire and something destructive may be going on in the neighbor's house. And when I see subjectivism sweep things under the rug to insist on Fr. Seraphim's canonization, and fail to open a fist closed on Protestant approaches to Holy Orthodoxy, I am concerned not only that Fr. Seraphim's colleague may have broken communion with the Orthodox Church to avoid Church discipline, but that Fr. Seraphim's devotees keep on breaking communion with reality when there is no question of discipline. The plume of smoke is not intolerable in itself, but it may betray fire.

I may be making myself unpopular here, but I'm bothered by Fr. Seraphim's fruit. I know that there have been debates down the centuries between pious followers of different saints—but I have never seen this kind of phenomenon with any other well-known figure in today's Orthodoxy.

So far as I have tasted it, Fr. Seraphim's fruit tastes bad.

**Note to Orthodox
Evolutionists:
Stop Trying to
Retroactively Shanghai
Recruit the Fathers to
Your Camp!**

**Two examples of a telling
symptom: Fishy, suspicious
arguments**

Alexander Kalamiros is perhaps a forerunner to Orthodox finding a profound harmony between the Church Fathers and evolution. To pick one of many examples, Kalamiros's *On the Six Days of Creation* cites St. Basil the Great as saying, "Therefore, if you say a day or an age, you express the same meaning" (homily 2 of St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation*). So Dr. Kalamiros cites St. Basil as clearly saying that "day" is a term with a rather elastic meaning, implying an indefinite length.

Something really piqued my curiosity, because a young earth Creationist cited the same saint, the same book, and even the

same homily as Kalamiros, but as supporting the opposite conclusion: "one day" means "one day," period.

I honestly wondered, "Why on earth?" Why would the same text be cited as a proof-text for "days" of quite open-ended length, but also a proof text for precise twenty-four hour days? So I read the homily of St. Basil that was in question. The result?

The young earther's claim is easier to explain: St. Basil does, in fact, quite plainly claim a young earth, and treats this belief as non-negotiable. And what Kalamiros cites? The text is talking about something else when St. Basil moves from discussing the Creation to matters of eternity and the Last Judgment. One of the names for eternity is "the eighth day," and in explaining the timelessness of eternity, St. Basil writes, "Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea." Which is not exactly how Kalamiros quotes him, not *exactly*.

Kalamiros offers a quote out of context, and translates in a subtle but misleading wording, leading the reader to believe St. Basil clarified that a "day" [of Creation] can just as well be an "age" [of time]. This is sophistry. This is disingenuous. What is more, I cannot ever remember following one of Kalamiros's footnotes supporting evolution and find an appropriate and responsible use of the original text. When I check things out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone argues like that, the reader is being treated dishonestly, and deceptive argument is rarely the herald of truth.

Let me quote another of many examples celebrating a harmony between patristic Orthodoxy and evolution, Vladimir de Beer's *Genesis, Creation and Evolution*. He writes:

The account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is known as the *Hexaemeron* (Greek for 'six days'), on which a number of Greek and Latin Church fathers wrote commentaries. Some of them interpreted the six days of creation quite literally, like St Basil the Great who was much influenced by Aristotle's natural philosophy. Yet the

same Cappadocian father insisted that the scriptural account of creation is not about science, and that there is no need to discuss the essence (ousias) of creation in its scientific sense.[1] Others followed a more allegorical approach, such as St Gregory of Nyssa who saw the *Hexaemeron* as a philosophy of the soul, with the perfected creature as the final goal of evolution.

It has been my experience that for a certain kind of author one of the cheapest ways to dismiss a Father is to say that they were heavily influenced by some kind of non-Orthodox philosophy. Usually they don't even give a footnote. *St. Basil the Great is a Church Father and one of the Three Heirarchs*, and if you are going to downplay whether his position is one we should believe, you should be doing a lot more than due diligence than making a dismissive bare assertion that he was heavily influenced by non-Orthodox forces.

But at least de Beer is kind enough to allow St. Basil to believe in six literal days. I am rather mystified by his treatment of St. Gregory of Nyssa, whose commentary *On the Six Days of Creation* is available on the web. Are we referring to the same work?

St. Gregory's commentary is not an allegorical interpretation, such as St. Maximus the Confessor's way of finding allegory about ascesis and ascetical struggles in the details of the Gospel. It is if anything 90% a science lesson, or an Aristotelian science lesson at any rate, and at face value St. Gregory owes much more of a debt to Aristotle than St. Basil does. (At *least* St. Gregory spends vastly more time talking about earth, air, fire, and water.) St. Gregory's *On the Six Days of Creation* assumes and asserts that the days of Creation were, in fact, literal days. And that's not the end. St. Gregory of Nyssa explicitly ascribes the highest authority and weight to St. Basil's work and would almost certainly be astonished to find his work treated as a *corrective* to St. Basil's problematically literal *On the Six Days of Creation*; St. Gregory's

attitude appears to be, "St. Basil made an excellent foundation and I want to build on it!" On all counts I can tell, St. Gregory does *not* provide a precedent for treating young earth creation as negotiable. De Beers may well have a friend among the Fathers, but St. Gregory is not that friend. And if this is his choice of friends, maybe he isn't aware of many real, honest friends among the Fathers. St. Augustine may be his friend here, but if the Blessed Augustine is your only friend among the Fathers, you're on pretty shaky ground.

Examples could easily be multiplied, but after a point it becomes somewhat tedious checking out more harmonizers' footnotes and finding that, no indeed, they don't check out.

Why it matters

Have you read much *creation science seeking to use science to prove a young earth*? The reason I'm asking is that *that's what scholars do when they use patristic resources to prove that Orthodoxy and evolution are in harmony*. The kind of distortion of facts that they wouldn't be caught dead in origins science is the kind of distortion of facts that is routine in those harmonizing Orthodoxy with evolution.

I wrote a thesis calling to task a Biblical Egalitarian treatment of the Haustafel in Ephesians, and it is part of my research and experience to believe that sophistry matters, *because sophistry is how people seek to persuade when truth is against them*. And when I see misrepresentation of sources, that betrays a problem.

I myself do not believe in a young earth; I am an old earth creationist and have seriously entertained returning to belief in theistic evolution. I stand pretty much as far outside the patristic consensus as Orthodox evolutionists. But I don't distort the Fathers to ~~shanghai~~ recruit them to my position.

It may well be that with knowledge that wasn't available to St. Gregory and his fellow Fathers, the intellectual dishonesty and distortion needed to believe in a young earth may be greater than saying, "I know the Fathers' consensus and I remain outside of it." That's not ideal, but it is infinitely better than distorting the Fathers' consensus to agree with you.

It is better by far to acknowledge that you are outside the Fathers' consensus than make them agree with you. *If you are an Orthodox evolutionist, please stop shanghaiing recruiting ancient Fathers to your camp.*

A helpful analogy: What are the elements?

Some Protestants made young-earth creationism almost "the article by which the Church stands or falls," and much of young-earth and old-earth creationism in Orthodoxy, *and evolution*, is shaped by that Protestant "article by which the Church stands or falls."

Today's young-earth creationism and theistic evolution are merely positions on a ballot in single-issue voting, and single-issue voting that was unknown to the Fathers. *There are other issues.*

(What other issues are there, you ask?)

Let me give my standard question in dealing with young-earth Orthodox who are being pests and perhaps insinuating that my Orthodoxy is impaired if I don't believe their position: "Are we obligated to believe that the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and maybe aether?"

If that question seems to come from out of the blue, let me explain:

St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation* takes a position we can relate to readily enough even if we disagree:

"And the evening and the morning were the first day." Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the approach of night to day... Why does Scripture say "one day the first day"? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day—we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there.

That's on our radar. What's not on our radar is how bluntly St. Basil treats his day's closest equivalent to modern chemistry, and please note that alchemy has nothing to do with this; he does not condemn alchemy as being occult, but *chemistry* as atheistic:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

The emphatic alternative he offers is a belief in the four or five elements, earth, air, fire, water, and possibly the aether. This is something he finds in Genesis:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil takes the text to mean more than just that water exists; he takes it to mean that water is an element. Nor is St. Basil the only one to make such claims; as mentioned earlier, St. Gregory's *On the Six Days of Creation* is not in the business of condemning opposing views, but it not only assumes literal days for Creation, but the "science" of earth, air, fire, and water is writ large, and someone wishing to understand how ancients could see science and cosmology on those terms has an invaluable resource in St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation*. Furthermore, the view of the four elements is ensconced in Orthodox liturgy: the Vespers for Theophany, which is arguably the central text for Orthodox understanding of Creation, enumerates earth, air, fire, and water as the four elements. To my knowledge, no Orthodox liturgy ensconces the implicit atheism of modern chemistry.

What are we to make of this? Does this mean that modern chemistry is off-limits to Orthodox, and that Orthodox doctors should only prescribe such drugs as the ancient theory would justify? God forbid! I bring this point up to say that the obvious answer is, "Ok, there is a patristic consensus and I stand outside of it," and that this answer can be given without ~~shanghaiing~~ recruiting the Fathers to endorse modern chemistry. When

science and astronomy were formed, someone was reported to say, "The Bible is a book about how to go to Heaven, not a book about how the Heavens go," and while it may be appropriate to say "On pain of worse intellectual dishonesty, I must accept an old earth and chemistry as worth my provisional assent," it is not appropriate to distort the Church Fathers into giving a rubber stamp to beliefs they would reject.

Drawing a line in the sand at a young earth is a Protestant invention that has nothing to do with Orthodoxy, but casting the opposite vote of theistic evolution in a single-issue vote is *also* short of the Orthodox tradition. In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls." Single-issue voting here, *even for evolution*, is not an Orthodox phenomenon except as it has washed in from Protestant battle lines. If an Orthodox who questions the Orthodoxy of old-earthers is being (crypto-)Protestant, the Orthodox who cites the Fathers in favor of evolution is only slightly less so—and both distort the truth.

The young-earth Creation Science makes scientific evidence bow before its will. The Orthodox evolutionist makes the Church Fathers bow before his will. Which is the more serious offense? "Religion and Science" is not just Intelligent Design vs. evolution.

"When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."

One Protestant friend said that I had a real knack for insulting analogies. The comment came after I said of

mainstream Evangelical "Christian art" that it worked on the same communication principle as hard porn: "Make every point with a sledgehammer and leave nothing to the imagination but the plot." And I have used that ability here: I have said that Orthodox evolutionists writing of harmony between evolution and the Church Fathers are treating patristic texts the same way creation scientists treat scientific evidence. *Ouch*. The Orthodox-evolutionary harmonizers are playing the same single-issue politics game as their young-earth counterparts, and are only different by casting the opposite vote. *Ouch*.

Is there a method to this madness?

I cannot forbid origins questions altogether, for reasons not least of which I am not tonsured even as a reader, let alone being your heirarch or priest. At least some heirarchs have refused to decide for their flock what they may believe: perhaps people are expected to find God's hand at work in creation, but the exact mechanism of involvement, and time frame, are not decided. But I could wish something like the theology surrounding the holy mysteries, where in contrast to the detailed, point by point Roman account, the Orthodox Church simply says that at one point in the Divine Liturgy the gifts are only (blessed) bread and wine, and at a certain later point they have become the body and blood of Christ, and beyond that point speculation is not allowed.

There are some questions where having the right answer is less valuable than not asking the question at all. Origins questions in the scientific sense do not loom large in the Fathers, and what little there is appears not to match scientific data. But this is not a defect in the Fathers. It is, if anything, a cue that our society's preoccupation with science is not particularly Orthodox in spirit, and perhaps something that doesn't belong in Orthodoxy. Again, "Religion and Science" is not just Intelligent Design vs. evolution.

But for the interim, for people who need an answer and are good enough scientists to see through Creation Science, please do not ~~shanghai~~ recruit the Church Fathers to rubber stamp the

present state of scientific speculation. For starters, science is less important than you may think. *But that's just for starters.*

Lesser Icons: Reflections on Faith, Icons, and Art

C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* opens with a chapter called "The Picture in the Bedroom," which begins, "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it." Not long into the chapter, we read:

They were in Lucy's room, sitting on the edge of her bed and looking at a picture on the opposite wall. It was the only picture in the house that they liked. Aunt Alberta didn't like it at all (that was why it was put away in a little back room upstairs), but she couldn't get rid of it because it had been a wedding present from someone she did not want to offend.

It was a picture of a ship—a ship sailing straight towards you. Her prow was gilded and shaped like the head of a dragon with a wide-open mouth. She had only one mast and one large, square sail which was a rich purple. The

sides of the ship—what you could see of them where the gilded wings of the dragon ended—were green. She had just run up to the top of one glorious blue wave, and the nearer slope of that wave came down towards you, with streaks and bubbles on it. She was obviously running fast before a gay wind, listing over a little on her port side. (By the way, if you are going to read this story at all, and if you don't know already, you had better get it into your head that the left of a ship when you are looking ahead is *port*, and the right is *starboard*.) All of the sunlight fell on her from that side, and the water on that side was full of greens and purples. On the other, it was darker blue from the shadow of the ship.

"The question is," said Edmund, "whether it doesn't make things worse, *looking* at a Narnian ship when you can't get there."

"Even looking is better than nothing," said Lucy. "And she is such a very Narnian ship."

"Still playing your old game?" said Eustace Clarence, who had been listening outside the door and now came grinning into the room. Last year, when he had been staying with the Pevensies, he had managed to hear them all talking of Narnia and he loved teasing them about it. He thought of course that they were making it all up; and as he was far too stupid to make anything up himself, he did not approve of that.

"You're not wanted here," said Edmund curtly.

"I'm trying to think of a limerick," said Eustace.

"Something like this:

Some kids who played games about Narnia
Got gradually balmier and balmier—"

"Well, *Narnia* and *balmier* don't rhyme, to begin with," said Lucy.

"It's an assonance," said Eustace.

"Don't ask him what an assy-thingummy is," said Edmund. "He's only longing to be asked. Say nothing and perhaps he'll go away."

Most boys, on meeting a reception like this, would have either cleared out or flared up. Eustace did neither. He just hung about grinning, and presently began talking again.

"Do you like that picture?" he asked.

"For Heaven's sake don't let him get started about Art and all that," said Edmund hurriedly, but Lucy, who was very truthful, had already said, "Yes, I do. I like it very much."

"It's a rotten picture," said Eustace.

"You won't see it if you step outside," said Edmund.

"Why do you like it?" said Eustace to Lucy.

"Well, for one thing," said Lucy, "I like it because the ship looks as if it were really moving. And the water looks as if it were really wet. And the waves look as if they were really going up and down."

Of course Eustace knew lots of answers to this, but he didn't say anything. The reason was that at that very moment he looked at the waves and saw that they did look very much indeed as if they were going up and down. He had only once been in a ship (and then only so far as the Isle of Wight) and had been horribly seasick. The look of the waves in the picture made him feel sick again. He turned rather green and tried another look. And then all three children were staring with open mouths.

What they were seeing may be hard to believe when you read it in print, but it was almost as hard to believe when you saw it happening. The things in the picture were moving. It didn't look at all like a cinema either; the colours were too real and clean and out-of-doors for that. Down went the prow of the ship into the wave and up went a great shock of spray. And then up went the wave behind her, and

her stern and her deck became visible for the first time, and then disappeared as the next wave came to meet her and her bows went up again. At the same moment an exercise book which had been lying beside Edmund on the bed flapped, rose and sailed through the air to the wall behind him, and Lucy felt all her hair whipping round her face as it does on a windy day. And this was a windy day; but the wind was blowing out of the picture towards them. And suddenly with the wind came the noises—the swishing of waves and the slap of water against the ship's sides and the creaking and the overall high steady roar of air and water. But it was the smell, the wild, briny smell, which really convinced Lucy that she was not dreaming.

"Stop it," came Eustace's voice, squeaky with fright and bad temper. "It's some silly trick you two are playing. Stop it. I'll tell Alberta—Ow!"

The other two were much more accustomed to adventures but, just exactly as Eustace Clarence said, "Ow," they both said, "Ow" too. The reason was that a great cold, salt splash had broken right out of the frame and they were breathless from the smack of it, besides being wet through.

"I'll smash the rotten thing," cried Eustace; and then several things happened at the same time. Eustace rushed towards the picture. Edmund, who knew something about magic, sprang after him, warning him to look out and not be a fool. Lucy grabbed at him from the other side and was dragged forward. And by this time either they had grown much smaller or the picture had grown bigger. Eustace jumped to try to pull it off the wall and found himself standing on the frame; in front of him was not glass but real sea, and wind and waves rushing up to the frame as they might to a rock. There was a second of struggling and shouting, and just as they thought they had got their balance a great blue roller surged up round them, swept them off their feet, and drew them down into the sea.

Eustace's despairing cry suddenly ended as the water got into his mouth.

I don't know that C.S. Lewis was thinking about icons or Orthodoxy when he wrote this, and I am reluctant to assume that C.S. Lewis was doing what would be convenient for the claims I want to make at icons. Perhaps there are other caveats that should also be made: but the caveats are not the whole truth.

I am not aware of a better image of what an icon is and what an icon does than this passage in Lewis. Michel Quenot's *The Icon: A Window on the Kingdom* is excellent and there are probably more out there, but I haven't come across as much of an evocative image as the opening to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.

I don't mean that the first time you see an icon, you will be swept off your feet. There was a long time where I found them to be clumsy art that was awkward to look at. I needed to warm to them, and appreciate something that works very differently from Western art. I know that other people have had these immediate piercing experiences with icons, but appreciating icons has been a process of coming alive for me. But much the same could be said of my learning French or Greek, where I had to struggle at first and then slowly began to appreciate what is there. This isn't something Orthodoxy has a complete monopoly on; some of the time Roman Catholic piety can have something much in the same vein. But even if it's hard to say that there's something in icons that is nowhere else, there is something in icons that I had to learn to appreciate.

A cradle Orthodox believer at my parish explained that when she looks at an icon of the Transfiguration, she is there. The Orthodox understanding of presence and memory is not Western and not just concerned with neurons firing in the brain; it means that icons are portals that bring the spiritual presence of the saint or archetypal event that they portray. An icon can be alive, some more than others, and some people can sense this spiritually.

Icons are called windows of Heaven. Fundamental to icon and to symbol is that when the Orthodox Church proclaims that we are the image of God, it doesn't mean that we are a sort of detached miniature copy of God. It doesn't mean that we are a detached *anything*. It is a claim that to be human is to be in relation to God. It is a claim that we manifest God's presence and that the breath we breathe is the breath of God. What this means for icons is that when the cradle Orthodox woman I just mentioned says that she is there at the Transfiguration, then that icon is like the picture of the Narnian ship. If we ask her, "Where are you?" then saying "Staring at painted wood" is like saying that someone is "talking to an electronic device" when that person is using a cell phone to talk with a friend. In fact the error is deeper.

An icon of a saint is not intended to inform the viewer what a saint looked like. Its purpose is to connect the viewer with Christ, or Mary the Theotokos, or one of the saints or a moment we commemorate, like the Annunciation when Gabriel told humble Mary that she would bear God, or the Transfiguration, when for a moment Heaven shone through and Christ shone as Christians will shine and as saints sometimes shine even in this life. I don't know all of the details of how the art is put together—although it is art—but the perspective lines vanish not in the depths of the picture but behind the viewer because the viewer is part of the picture. The viewer is invited to cross himself, bow before, and kiss the icon in veneration: the rule is not "Look, but don't touch." any more than the rule in our father's house is "Look, but don't touch." The gold background is there because it is the metal of light; these windows of Heaven are not simply for people to look into them and see the saint radiant with Heaven's light, but Heaven looks in and sees us. When I approach icons I have less the sense that I am looking at these saints, and Heaven, than that they are looking at me. The icon's purpose is not, as C.S. Lewis's picture, to connect people with Narnia, but to draw people into Heaven, which in the Orthodox understanding must begin in this

life. It is less theatrical, but in the end the icon offers something that the Narnian picture does not.

It is with this theological mindset that Bishop KALLISTOS Ware is fond, in his lectures, of holding up a photograph of something *obviously* secular—such as a traffic intersection—and saying, "In Greece, this is an icon. It's not a holy icon, but it's an icon."

That, I believe, provides as good a departure as any for an Orthodox view of art. I would never say that icons are inferior art, and I would be extremely hesitant to say that art is equal to icons. But they're connected. Perhaps artwork is lesser icons. Perhaps it is indistinct icons. But art is connected to iconography, and even if that link is severed so that art becomes non-iconic, it dies.

Another illustration may shed light on the relation between iconography and other art. The Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ to Orthodox. It is not simply a sacrament, but the sacrament of sacraments, and the sacrament which all other sacraments are related. And there are ways the Orthodox Church requires that this Holy Communion be respected: it is to be prepared for with prayer and fasting, and under normal circumstances it is only received by people who are of one mind as the early Church. It encompasses, inseparably, mystic communion with God and communion with the full brothers and sisters of the Orthodox Church.

How does an ordinary meal around a table with family compare? In one sense, it doesn't. But to say that and stop is to miss something fundamental. Eating a meal around a table with friends and family is communion. It is not Holy Communion, but it is communion.

A shared meal is a rite that is part of the human heritage. It persists across times, cultures, and religions. This is recognized more clearly in some cultures than others, but i.e. Orthodox Jewish culture says that to break bread is only something you do when you are willing to become real friends. The term "breaking of bread" in the New Testament carries a double meaning; it can

mean either the Eucharist or a common meal. A common meal may not have Orthodox making the same astounding claims we make about the Eucharist, but it is a real communion. This may be why a theologian made repeatedly singled out the common meal in the Saint Vladimir's Seminary Education Day publication to answer questions of what we should do today when technology is changing our lives, sometimes for the better but quite often not. I myself have not made that effort much, and I can say that there is a difference between merely eating and filling my animal needs, and engaging in the precious ritual, the real communion, of a common meal around a table.

If we compare a common meal with the Eucharist, it seems very small. But if we look at a common meal and the community and communion around that meal (*common, community,* and *communion* all being words that are related to each other and stem from the same root), next to merely eating to serve our animal needs, then all of the sudden we see things that can be missed if we only look at what separates the Eucharist from lesser communions. A common meal is communion. It is not Holy Communion, but it *is* communion.

In the same sense, art is not the equal of sacred iconography. My best art, even my best religious art, does not merit the treatment of holy icons. But neither is art, or at least good art, a separate sort of thing from iconography, and if that divorce is ever effected (it has been, but I'll wait on that for how), then it generates from being art as a meal that merely fills animal, bodily needs without being communion degenerates from what a common meal should be. And in that sense I would assert that art is lesser iconography. And the word "lesser" should be given less weight than "iconography." I may not create holy icons, but I work to create icons in all of my art, from writing to painting to other creations.

In my American culture—this may be different in other areas of the world, even if American culture has a strong influence—there are two great obstacles to connecting with art. These

obstacles to understanding need to be denounced. These two obstacles can be concisely described as:

- The typical secular approach to art.
- The typical Christian approach to art.

If I'm going to denounce those two, it's not clear how much wiggle room I am left over to affirm—and my goal is not merely to affirm but embrace an understanding of art. Let me begin to explain myself.

Let's start with a red flag that provides just a glimpse of the mainstream Christian view of art. In college, when I thought it was cool to be a cynic and use my mind to uncover a host of hidden evils, I defined "Christian Contemporary Music" in *Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary* to be "A genre of song designed primarily to impart sound teaching, such as the doctrine that we are sanctified by faith and not by good taste in music."

May God be praised, that was not the whole truth in Christian art then, and it is even further from being the whole truth today—I heartily applaud the "Wow!" music videos, and there is a rich stream of exceptions. But this doesn't change the fact that the #1 selling Christian series today is the *Left Behind* series, which with apologies to Dorothy Parker, does not have a *single* book that is to be set aside lightly. (They are all to be hurled with great force!)

If I want to explain what I would object to instead of simply making incendiary remarks about Christian arts, let me give a concrete example. I would like to discuss something that I discussed with a filmmaker at a Mennonite convention a couple of years I converted to Orthodoxy. I did not set out to criticize, and I kept my mouth shut about certain things.

What I did do was to outline a film idea for a film that would start out indistinguishably from an action-adventure movie. It would have one of the hero's friends held captive by some

cardboard-cutout villains. There is a big operation to sneak in and deftly rescue him, and when that fails, all Hell breaks loose and there is a terrific action-adventure style firefight. There is a dramatic buildup to the hero getting in the helicopter, and as they are leaving, one of the villain's henchmen comes running with a shotgun. Before he can aim, the hero blasts away his knee with a hollow-nosed .45.

The camera surprisingly does not follow the helicopter in its rush to glory, but instead focuses on the henchman for five or ten excruciating minutes as he curses and writhes in agony. Then the film slows down to explore what that one single gunshot means to the henchman for the remaining forty years of his life, as he nursed a spiritual wound of lust for vengeance that was infinitely more tragic than his devastating physical wound.

The filmmaker liked the idea, or at least that's what he thought. He saw a different and better ending than what I envisioned. It would be the tale of the henchman's journey of forgiveness, building to a dramatic scene where he is capable of killing the hero and beautifully lets go of revenge. And as much as I believe in forgiveness and letting go of revenge, this "happy ending" (roughly speaking) bespoke an incommensurable gulf between us.

The difference amounts to a difference of love. Not that art has to cram in as much love, or message about love or forgiveness, as it can. If that happens, it is fundamentally a failure on the part of the artist, and more specifically it is a failure of a creator to have proper love for his creation. My story would not show much love in action, and it is specifically meant to leave audiences not only disturbed but shell shocked and (perhaps) sickened at how violence is typically shown by Hollywood. The heartblood of cinematic craft in this film would be an effort to take a character who in a normal action-adventure movie is faceless, and which the movie takes pains to prevent us from seeing or loving as human when he is torn up by the hero's cool weapon, and give him a human face so that the audience feels the

pain not only of his wounded body but the grievous spiritual wound that creates its deepest tragedy. That is to say that the heartblood of cinematic craft would be to look lovingly at a man, unloving as he may be, and give him a face instead of letting him be a faceless henchman whose only purpose is to provide conflict so we can enjoy him being slaughtered. And more to the point, it would not violate his freedom or his character by giving him a healing he would despise, and announce that after his knee has been blasted away he comes to the point of forgiving the man who killed his friends and crippled him for life.

Which is to say that I saw the film as art, and he saw it as a container he could cram more message into. That is why I was disturbed when he wanted to tack a happy ending on. There is a much bigger problem here than ending a story the wrong way.

I don't mean to say that art shouldn't say anything, or that it is a sin to have a moral. This film idea is not only a story that has a moral somewhere; its entire force is driven by the desire to give a face, a human face, to faceless villains whose suffering and destruction is something we rejoice in other words. In other words, it has a big moral, it doesn't mince words, and it makes absolutely no apologies for being driven by its moral.

Then what's the difference? It amounts to love. In the version of the story I created, the people, including the henchmen, are people. What the filmmaker saw was a question of whether there's a better way to use tools to drive home message. And he made the henchman be loving enough to forgive by failing to love him enough.

When I was talking with one professor at Wheaton about how I was extremely disappointed with a Franklin Peretti novel despite seeing how well the plot fit together, I said that I couldn't put my finger on what it was. He rather bluntly interrupted me and simply said that Peretti didn't love his characters. And he is right. In *This Present Darkness*, Franklin Peretti makes a carefully calculated use of tools at his disposal (such as characters) to provide maximum effect in driving home his point.

He does that better than art does. But he does not love his characters into being; he does not breathe into them and let them move. It's not a failure of technique; it's a failure of something much deeper. In this sense, the difference between good and bad art, between *A Wind in the Door* and *Left Behind*, is that in *A Wind in the Door* there are characters who not only have been loved into being but have a spark of life that has been not only created into them but loved into them, and in *Left Behind* there are tools which are used to drive home "message" but are not in the same sense *loved*.

There is an obvious objection which I would like to pause to consider: "Well, I understand that elevated, smart people like you can appreciate high art, and that's probably better. But can't we be practical and look at popular art that will reach ordinary people?" My response to that is, "Are you sure? Are you *really* sure of what you're assuming?"

Perhaps I am putting my point too strongly, but let me ask the last time you saw someone who wasn't Christian and not religious listening to Amy Grant-style music, or watching the *Left Behind* movie? (And isn't that what "relevant" stuff is supposed to do?) The impression I've gotten, the strong impression, is that the only people who find that art relevant to their lives are Evangelicals who are trying to be relevant. But isn't the world being anti-Christian? My answer to that is that people who watch *The Chronicles of Narnia* and people who watch *Star Wars* movies are largely watching them for the same reason: they are good art. The heavy Christian force behind *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which Disney to its credit did not edit out, has not driven away enough people to stop the film from being a major success. *The Chronicles of Narnia* is relevant, and it is relevant not because people calculated how to cram in the most message, but because not only C.S. Lewis but the people making the film loved their creation. Now, there are other factors; both *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Star Wars* have commercial tie-in's. And there is more commercial muscle behind those two than

the *Left Behind* movie. But to only observe these things is to miss the point. The stories I hear about the girl who played Lucy walking onto the set and being so excited she couldn't stop her hands from shaking, are not stories of an opportunistic actress who found a way to get the paycheck she wanted. They are stories of people who loved what they were working on. *That* is what makes art powerful, not a big budget.

There's something I'd like to say about love and work. There are some jobs—maybe all—that you really can't do unless you really love them. How? Speaking as a programmer, there's a *lot* of stress and aggravation in this job. Even if you have no difficulties with your boss, or co-workers, the computer has a sort of perverse parody of intelligence that means that you do your best to do something clearly, and the computer does the strangest things.

It might crash; it might eat your work; it might crash and eat your work; it might show something weird that plays a perverted game of hide and seek and always dodge your efforts to find out what exactly is going wrong so you can fix it. Novices' blood is boiling before they manage to figure out basic errors that won't even let you run your program at all. So programmers will be fond of definitions of "**Programming**, *n.* A hobby similar to banging your head against a wall, but with fewer opportunities for reward."

Let me ask: What is programming like if you do not love it? There are many people who love programming. They don't get there unless they go through the stress and aggravation. There's enough stress and aggravation that you can't be a good programmer, and maybe you can't be a programmer at all, unless you love it.

I've made remarks about programming; there are similar remarks to be made about carpentry, or being a mother (even if being a mother is a bigger kind of thing than programming or carpentry). This is something that is true of art—with its stress and aggravation—precisely because art is work, and work can

have stress and aggravation that become unbearable if there is no love. Or, in many cases, you can work, but your work suffers. Love may need to get dirty and do a lot of grimy work—you can't love something into being simply by feeling something, even if love can sometimes transfigure the grimy work—but there absolutely *must* be love behind the workgloves. It doesn't take psychic powers to tell if something was made with love.

I would agree with Franky Schaeffer's remark in *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*, when he pauses to address the question "How can I as a Christian support the arts?" the first thing he says is to avoid Christian art. I would temper that remark now, as some Christian art has gotten a lot better. But he encouraged people to patronize good art, and to the question, "How can I afford to buy original paintings?" he suggests that a painting costs much less than a TV. But Schaeffer should be set aside another work which influenced his father, and which suggests that if Christian art is problematic, that doesn't mean that secular art is doing everything well.

When I was preparing for a job interview with an auction house that deals with coins and stamps, I looked through the 2003(?) *Spink's Catalogue of British Coins*. (Mainly I studied the pictures of coins to see what I could learn.) When I did that, a disturbing story unfolded.

The Spink's catalogue takes coins from Celtic and Roman times through medieval times right up through the present day. While there are exceptions in other parts of the world, the ancient and early medieval coins all had simple figures that were not portraits, in much the way that a drawing in a comic strip like *Foxtrot* differs from Mark Trail or some other comic strip where the author is trying to emulate a photograph. Then, rather suddenly, something changes, and people start cramming in as much detail as they could. The detail reaches a peak in the so-called "gold penny", in which there is not a square millimeter of blank space, and then things settle down as people realize that it's not a sin to have blank space as well as a detailed portrait. (On

both contemporary British and U.S. coinage, the face of the coin has a bas-relief portrait of a person, and then there is a blank space, and a partial ring of text around the edge, with a couple more details such as the year of coinage. The portrait may be detailed, but the coinmakers are perfectly willing to leave blank space in without cramming in more detail than fits their design. In the other world coinage I've seen, there can be some differences in the portrait (it may be of an animal), but there is a similar use of portrait, text, and blank space.

This is what happened when people's understanding of symbol disintegrated. The effort to cram in detail which became an effort to be photorealistic is precisely an effort to cram some reality into coins when they lost their reality as symbols. There are things about coins then that even numismatists (people who study coins) do not often understand today. In the Bible, the backdrop to the question in Luke 20 that Jesus answered, "Show me a coin. Whose likeness is it, and whose inscription? ... Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God," is on the surface a question about taxes but is not a modern gripe about "*Must I pay my hard-earned money to the Infernal Revenue Service?*", It is not the question some Anabaptists ask today about whether it is OK for Christians' taxes to support things they believe are unconscionable, and lead one pastor to suggest that people earn less money so they will pay less taxes that will end up supporting violence. It's not a question about anything most Christians would recognize in money today.

It so happens that in traditional fashion quarters in the U.S. today have a picture of George Washington, which is to say not only a picture but an authority figure. There is no real cultural reason today why this tradition has to be maintained. If the government mint started turning out coins with a geometric design, a blank surface, or some motto or trivia snippet, there would be no real backlash and people would buy and sell with the new quarters as well as the traditional ones. The fact that the quarter, like all commonly circulated coins before the dollar coin,

has the image of not simply a-man-instead-of-a-woman but specifically the man who once held supreme political authority within the U.S., is a quaint tradition that has lost its meaning and is now little more than a habit. But it has been otherwise.

The Roman denarius was an idol in the eyes of many Jewish rabbis. It was stamped with the imprint of the Roman emperor, which is to say that it was stamped with the imprint of a pagan god and was therefore an idol. And good Jews shouldn't have had a denarius with them when they asked Jesus that trapped question. For them to have a denarius with them was worse on some accounts than if Jesus asked them, "Show me a slab of bacon," and they had one with them. The Jewish question of conscience is "Must one pay tax with an idol?" and the question had nothing to do with any economic hardship involved in paying that tax (even though most Jews then were quite poor).

Jesus appealed to another principle. The coin had Caesar's image and inscription: this was the one thing he asked them to tell him besides producing the coin. In the ancient world people took as axiomatic that the authority who produced coinage had the authority to tax that coinage, and Jesus used that as a lever: "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God's the thing that are God's."

This last bit of leverage was used to make a much deeper point. The implication is that if a coin has Caesar's image and we owe it to Caesar, what has God's image—you and I—are God's and are owed to God. This image means something deep. If it turns out that we owe a tax to Caesar, how much more do we owe our very selves to God?

Augustine uses the image of "God's coins" to describe us. He develops it further. In the ancient world, when coins were often made of precious and soft metals instead of the much harder coins today, coins could be "defaced" by much use: they would be rubbed down so far that the image on the coin would be worn away. Then defaced coins, which had lost their image, could be restruck. Augustine not only claims that we are owed to God; he

claims that the image in us can be defaced by sin, and then restructed with a new image by grace. This isn't his whole theology for sin and grace, but it says something significant about what coins meant not just to him but to his audience.

During the Iconoclastic Controversy, not only in the East but before the overcrowded "gold penny", one monk, who believed in showing reverence to icons, was brought before the emperor, who was trying to suppress reverence to icons. The emperor asked the monk, "Don't you know that you can walk on an icon of Christ without showing disrespect to him?" and the monk asked if he could walk on "your face", meaning "your face as present in this coin," without showing the emperor disrespect. He threw down a coin, and started to walk on it. The emperor's guards caught him in the act, and he was brutally assaulted.

These varying snapshots of coins before a certain period in the West are snapshots of coins that are icons. They aren't holy icons, but they are understood as icons before people's understanding of icons disintegrated.

When I explained this to one friend, he said that he had said almost exactly the same thing when observing the development or anti-development of Western art. The story I was told of Western art, at least until a couple of centuries ago, was a story of progress from cruder and more chaotic art. Medieval art was sloppy, and when perspective came along, it was improved and made clearer. But this has a very different light if you understood the older art's reality as symbol. In *A Glimpse in Eastern Orthodoxy*, I wrote:

Good Orthodox icons don't even pretend to be photorealistic, but this is not simply because Orthodox iconography has failed to learn from Western perspective. As it turns out, Orthodox icons use a reverse perspective that is designed to include the viewer in the picture. Someone who has become a part of the tradition is drawn into the picture, and in that sense an icon is like a door,

even if it's more common to call icons "windows of Heaven." But it's not helpful to simply say "Icons don't use Renaissance perspective, but reverse perspective that includes the viewer," because even if the reverse perspective is there, reverse perspective is simply not the point. There are some iconographers who are excellent artists, and artistry does matter, but the point of an icon is to have something more than artistry, as much as the point of visiting a friend is more than seeing the scenery along the way, even if the scenery is quite beautiful and adds to the pleasure of a visit. Cramming in photorealism is a way of making more involved excursions and dredging up more exotic or historic or whatever destinations that go well beyond a scenic route, after you have lost the ability to visit a friend. The Western claim is "Look at how much more extravagant and novel my trip are than driving along the same roads to see a friend!"—and the Orthodox response shows a different set of priorities: "Look how lonely you are now that you no longer visit friends!"

Photorealistic perspective is not new life but an extravagance once symbol has decayed. That may be one problem, or one thing that I think is a problem. But in the centuries after perspective, something else began to shift.

When Renaissance artists experimented with more photorealistic perspective, maybe they can be criticized, but they were experimenting to communicate better. Perspective was a tool to communicate better. Light and shadow were used to communicate better. It's a closer call with impressionism, but there is a strong argument that their departure from tradition and even photorealism was to better communicate how the outsides of things looked in different lighting conditions and at different times of day. But then something dreadful happened: not only artists but the community of people studying art learned a lesson from history. They learned that the greatest art, from the

Renaissance onwards, experimented with tradition and could decisively break from tradition. They did not learn that this was always to improve communication with the rest of us. And so what art tried to do was break from tradition, whether or not this meant communicating better to "the rest of us".

Some brave souls go to modern art museums, and look at paintings that look nothing like anything they can connect with, and walk away humbled, thinking that they're stupid, or not good enough to appreciate the "elevated" art that better people are able to connect with. There's something to be said for learning to appreciate art, but with most of these people the problem is *not* that they're not "elevated" enough. The problem is that the art is not trying to communicate with the world as a whole. Innovation is no longer to better communicate; innovation at times sneers at communication in a fashion people can recognize.

The Franky Schaeffer title I gave earlier was *Addicted to Mediocrity: 20th Century Christians and the Arts*; the title I did not give is *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, which has disturbing lettering and a picture of a man screaming on its cover art. If there is a deep problem with the typical Christian approach to arts (and it is *not* a universal rule), there is a deep problem with the typical secular Western approach to arts (even if that is *not* a universal rule either). A painting like "The Oaths of the Horatii" is no more intended to be a private remark among a few elite souls than *Calvin and Hobbes*; *Calvin and Hobbes* may attract the kind of people who like other good art, but this is never because, as Calvin tells Hobbes about his snowman art which he wants lowbrows to have to subsidize, "I'm trying to criticize the lowbrows who can't appreciate this."

The concept of an artist is also deeply problematic. When I was taking an art history class at Wheaton, the professor asked people a question about their idea of an artist, and my reaction was, "I don't have any preconceptions." Then he started talking, and I realized that I did have preconceptions about the matter.

If we look at the word "genius" across the centuries, it has changed. Originally your "genius" was your guardian angel, more or less; it wasn't connected with great art. Then it became a muse that inspired art and literature from the outside. Then "genius" referred to artistic and literary giftedness, and as the last step in the process of internalization, "genius" came to refer to the author or artist himself.

The concepts of the artist and the genius are not the same, but they have crossed paths, and their interaction is significant. Partly from other sources, some artists take flak today because they lead morally straight lives. Why is this? Well, given the kind of superior creature an artist is supposed to be, it's unworthy of an artist to act as if they were bound by the moral codes that the common herd can't get rid of. The figure of the artist is put up on a pedestal that reaches higher than human stature; like other figures, the artist is expected to have an enlightened vision about how to reform society, and be a vanguard who is above certain rules.

That understanding of artists has to come down in the Christian community. Artists have a valuable contribution; when St. Paul is discussing the Spirit's power in the Church, he writes (I Cor 12:7-30, RSV):

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one

body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the organs in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single organ, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those parts of the body which we think less honorable we invest with the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, then healers, helpers, administrators, speakers in various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

I would suggest that the secular idea of an artisan is closer to an Orthodox understanding of an artist than the secular idea of

artist itself. Even if an artisan is not thought of in terms of being a member of a body, the idea of an artisan is one that people can accept being one member of an organism in which all are needed.

An artisan can show loving craftsmanship, can show a personal touch, can have a creative spark, and should be seen as pursuing honorable work; however, the idea of an artisan carries less bad freight than the idea of an artist. They're also not too far apart: in the Middle Ages, the sculptors who worked on cathedrals were closer to what we would consider artisans who produced sculptures than being seen as today's artists. Art is or should be connected to iconography; it should also be connected to the artisan's craft, and people are more likely to give an artisan a place as a contributing member who is part of a community than artists.

If we look at technical documentation, then there are a number of believable compliments you could give if you bumped into the author. It would be believable to say that the documentation was a helpful reference met your need; that it was clear, concise, and well-written; or that it let you find exactly what you needed and get back to work. But it would sound odd to say that the technical writer had very distinctive insights, and even odder to say that you liked the author's personal self-expression about what the technology could do. Technical writing is not glorified self-expression, and if we venerate art that is glorified self-expression, then maybe we have something to learn from how we treat technical writing.

If this essay seems like a collection of distinctive (or less politely, idiosyncratic) personal insights I had, or my own personal self-expression in Orthodoxy, theology, and faith, then that is a red flag. It falls short of the mark of what art, or Orthodox writing, should be. (And it is intended as art: maybe it's minor art, but it's meant as art.) It's not just that most or all of the insights owe a debt to people who have gone before me, and I may have collated but contributed nothing to the best insights, serving much more to paraphrase than think things up from

scratch. Michel Quenot's *The Icon: A Window on the Kingdom*, and, for much longer, Madeleine l'Engle's *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* have both given me a grounding. But even aside from that, art has existed for long before me and will exist for long after me, and I am not the sole creator of an Orthodox or Christian approach to the arts any more than a technical writer has trailblazed a particular technique of creating such-and-such type of business report. Good art is freedom and does bear its human creator's fingerprints. Even iconography, with its traditional canons, gives substantial areas of freedom to the iconographer and never specify each detail. Part of being an iconographer is using that freedom well. However, if this essay is simply self-expression, that is a defect, not a merit. As an artist and writer, I am trying to offer more than glorified self-expression.

This Sunday after liturgy, people listened to a lecture taped from Bp. KALLISTOS Ware. He talked about the great encounter at the burning bush, when God revealed himself to Moses by giving his name. At the beginning of the encounter, Moses was told, "Take off your shoes, for the place you are standing is holy ground." Bp. KALLISTOS went on to talk about how in those days, as of the days of the Fathers, people's shoes were something dead, something made from leather. The Fathers talked about this passage as meaning by implication that we should take off our dead familiarity to be able to encounter God freshly.

I was surprised, because I had reinvented that removal of familiarity, and I had no idea it was a teaching of the Orthodox Church. Perhaps my approach to trying to see past the deadness of familiarity—which you can see in *Game Review: Meatspace*—was not exactly the same as what Bp. KALLISTOS was saying to begin a discussion about receiving Holy Communion properly. Yet I found out that something I could think of as my own private invention was in fact a rediscovery. I had reinvented one of the treasures of Orthodoxy. Part of Orthodoxy is surrender, and that acknowledgment that anything and everything we hold, no

matter how dear, must be offered to God's Lordship for him to do with as we please. Orthodoxy is inescapably a slow road of pain and loss. But there is another truth, that things we think are a private heresy (I am thinking of G.K. Chesterton's discussion) are in fact a reinvention, perhaps a crude reinvention, of an Orthodox treasure and perhaps an Orthodox treasure which meets its best footing, deepest meaning, and fullest expression when that jewel is set in its Orthodox bezel.

There are times when I've wanted to be an iconographer (in the usual sense). I don't know if that grace will ever be granted me, but there was one point when I had access to an icon painting class. When I came to it and realized what was going on, I shied away. Perhaps I wanted to learn to write icons (Orthodox speak of writing icons rather than painting them), but there was something I wasn't comfortable with.

Parishes have, or at least should have, a meal together after worship, even if people think of it as "coffee hour" instead of thinking of it as the communion of a common meal. The purpose is less to distribute coffee, which coffee drinkers have enough of in their homes, than to provide an opportunity (perhaps with a social lubricant) for people to meet and talk. That meeting and talking is beautiful. Furthermore, a parish may have various events when people paint, seasonally decorate, or maintain the premises, and in my experience there can be, and perhaps should be, an air of lighthearted social gathering about it all.

But this iconography class had lots of chatter, where people gathered and learned the skill of icon painting that began and ended with a prayer but in between had the atmosphere of a casual secular gathering that didn't involve any particularly spiritual endeavor or skill. Now setting my personal opinions aside, the classical canons require that icons be written in prayer, concentration, and quiet. There are reasons for this, and I reacted as I did, not so much because I had heard people were breaking such-and-such ancient rule, but more because I was affronted by something that broke the rule's spirit even more than its letter,

and I sensed that there was something askew. The reason is that icons are written in silence is that you cannot make a healthy, full, and spiritual icon simply by the motions of your body. An icon is first and foremost created through the iconographer's spirit to write what priests and canons have defined, and although the iconographer is the copyist or implementor and not original author, we believe that the icon is written by the soul of the iconographer—if you understand it as a particular (secular) painting technique, you don't understand it. That class, like that iconographer, have produced some of the dreariest and most opaque icons, or "windows of Heaven", that I have seen. I didn't join that class because however much I wanted to be an iconographer, I didn't want to become an iconographer like that, and in the Orthodox tradition you become an iconographer by becoming a specific iconographer's disciple and becoming steeped in that iconographer's spiritual characteristics.

Years ago, I stopped watching television, or at least started making a conscious effort to avoid it. I like and furthermore love music, but I don't put something on in the background. And, even though I love the world wide web, I observe careful limits, and not just because (as many warn) it is easy to get into porn. The web can be used to provide "noise" to keep us from coming face to face with the silence. The web can be used to anesthetize the boredom that comes when we face silence, and keep us from ever coming to the place on the other side of boredom. When I have made decisions about television, I wasn't thinking, on conscious terms, about being more moral and spiritual by so doing. I believe that television is a pack of cigarettes for the heart and mind, and I have found that I can be creative in more interesting ways, and live better, when I am cautious about the amount of noise in my life, even if you don't have to be the strictest "quiet person" in the world to reap benefits. Quiet is one spiritual discipline of the Orthodox Church (if perhaps a lesser spiritual discipline), and the spiritual atmosphere I pursued is a reinvention, perhaps lesser and incomplete, of something the

Orthodox Church wants her iconographers to profitably live. There is a deep enough connection between icons and other art that it's relevant to her artists.

When I write what I would never call (or wish to call) my best work, I have the freedom to be arbitrary. If I'm writing something of no value, I can impose my will however I want. I can decide what I want to include and what I want to exclude, what I am going to go into detail about what I don't want to elaborate on, and what analogies I want to draw. It can be as much dictated by "Me! Me! Me!" as I want. When I am creating something I value, however, that version of freedom hardly applies. I am not free, if I am going to create fiction that will resonate and ring true, to steamroll over my characters' wishes. If I do I diminish my creation. What I am doing is loving and serving my creations. I can't say that I never act on selfish reasons, but if I am doing anything of a good job my focus is on loving my creation into being and taking care of what it needs, which is simultaneously a process of wrestling with it, and listening to it with the goal of getting myself out of the way so I can shape it as it needs to be shaped.

There is a relationship that places the artist as head and lord of his creation, but if we reach for some of the most readily available ideas of headship and lordship, that claim makes an awful lot of confusion. Until I began preparing to write this essay, it didn't even occur to me to look at the human creator-creation connection in terms of headship or lordship. I saw a place where I let go of arbitrary authority and any insistence on my freedoms to love my creation, to listen to and then serve it, and care for all the little details involved in creating it (and, in my case, publishing it on the web). All of this describes the very heart of how Christians are to understand headship, and my attitude is hardly unique: Christian artists who do not think consciously about headship at all create out of the core of the headship relation. They give their works not just any kind of love, but the particular and specific love which a head has for a body. If art

ends by bearing the artist's fingerprints, this should not be because the artist has decided, "My art must tell of my glory," but because loved art, art that has been served and developed and educated and drawn into manifest being, cannot but be the image, and bear the imprint, of its creator. That is how art responds to its head and lord.

To return to spiritual discipline: Spiritual discipline is the safeguard and the shadow of love. This applies first and foremost to the Orthodox Way as a whole, but also specifically to art. Quiet is a lesser discipline, and may not make the front page. Fasting from certain foods can have value, but it is only good if saying no to yourself in food prepares you to love other people even when it means saying no to yourself. There are harsh warnings about people who fast and look down on others who are less careful about fasting or don't fast at all and judging them as "less spiritual". Perhaps fasting can have great value, but it is better not to fast than to fast and look down.

Prayer is the flagship, the core, and the crowning jewel of spiritual discipline. The deepest love for our neighbor made in God's image is to pray and act out of that prayer. Prayer may be enriched when it is connected with other spiritual disciplines, but the goal of spiritual discipline and the central discipline in creating art is prayer.

There is a passage in George MacDonald where a little girl stands before an old man and looks around an exquisite mansion in wonder. After a while the old man asks her, "Are you done saying your prayers?" The surprised child responds, "I wasn't saying my prayers." The old man said, "Yes you were. You just didn't realize it."

If I say that prayer drives art, I don't just mean that I say little prayers as I create art (although that should be true). I mean that when I am doing my best work, part of why it is my best work is that the process itself is an act of prayer. However many arbitrary freedoms I would not dare to exercise and deface my own creation, I am at my freest and most alive when I am

listening to God and a creation about how to love it into being. It is not the same contemplation as the Divine Liturgy, but it is connected, part of the same organism. The freedom I taste when I create, the freedom of service and the freedom of love, is freedom at so deep a level that a merely arbitrary freedom to manipulate or make dictatorial insistences on a creation pales in comparison to the freedom to listen and do a thousand services to art that is waiting for me to create it.

"He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen." (I Jn 4:20, RSV). If an artist does not love God and the neighbors whom he can see and who manifest the glory of the invisible God, he is in a terrible position to healthily love a creation which—at the moment, exists in God's mind and partially in its human creator, but nowhere else. This is another way of saying that character matters. I have mentioned some off-the-beaten-track glimpses of spiritual discipline; this leaves out more obvious and important aspects of love like honesty and chastity. The character of an artist who can love his works into being should be an overflow of a Christian life of love. Not to say that you must be an artist to love! Goodness is many-sided. This is true of what Paul wrote (quoted above) about the eye, hand, and foot all belonging to the body. Paul also wrote the scintillating words (I Cor 15:35-49, RSV):

But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and

another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.

These are words of resurrection, but the promise of the glorious and incorruptible resurrection body hinge on words where "star differs from star in glory". An artist's love is the glory of one star. It is no more the only star than the eye is the only part of the body. It is part of a scintillating spectrum—but not the whole spectrum itself!

I would like to also pause to respond to an objection which careful scholars would raise, and which some devout Orthodox would sense even if they might not put it in words. I have fairly uncritically used a typically Western conception of art. I have lumped together visual arts, literature, music, film, etc. and seem to assume that showing something in one case applied to every case. I would acknowledge that a more careful treatment would pay attention to their differences, and that some stick out more than others.

I am not sure that a better treatment would criticize this assumption. However, let's look at one distinctive of Orthodoxy. One thinks of why Western Christians talk about how the

superficial legend goes that the leaders of (what would become) Russia went religion-shopping, and they saw that the Orthodox worship looked impressive, and instead of deciding based on a good reason, they went with the worship they liked best. Eastern Christians tend to agree about the details of what people believe happened, but we do not believe the aesthetic judgments were something superficial that wasn't a good reason. We believe that something of Heaven shone through, and if that affected the decision, people weren't making a superficial decision but something connected with Truth and the Light of Heaven and of God. We believe that worship, and houses of worship, are to be beautiful and reflect not only the love but the Light and beauty of Heaven, and a beautiful house of worship is no more superfluous to light than good manners are superfluous to love. The "beauty connection" has not meant that we have to choose between good homilies, music, liturgy, and icons. A proper Orthodox listing of what constituted real, iconic art may differ from a Western listing, and there's more than being sticks in the mud behind the fact that Orthodox Churches, by and large, do not project lyrics with PowerPoint. Part of what I have said about icons is crystallized in a goal of "transparency", that the goal of a window of Heaven is to be transparent to Heaven's light and love. Not just icons can be, or fail to be, transparent. Liturgical music can be transparent or fail to be transparent. Homilies can be transparent or fail to be transparent.

I've heard just enough bad homilies, that is opaque homilies that left me thinking about the homilist instead of God—to appreciate how iconically translucent most of the homilies I've heard are, and to realize that this is a privilege and not a right that will automatically be satisfied. The opaque Orthodox homilies don't (usually) get details wrong; they get the details right but don't go any further. But this is not the whole truth about homilies. A homily that is written like an icon—not necessarily written out but drawn into being first and foremost by the spirit, out of love, prayer, and spiritual discipline, can be not

only transparent but luminous and let Heaven's light shine through.

Some wag said, "A sermon is something I wouldn't go across the street to hear, but something I'd go across the country to deliver." I do not mean by saying this to compete with, or replace, the view of homilies as guidance which God has provided for our good, but a successful homily does more than inform. It edifies, and the best homilies are luminously transparent. They don't leave the faithful thinking about the preacher—even about how good he is—but about the glory of God. When icons, liturgy, and homilies rise to transparency, they draw us beyond themselves to worship God.

My denser and more inaccessible musings might be worth reading, but they should never be read as a homily; the photographs in my slideshow of Cambridge might capture real beauty but should never be mounted on an icon stand for people to venerate; my best cooking experiments may be much more than edible but simply do not belong in the Eucharist—but my cooking can belong at coffee hour. The Divine Liturgy at its best builds up to Holy Communion and then flows into a common meal (in my culture, coffee hour) that may not be Holy Communion but is communion, and just as my more edible cooking may not be fit for the Eucharist but belongs in a common meal, I am delighted to tell people I have a literature and art website at CJSHayward.com which has both short and long fiction, musings and essays, poetry, visual art, and (perhaps I mention) computer software that's more artistic than practical. I have put a lot of love into my website, and it gives me great pleasure to share it. If its contents should not usurp the place of holy icons or the Divine Liturgy, I believe they do belong in the fellowship hall and sacred life beyond the sanctuary. Worshiping life is head and lord to the everyday life of the worshiping faithful, but that does not mean a denigration of the faithful living as lesser priests. The sacramental priesthood exists precisely as the crystallization and ornament of our priestly life in the world. As I

write, I am returning from the Eucharist and the ordination of more than one clergy. Orthodox clergy insist that unless people say "Amen!" to the consecration of the bread and wine which become the holy body and the holy blood of Christ, and unless they say, "Axios!" ("He is worthy!") to the ordination, then the consecration or the ordination doesn't happen. Unlike in Catholicism, a priest cannot celebrate the Divine Liturgy by himself in principle, because the Divine Liturgy is in principle the work of God accomplished through the cooperation of priest and faithful, and to say that a priest does this himself is as odd as saying that the priest has a hug or a conversation by himself. The priest is head and even lord of the parish, but under a richer, Christian understanding of headship and lordship, which means that as the artist in his care he must listen to the faithful God has entrusted to his inadequate care, listening to God about who God and not the priest wants them to become, and both serve them and love them into richer being. (And, just as it is wrong for an artist to domineer his creation, it is even more toxic for a priest to domineer, *ahem*, work to improve the faithful in his parish. The sharpest warning I've heard a bishop give to newly ordained clergy is about a priest who decided he was the best thing to happen to the parish in his care, and immediately set about improving all the faithful according to his enlightened vision. It was a much more bluntly delivered warning than I've said about doing that to art.) The priest is ordained as the crystallization and crown of the faithful's priestly call. The liturgy which priest (and faithful) is not to be cut off when the ceremony ends; it is to flow out and imprint its glory on the faithful's life and work. Not only the liturgical but the iconic is to flow out and set the pace for life.

Art is to be the broader expression of the iconic.

Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth

With what words
shall I hymn the Lord of Heaven and Earth,
the Creator of all things visible and invisible?
Shall I indeed meditate
on the beauty of his Creation?

As I pray to Thee, Lord,
what words shall I use,
and how shall I render Thee praise?

Shall I thank thee for the living tapestry,
oak and maple and ivy and grass,
that I see before me
as I go to return to Thee at Church?

Shall I thank Thee for Zappy,
and for her long life—
eighteen years old and still catching mice?

Shall I thank thee for her tiger stripes,
the color of pepper?
Shall I thank thee for her kindness,
and the warmth of her purr?

Shall I thank Thee for a starry sapphire orb
hung with a million million diamonds, where
"The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.
Day to day utters speech,
and night to night proclaims knowledge.
There are no speeches or words,
in which their voices are not heard.
Their voice is gone out into all the earth,
and their words to the end of the earth.
In the sun he has set his tabernacle;
and he comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber:
he will exult as a giant to run his course."?

Shall I thank Thee for the river of time,
now flowing quickly,
now flowing slowly,
now narrow,
now deep,
now flowing straight and clear,
now swirling in eddies that dance?

Shall I thank Thee for the hymns and songs,
the chant at Church, when we praise Thee in the head of
Creation, the vanguard of Creation that has come from Thee in
Thy splendor and to Thee returns in reverence?

Shall I thank thee for the Chalice:
an image,
an icon,

a shadow of,
a participation in,
a re-embodiment of,
the Holy Grail?

Shall I forget how the Holy Grail itself
is but the shadow,
the impact,
the golden surface reflecting the light,
secondary reflection to the primeval Light,
the wrapping paper that disintegrates next to the Gift it holds:
that which is
mystically and really
the body and the blood of Christ:
the family of saints
for me to be united to,
and the divine Life?

Shall I meditate
on how I am fed
by the divine generosity
and the divine gift
of the divine energies?

Shall I thank Thee for a stew I am making,
or for a body nourished by food?

Shall I indeed muse that there is
nothing else I could be nourished by,
for spaghetti and bread and beer
are from a whole cosmos
illuminated by the divine Light,
a candle next to the sun,
a beeswax candle,
where the sun's energy filters through plants

and the work of bees
and the work of men
to deliver light and energy from the sun,
and as candle to sun,
so too is the bread of earth
to the Bread that came from Heaven,
the work of plants and men,
the firstfruits of Earth
returned to Heaven,
that they may become
the firstfruits of Heaven
returned to earth?

Shall I muse on the royal "we,"
where the kings and queens
said not of themselves "I", but "we"
while Christians are called to say "we"
and learn that the "I" is to be transformed,
made luminous,
scintillating,
when we move beyond "Me, me, me,"
to learn to say, "we"?

And the royal priesthood is one in which we are called to be
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
made divine,
a family of little Christs,
sons to God and brothers to Christ,
the ornament of the visible Creation,
of rocks and trees and stars and seas,
and the spiritual Creation as well:
seraphim, cherubim, thrones

dominions, principalities, authorities,
powers, archangels, angels,
rank on rank of angels,
singing before the presence of God,
and without whom no one can plumb the depths
of the world that can be seen and touched.

For to which of the angels did God say,
"You make my Creation complete," or
"My whole Creation, visible and invisible,
is encapsulated in you,
summed up in your human race?"

To which of the angels
did the divine Word say,
"I am become what you are
that you may become what I am?"

To which of the angels did the Light say,
"Thou art my Son; today I have adopted Thee,"
and then turn to say,
"You are my sons; today I have adopted you;
because I AM WHO I AM,
you are who you are."?

So I am called to learn to say, "we",
and when we learn to say we,
that "we" means,
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
a family of little Christs,
made divine,
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,

called to lead the whole Creation
loved into being by God,
to be in love
that to God they may return.

And when we worship thus,
it cannot be only us, for
apples and alligators,
boulders and bears,
creeks and crystals,
dolphins and dragonflies,
eggplants and emeralds,
fog and furballs,
galaxies and grapes,
horses and habaneros,
ice and icicles,
jacinth and jade,
kangaroos and knots,
lightning and light,
meadows and mist,
nebulas and neutrons,
oaks and octupi,
porcupines and petunias,
quails and quarks,
rocks and rivers,
skies and seas,
toads and trees,
ukeleles and umber umbrellas,
wine and weirs,
xylophones and X-rays,
yuccas and yaks,
zebras and zebra-wood,
are all called to join us before Thy throne
in the Divine Liturgy:

Praise ye the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord from the heavens:
praise him in the heights.
Praise ye him, all his angels:
praise ye him, all his hosts.
Praise ye him, sun and moon:
praise him, all ye stars of light.
Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,
and ye waters that be above the heavens.
Let them praise the name of the Lord:
for he commanded, and they were created.
He hath also stablished them for ever and ever:
he hath made a decree which shall not pass.
Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:
Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours;
stormy wind fulfilling his word:
Mountains, and all hills;
fruitful trees, and all cedars:
Beasts, and all cattle;
creeping things, and flying fowl:
Kings of the earth, and all people;
princes, and all judges of the earth:
Both young men, and maidens;
old men, and children:
Let them praise the name of the Lord:
for his name alone is excellent;
his glory is above the earth and heaven.
He also exalteth the horn of his people,
the praise of all his saints;
even of the children of Israel,
a people near unto him.
Praise ye the Lord.

How can we know Christ
as the bridge between God and mankind

if we forget Christ
as the bridge between God
and his whole Creation?
Can a wedge come between the two?
Shall we understand the human mind
without needing to know of the body?
Shall we worship in liturgy at Church
without letting it create a life of worship?
Shall we say, "Let them eat cake?"
of those who lack bread?
No more can we understand Christ
as saving "Me, me, me!"
but not the whole cosmos,
of which we are head, yes,
but of which he is the greatest Head.

On what day do we proclaim:

As the prophets beheld,
as the Apostles have taught,
as the Church has received,
as the teachers have dogmatized,
as the Universe has agreed,
as Grace has shown forth,
as Truth has revealed,
as falsehood has been dissolved,
as Wisdom has presented,
as Christ awarded...
thus we declare,
thus we assert,
thus we preach
Christ our true God,
and honor as Saints
in words,
in writings,

in thoughts,
 in sacrifices,
 in churches,
 in Holy Icons;
 on the one hand
 worshipping and reverencing
 Christ as God and Lord,
 and on the other hand
 honoring as true servants
 of the same Lord of all
 and accordingly offering them
 veneration... [*Then louder!*]
 This is the Faith of the Apostles,
 this is the Faith of the Fathers,
 this is the Faith of the Orthodox,
 this is the Faith which has established the Universe.

Is it not the day
 when we celebrate the restored icons,
 because Christ became not only a human spirit,
 but became man,
 entering the Creation,
 the Word become matter,
 taking on himself all that that entails.

And all that that entails
 means that Christ became matter
 and that matter is to be
 glorified in his triumph,
 the same Christ
 whose physical body was transfigured
 and shone with the Light of Heaven itself
 and this was not an opposite
 of what is to be normal
 but rather transformed what is normal

so that our embodiment is to be our glory.
And this Christ,
who lived as a particular man,
in a particular place,
honored every time and place,
as the Nobel Prize for physics
honors not simply one chosen physicist per year,
but in its spirit
honors the whole enterprise of physics.
When Christ entered a here and now,
he honored every here and now,
and the Sunday of the restoration of icons
is not "The Sunday of Icons"
but
"The Sunday of Orthodoxy."
Christ was not a "generic" man
with no real time or place.
Christ entered a here and now
and his saints entered a here and now
and if he became what we are,
that we might become what he is,
the divine become human
that the human might become divine,
then if we are not to divide the Christ,
or truncate the Christ,
then his victory extends
to spirit shining through matter
in icons.
How can we praise Thee for this, O Lord?

Is not it all born up
in the scandal of the particular,
and we remember the woman in whom Heaven and Earth met,
who cannot be separated from the Church,
nor from the Cosmos,

to whom we sing
with the beauty of Creation?

Shall we recall his work in Creation
in the song to the woman
in whom Heaven and Earth met?

I shall open my mouth,
and the Spirit will inspire it,
and I shall utter the words of my song
to the Queen and Mother:
I shall be seen radiantly keeping
feast and joyfully praising her wonders.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Beholding thee,
the living book of Christ,
sealed by the Spirit,
the great archangel exclaimed to thee,
O pure one:
Rejoice, vessel of joy,
through which the curse
of the first mother is annulled.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Virgin bride of God,
restoration of Adam and death of hell.
Rejoice, all-immaculate one,
palace of the King of all.
Rejoice, fiery throne of the Almighty.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice, O thou who alone
hast blossomed forth the unfading Rose.
Rejoice, for thou hast borne the fragrant Apple.
Rejoice, Maiden unwedded,
the pure fragrance of the only King,
and preservation of the world.

Both now and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Rejoice, treasure-house of purity,
by which we have risen from our fall.
Rejoice, sweet-smelling lily
which perfumeth the faithful,
fragrant incense and most precious myrrh.

O Mother of God,
thou living and plentiful fount,
give strength to those
united in spiritual fellowship,
who sing hymns of praise to thee:
and in thy divine glory
vouchsafe unto them crowns of glory.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

From thee, the untilled field,
hath grown the divine Ear of grain.
Rejoice, living table
that hath held the Bread of Life.

Rejoice, O Lady, never-failing
spring of the Living Water.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

O Heifer that barest the unblemished Calf
for the faithful, rejoice,
Ewe that hast brought forth the lamb of God
Who taketh away the sins of all the world.
Rejoice, ardent mercy-seat.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice brightest dawn,
who alone barest Christ the Sun.
Rejoice, dwelling-place of Light,
who hast dispersed darkness
and utterly driven away
the gloomy demons.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Rejoice, only door through
which the Word alone hath passed.
By thy birthgiving, O Lady,
thou hast broken the bars and gates of hell.
Rejoice, Bride of God,
divine entry of the saved.

He who sitteth in glory
upon the throne of the Godhead,
Jesus the true God,

is come in a swift cloud
and with His sinless hands
he hath saved those who cry:
Glory to Thy power, O Christ.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

With voices of song in faith
we cry aloud to thee,
who art worthy of all praise:
Rejoice, butter mountain,
mountain curdled by the Spirit.
Rejoice, candlestick and vessel of manna,
which sweeteneth the senses of all the pious.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, mercy-seat of the world,
most pure Lady.
Rejoice, ladder raising all men
from the earth by grace.
Rejoice, bridge that in very truth
hast led from death to life
all those that hymn thee.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,
higher than the heavens,
who didst painlessly carry within thy womb
the Fountain of the earth.
Rejoice, sea-shell that with thy
blood didst dye a divine purple robe
for the King of Hosts.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice, Lady who in truth
didst give birth to the lawgiver,
Who freely washed clean
the iniquities of all.
O Maiden who hast not known wedlock,
unfathomable depth, unutterable height,
by whom we have been deified.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Praising thee who hast woven
for the world a Crown
not made by hand of man,
we cry to thee:
Rejoice, O Virgin,
the guardian of all men,
fortress and stronghold and sacred refuge.

The whole world was amazed
at thy divine glory:
for thou, O Virgin
who hast not known wedlock,
hast held in thy womb
the God of all
and hast given birth
to an eternal Son,
who rewards with salvation
all who sing thy praises.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most immaculate one,
who gavest birth to the Way of life,
and who savedst the world
from the flood of sin.

Rejoice, Bride of God, tidings
fearful to tell and hear.

Rejoice, dwelling-place of the Master
of all creation.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,
the strength and fortress of men,
sanctuary of glory,
the death of hell,
all-radiant bridal chamber.

Rejoice, joy of angels.

Rejoice, helper of them
that pray to thee with faith.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, O Lady,
fiery chariot of the Word,
living paradise,
having in thy midst
the Tree of Life,
the Lord of Life,
Whose sweetness vivifieth
all who partake of Him
with faith, though they
have been subject to corruption.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Strengthened by thy might,
we raise our cry
to thee with faith:
Rejoice, city of the King of all,
of which things glorious and worthy to be heard
were clearly spoken.
Rejoice, unhewn mountain,
unfathomed depth.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Rejoice, most pure one,
spacious tabernacle of the Word,
shell which produced
the divine Pearl.
Rejoice, all-wondrous Theotokos,
who dost reconcile with God
all who ever call thee blessed.

As we celebrate this sacred
and solemn feast
of the Mother of God,
let us come, clapping our hands,
O people of the Lord,
and give glory to God who
was born of her.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

O undefiled bridal chamber of the Word,
cause of deification for all,
rejoice, all honorable preaching
of the prophet;
rejoice, adornment of the apostles.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

From thee hath come
the Dew that quenched
the flame of idolatry;
therefore, we cry to thee:
Rejoice, living fleece wet
with dew,
which Gideon saw of old,
O Virgin.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Behold, to thee, O Virgin,
we cry: Rejoice!
Be thou the port and a haven
for all that sail
upon the troubled waters of affliction,
amidst all the snares of the enemy.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Thou cause of joy,
endue our thoughts with grace,
that we may cry to thee:

Rejoice, unconsumed bush,
cloud of light
that unceasingly overshadowest the faithful.

The holy children
bravely trampled upon the threatening fire,
refusing to worship created things
in place of the Creator,
and they sang in joy:
'Blessed art Thou and
praised above all,
O Lord God of our Fathers.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

We sing of thee, saying aloud:
Rejoice, chariot of the noetic Sun;
true vine, that hast produced ripe grapes,
from which floweth a wine making glad
the souls of them that in faith glorify thee.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Bride of God,
who gavest birth
to the Healer of all;
mystical staff,
that didst blossom with the unfading Flower.
Rejoice, O Lady,
through whom we are filled
with joy and inherit life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

No tongue, however eloquent,
hath power to sing thy praises, O Lady;
for above the seraphim art thou exalted,
who gavest birth to Christ the King,
Whom do thou beseech
to deliver from all harm
those that venerate thee in faith.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

The ends of the earth
praise thee and call thee blessed,
and they cry to thee
with love:
Rejoice, pure scroll,
upon which the Word was written
by the finger of the Father.
Do thou beseech Him
to inscribe thy servants
in the book of life, O Theotokos.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

We thy servants pray to thee
and bend the knees of our hearts:
Incline thine ear, O pure one;
save thy servants who are always sinking,
and preserve thy city
from every enemy captivity, O Theotokos.

The Offspring of the Theotokos
saved the holy children in the furnace.
He who was then prefigured
hath since been born on earth,
and he gathers all the creation to sing:
O all ye works of the Lord,
praise ye the Lord and exalt Him
above all for ever.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Within thy womb
thou hast received the Word;
thou hast carried Him who carrieth all;
O pure one, thou hast fed with milk
Him Who by His beck feedeth the whole world.
To Him we sing:
Sing to the Lord,
all ye His works,
and supremely exalt
Him unto the ages.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Moses perceived in the burning bush
the great mystery of thy childbearing,
while the youths clearly prefigured it
as they stood in the midst of the fire
and were not burnt,
O Virgin pure and inviolate.
Therefore do we hymn thee
and supremely exalt thee unto the ages.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

We who once through falsehood
were stripped naked,
have by thy childbearing been clothed
in the robe of incorruption;
and we who once sat in the darkness of sin
have seen the light, O Maiden,
dwelling-place of Light.
Therefore do we hymn thee
and supremely exalt thee unto the ages.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Through thee the dead are brought to life,
for thou hast borne the Hypostatic Life.
They who once were mute
are now made to speak well;
lepers are cleansed,
diseases are driven out,
the hosts of the spirits of the air are conquered,
O Virgin, the salvation of men.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Thou didst bear the salvation of the world,
O pure one, and through thee we
were lifted from earth to heaven.
Rejoice, all-blessed, protection and strength,
rampart and fortress of those who sing:
O all ye works of the Lord,
praise ye the Lord
and supremely exalt Him unto the ages.

Let every mortal born on earth,
radiant with light,
in spirit leap for joy;
and let the host of the angelic powers
celebrate and honor the holy feast
of the Mother of God, and let them cry:
Rejoice! Pure and blessed Ever-Virgin,
who gavest birth to God.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us, the faithful, call to thee:
Rejoice! Through thee, O Maiden, we have
become partakers of everlasting joy.
Save us from temptations, from barbarian
captivity, and from every other injury
that befalleth sinful men
because of the multitude of their transgressions.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Thou hast appeared as our
enlightenment and confirmation;
wherefore, we cry to thee:
Rejoice, never-setting star
that bringest into the world
the great Sun. Rejoice, pure Virgin
that didst open the closed Eden.
Rejoice, pillar of fire,
leading mankind to a higher life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us stand with reverence
in the house of our God,

and let us cry aloud:
Rejoice, Mistress of the world.
Rejoice, Mary, Lady of us all.
Rejoice, thou who alone art immaculate
and fair among women.
Rejoice, vessel that receivedst
the inexhaustible myrrh poured out on thee.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Thou dove that hast borne the Merciful One,
rejoice, ever-virgin!
Rejoice, glory of all the saints.
Rejoice, crown of martyrs.
Rejoice, divine adornment
of all the righteous
and salvation of us the faithful.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Spare Thine inheritance, O God,
and pass over all our sins now,
for as intercessor in Thy sight,
O Christ, Thou hast her that on earth
gave birth to Thee without seed,
when in Thy great mercy
Thou didst will to take the form of man.

To Thee, the Champion Leader,
we Thy servants dedicate
a feast of victory and of thanksgiving

as ones rescued out of sufferings,
O Theotokos:
but as Thou art one with might which is invincible,
from all dangers that can be
do Thou deliver us,
that we may cry to Thee:
Rejoice, Thou Bride Unwedded!

To her is sung:

More honorable than the cherubim,
and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim,
thou barest God the Word.
True Mother of God,
we magnify thee.

Shall we praise thee
for the beauty of a woman
with a child in her arms,
or a child nestled in her womb?

Mary is the one whose womb
contained the uncontainable God.

When that happened,
she gave him his humanity,
and there was an exchange of gifts.

Once you understand this exchange,
it changes everything.

She gave him
his humanity.
He gave her
grace,

the divine life,
as none before her
and none after.

The cherubim and seraphim are the highest ranks of angels.
'Seraph' means fiery one
and they stand most immediately in God's presence.

What is this fire?
Is it literal heat from a real fire?
Or is it something deeper,
something more fire-like than fire itself?
Would not someone who understood the seraphim
as the highest angels,
angels that burn,
would instead ask if our "real" fires
are truly real?
Is it emotion?
Or is it not "emotion"
as we understand the term,
as "deep love"
is not "hypocritical politeness"
as we understand the term?
Or yet still more alien?

Is there anything in our visible Creation
that can explain this?

If a man were to be exposed to this fire,
and he were not destroyed that instant,
he would throw himself into burning glass
to cool himself.

And yet an instant
of direct touch with God the Father,

were that even possible,
would incinerate the seraphim.

Then how can we approach God?

The bridge between Heaven and Earth:
the Word by which the Father is known,
the perfect visible image of the invisible God,
who has become part of his Creation.

When we look at the Christ, the Bridge,
and see the perfect image of God,
God looks at Christ, the Bridge,
and sees the perfect image
of mankind
and not merely mankind,
but inseparably the whole Creation.

How shall we worship the Father,
fire beyond fire beyond fire?

How shall we worship God,
holy, holy, holy?

It is a mystery.
It is impossible.
And yet it happens
in one who was
absolutely God and absolutely man,
and one who is
absolutely God and absolutely man,
bringing Heaven down to Earth,
sharing our humanity
that we might share in his divinity,

and bring Heaven down to Earth,
that Earth may be brought up to Heaven.

There is a mystic likeness
between
Mary, the Mother of God,
the Church,
and the world,
feminine beauty
created, headed, and served
by a masculine revealed God
whom no one can measure.
His Light is incomparably more glorious;
we can know the energies from God
but never know God's essence,
and yet to ask that question is
the wrong way of looking at it.
It is like asking,
"Which would you choose:
Compassion for your neighbor or common decency,
Being a good communicator or using language well,
Living simply or not wasting electricity?"

Christ and the Church are one,
a single organism,
and in that organism,
the rule is one unified organism,
not two enemies fighting for the upper hand.
I am one of the faithful,
and the clergy are not clergy at my expense.
We are one organism.
The Gift of the Eucharist does not happen,
except that it be celebrated by a priest,
and except that the people say, "Amen!"
The Church in its fullness is present

where at least one bishop or priest is found,
and at least one faithful—
and without the faithful,
the clergy are not fully the Church.
The "official" priest is priest,
not instead of a priestly call among the faithful,
but precisely as the crystallization of a priesthood in which
there is no male nor female,
red nor yellow nor black nor white,
rich nor poor, but Christ is all,
and is in all, with no first or second class faithful.
Every Orthodox,
every Christian,
every person
is called to be
part of a single united organism,
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
made divine
a family of little Christs,
sons to God and brothers to Christ,
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,
called to lead the whole Creation
loved into being by God,
to be in love
that to God they may return.

So what can we do,
save to give thanks
for rocks and trees,
stars and seas,
pencils and pine trees,
man and beast,

faces and embraces,
solitude and community,
symphonies and sandcastles,
language and listening,
ivy vines and ivy league,
cultures and clues,
incense and inspiration,
song and chant,
the beauty of nature
and the nature of beauty,
the good, the true, and the beautiful,
healing of soul and body,
the spiritual struggle,
repentance from sin
and the freedom it brings,
and a path to walk, a Way,
one that we will never exhaust—
what can we do
but bow down in worship?

Glory be
to the Father,
and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit,
both now and ever,
and to the ages of ages.
Amen.

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

The cold matter of science—
Exists not, O God, O Life,
For Thou who art Life,
How could Thy humblest creature,
Be without life,
Fail to be in some wise,
The image of Life?
Minerals themselves,
Lead and silver and gold,
The vast emptiness of space and vacuum,
Teems more with Thy Life,
Than science will see in man,
Than hard and soft science,
Will to see in man.

How shall I praise Thee,
For making man a microcosm,
A human being the summary,
Of creation, spiritual and material,
Created to be,
A waterfall of divine grace,

Flowing to all things spiritual and material,
A waterfall of divine life,
Deity flowing out to man,
And out through man,
To all that exists,
And even nothingness itself?

And if I speak,
To an alchemist who seeks true gold,
May his eyes be opened,
To body made a spirit,
And spirit made a body,
The gold on the face of an icon,
Pure beyond twenty-four carats,
Even if the icon be cheap,
A cheap icon of paper faded?

How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Whose eyes overlook a transformation,
Next to which the transmutation,
Of lead to gold,
Is dust and ashes?
How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Of the holy consecration,
Whereby humble bread and wine,
Illumine as divine body and blood,
Brighter than gold, the metal of light,
The holy mystery the fulcrum,
Not stopping in chalice gilt,
But transforming men,
To be the mystical body,
The holy mystery the fulcrum of lives transmuted,
Of a waterfall spilling out,
The consecration of holy gifts,
That men may be radiant,

That men may be illumined,
That men be made the mystical body,
Course with divine Life,
Tasting the Fountain of Immortality,
The transformed elements the fulcrum,
Of God taking a lever and a place to stand,
To move the earth,
To move the cosmos whole,
Everything created,
Spiritual and material,
Returned to God,
Deified.

And how shall I tell an alchemist,
That alchemy suffices not,
For true transmutation of souls,
To put away searches for gold in crevices and in secret,
And see piles out in the open,
In common faith that seems mundane,
And out of the red earth that is humility,
To know the Philosopher's Stone Who is Christ,
And the true alchemy,
Is found in the Holy Orthodox Church?

How shall I tell an alchemist?

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

Wardrobe of fur coats and fir trees:
Sword and armor, castle and throne,
Talking beast and Cair Paravel:
From there began a journey,
From thence began a trek,
Further up and further in!

The mystic kiss of the Holy Mysteries,
A many-hued spectrum of saints,
Where the holiness of the One God unfurls,
Holy icons and holy relics:
Tales of magic reach for such things and miss,
Sincerely erecting an altar, "To an unknown god,"
Enchantment but the shadow whilst these are realities:
Whilst to us is bidden enjoy Reality Himself.
Further up and further in!

A journey of the heart, barely begun,
Anointed with chrism, like as prophet, priest, king,
A slow road of pain and loss,

Giving up straw to receive gold:
Further up and further in!

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,
Silence without, building silence within:
The prayer of the mind in the heart,
Prayer without mind's images and eye before holy icons,
A simple Way, a life's work of simplicity,
Further up and further in!

A camel may pass through the eye of a needle,
Only by shedding every possession and kneeling humbly,
Book-learning and technological power as well as possessions,
Prestige and things that are yours— Even all that goes without
saying:
To grow in this world one becomes more and more;
To grow in the Way one becomes less and less:
Further up and further in!

God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men might become gods and the sons
of God:
The chief end of mankind,
Is to glorify God and *become* him forever.
The mysticism in the ordinary,
Not some faroff exotic place,
But here and now,
Living where God has placed us,
Lifting where we are up into Heaven:
Paradise is wherever holy men are found.
Escape is not possible:
Yet escape is not needed,
But our active engagement with the here and now,
And in this here and now we move,
Further up and further in!

We are summoned to war against dragons,
Sins, passions, demons:
Unseen warfare beyond that of fantasy:
For the combat of knights and armor is but a shadow:
Even this world is a shadow,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the victor in warfare unseen,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the man whose heart is
purified,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the one who rejects activism:
Fighting real dragons in right order,
Slaying the dragons in his own heart,
And not chasing (real or imagined) snakelets in the world
around:
Starting to remove the log from his own eye,
And not starting by removing the speck from his brother's eye:
Further up and further in!

Spake a man who suffered sorely:
For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,
Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be
revealed in us, *and*:
Know ye not that we shall judge angels?
For the way of humility and tribulation we are beckoned to walk,
Is the path of greatest glory.
We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,
But we have the best of all possible Gods,
And live in a world ruled by the him,
And the most painful of his commands,
Are the very means to greatest glory,
Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,
To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,
An instant of earthly apprenticeship,
To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:
He saved others, himself he cannot save,
Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:

But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,
Turned to gold,
And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:
Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:
Further up and further in!

When I became a man, I put away childish things:
Married or monastic, I must grow out of self-serving life:
For if I have self-serving life in me,
What room is there for the divine life?
If I hold straw with a death grip,
How will God give me living gold?
Further up and further in!

Verily, verily, I say to thee,
When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself,
And walkedst whither thou wouldest:
But when thou shalt be old,
Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee,
And carry thee whither thou wouldest not.
This is victory:
Further up and further in!

A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop

I believe that if some of the best bishops were asked, "How would you like to step down from all of your honors, and all of your power, and hand the reins over to an excellent successor, and become only the lowest rank of monk at an obscure monastery in the middle of nowhere with no authority over any soul's salvation but your own—would you take it?" their response might be, "Um, uh... *what's the catch?*"

(I deeply respect my heirarch and after a bit of thought, I removed certain remarks because I really think he would rather endure baseless slander than others making a public display of his virtues.)

If I may comment briefly on virginity and marriage: in a culture where you try to rip your opponent's position to shreds instead of aiming for fair balance in a critique, St. Gregory of Nyssa's *On Virginity* is *meant* to rip marriage to shreds. I don't mean that, and I would say something that I don't think needed

to be said, or at least not needed to be said, as much: *true marriage should be seen as having something of the hallowed respect associated with monasticism*. A marriage in its fullest traditional sense, is becoming (or already is) something that should be called exotic if people didn't look down their noses at it. As far as true marriage relates to monasticism, the externals are almost antithetical but the goal is the same: self-transcendence. The person who said, "Men love women. Women love children. Children love pets. Life isn't fair," is on to something. Getting into marriage properly requires stepping beyond an egotism of yourself; raising children, if you are so blessed, requires stepping beyond an egotism of two. And Biblically and patristically, childlessness was seen as a curse; the priestly father to whom one child was given in old age, the Mother of God herself, bore derision even in his high office because people viewed childlessness as a curse enough to be a sign of having earned divine judgment and wrath. And at a day and age where marriage is being torn from limb to limb, it might befit us to make particular efforts to honor marriage alongside monasticism.

There is one advantage to monasticism; actually, there are several, but one eclipses the others, and that is mentioned when St. Paul recognizes that not everyone can be celibate like him, marriage being a legitimate and honorable option. But he mentions a significant advantage to celibacy: the married person must have divided attention between serving family and the Lord, where a celibate person (today this usually belongs in monasticism) is able to give God an undivided attention, enjoying the blessed estate of a Mary sitting at the Lord's feet as a disciple taking in the one thing that is truly necessary, and not as a Martha who is busily encumbered with many other things. And while St. Paul knows that not everybody can walk the celibate path, he does at least wish that people could offer God an undivided attention. And I have yet to hear Orthodox challenge that any genuine marriage includes a condition of divided attention.

If we leave off talking about bishops just briefly, let's take a brief look at the abbot next to a simple monk under him ("simple monk" is a technical term meaning a monk who has not additionally been elevated to any minor or major degree of sacramental priesthood). The simple monk has lost some things, but he has in full the benefit St. Paul wants celibates to have: everything around him is ordered to give him the best opportunity to work on salvation. Meanwhile, any abbot who is doing an abbot's job is denied this luxury. Some abbots have been tempted to step down from their honored position because of how difficult they've found caring for themselves spiritually as any monk should, and additionally care for the many needs of a monastery and the other monks. An abbot may not focus on his own salvation alone; he must divide his attention to deal with disciples and various secular material needs a monastery must address. An abbot is a monk who must bear a monk's full cross; in addition, while an abbot has no sexual license, he must also bear the additional cross of a father who is dividing his attention in dealing with those under his care. He may be celibate, but he effectively forgoes the chief benefit St. Paul ascribes to living a celibate life.

To be a heirarch brings things another level higher. Right now I don't want to compare the mere monk with a bishop, but rather compare an abbot with a bishop. The abbot acts as a monk in ways that include the full life participation in the services and environment in a monastery. It may be true that the abbot is more finely clad than *other* monks, but abbot and simple monk alike are involved in the same supportive environment, and what abbot and simple monk share is greater than their difference. By comparison, unless the bishop is one of few bishops serving in a monastery, the bishop may be excused for perhaps feeling like a fish out of water. It may be desired that a bishop have extensive monastic character formation, but a bishop is compelled to live in the world, and to travel all over the place in ways and do some things that other monastics rightly flee. Now the heirarch does

have the nicest robes of all, and has privileges that no one else has, but it is too easy to see a bishop's crownlike mitre in the majesty of Liturgy and fail to sense the ponderous, heavy crown of thorns invisibly present on a bishop's head all the time. Every Christian must bear his cross, but you are very ignorant about the cross a bishop bears if you think that being a bishop is all about wearing the vestments of the Roman emperor, being called "Your Grace" or "Your Eminence," and sitting on a throne at the center of everything.

Now it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear a bishop's robes; for that matter it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear an acolyte's robe or never wear liturgical vestments at all. But I know someone who is really bright, and has been told, "You are the most brilliant person I know!" The first time around it was really intoxicating; by the fifth or sixth time he felt more like someone receiving uninteresting old news, and it was more a matter of disciplined social skills than spontaneous delight to keep trying to keep giving a graceful and fitting response to an extraordinary compliment. Perhaps the *first* time a new heirarch is addressed as "Your Grace," "Your Emimence," or "Vladyka," it feels intoxicatingly heady. However, I don't believe the effect lasts much more than a week, if even that. There is reason to address heirarchs respectfully and appropriately, but it is really much less a benefit to the bishop than it is a benefit to us, and this is for the same reason children who respect adults are better off than children who don't respect adults. Children who respect adults benefit much more from adults' care, and faithful who respect clergy (including respect for heirarchs) benefit much more from pastoral care.

As I wrote in "A Pet Owner's Rules," God is like a pet Owner who has two rules, and only two rules. The first rule, and the more important one, is "I am your Owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have given you," and the second is really more a clarification than anything else: "Don't drink out of the toilet." The first comparison is to drunkenness. A recovering

alcoholic will tell you that being drunk all the time is not a delight; it is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. "Strange as it may sound, you have to be basically sober even to enjoy getting drunk:" drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. *But you don't need to literally drink to be drinking out of the toilet.*

There is something like a confused drinking out of the toilet in ambition, and in my own experience, ambition is not only sinful, but it is a recipe to not enjoy things. Being an abbot may be more prestigious than being a simple monk and being a bishop may be more prestigious than being an abbot but looking at things that way is penny wise and pound foolish.

Ambition reflects a fundamental confusion that sees external honors but not the cross tied to such honors. I hope to write this without making married Orthodox let go of one whit of their blessed estate, but the best position to be in is a simple monastic, end of discussion. It is a better position to be a simple monastic than to be an abbot, and it is a better position to be an abbot than a heirarch. Now the Church needs clergy, including abbots and heirarchs, and it is right to specifically pray for them as the Liturgy and daily prayer books have it. Making a monk into a priest or abbot, or bishop, represents a sacrifice. Now all of us are called to be a sacrifice at some level, and God's grace rests on people who are clergy for good reasons. An abbot who worthily bears both the *cross* of the celibate and the *cross* of the married in this all-too-transient world may shine with a double *crown* for ever and ever. But the lot we should seek for is not that of Martha cumbered about with much serving; it is of Mary embracing the one thing needful.

The best approach is to apply full force to seeking everything that is better, and then have God persistently tell us if we are to step in what might be called "the contemplative life perfected in action."

The Patriarch's throne, mantle, crown, title, and so on are truly great and glorious.

But they pale in comparison to the hidden Heavenly honors given to a simple monk, and an eternal glory that can be present in power here and now.

Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist

Saying farewell to heroes

C.S. Lewis was one of my youth heroes, and after much quoting of him I have said farewell to him, in “A Pilgrimage from Narnia.”

The oldest written work on this site, “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength,” is one that I owe to Gandhi. It is an apology for the Christian pacifist position, and I as a Christian held tight to the the Sermon on the Mount and nonviolence as best I could. And I was positive Mohondas K. Gandhi had openly pulled from Christianity in his nonviolence, and part of my debt to him is expressed in that in “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength” I took as my model a chapter called "Ahimse or the Way of Nonviolence" in *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told In His Own Words*. And in fact Gandhi did borrow from Christianity; he says that the three men he holds as his heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom held their lives as nothing next to their souls. Elsewhere he said that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the

sin of the world, a perfect act. Gandhi in fact wanted to become a Christian, and was soured to Christianity when a missionary turned him away because of the color of his skin. *Absolutely disgusting.*

Yet I am taking leave of Gandhi as the same Orthodox who took leave of C.S. Lewis. I take leave of Gandhi even as it unravels the style of nonviolence I found as a best interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount. I find in the end not that I was too fixated on the Sermon on the Mount and took too much from it, but that I took too little. The Indian style of nonviolence has much to commend it, and I am impressed that Indian nationalism identifies with nonviolence instead of glorified violence that affects nationalism in so many other places. India and others have not let Gandhi be the last of a particular nonviolent alternative to violence. But there is a little bit of a burr under my saddle here. The Sermon on the Mount does not, in the main, offer an alternative answer to the questions addressed by just war and violence, not even the alternative answer of voluntary suffering that brought India's freedom. It answers another question altogether.

How else could it be?

The rather obvious question to be raised, by just war Christian and by pacifist as well, is "How else could it be?" How does a Sermon on the Mount that says, "Do not resist evil" not call for nonviolent resistance if it is not taken as a hyperbolic statement that for more ordinary mortals means something like, "Be restrained when you must resist evil, and grieve when you must do so."? And on this point I would place my own earlier position, and "Blessed are the Peacemakers," in the same category as just war theory. It is an answer to what is the most effective legitimate means to address certain dark situations.

And the answer I would give is that the Sermon on the Mount does not say, "Do not resist evil." Or at least it does not stop there. It says in full,

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should

perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the

just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the
glory, for ever. Amen.

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for

they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him

that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth

them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

When Christ preached these words, the crowds were astounded.

What is at the heart of this is a Life, a life like the birds of the air and the grass of the field, the Divine life, that is as naked as Adam. One of the greatest idols and transgressions against the Sermon on the Mount. One particularly illumining footnote in *The Orthodox Study Bible* reads:

Luke 12:16-21:

Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night [angels shall require] your soul of you; then whose things be which you have provided?'

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

The comment reads:

"Whose will those things be by which you have provided?" is the key to understanding the saving up of material goods. St. John Chrysostom writes that the only barns we need we already have: "the stomachs of the poor." St. Basil the Great taught that the bread in our cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused

belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in our closet belong to the one who has no shoes, and money we hoard belongs to the poor. St. Ambrose teaches, "The things which we cannot take with us are not ours. Only virtue will be our companion when we die." Even when Joseph stored up grain in Egypt (Gn 41), it was for the benefit of the whole nation.

Sandwiched between "Do not store up treasure on earth" and "No man can serve two masters" is the strange-sounding, sandwiched "The eye is the lamp of the body." But this is of a piece with the text that surrounds it. Is our eye fixed on providing for ourselves through earthly means, or looking up to God in the trust that he will provide and the realization that he knows our needs better than we do and loves us better than we know how to love? If we are confused here then our eye is not "single", but poisoned. Those of us who are not monastics are permitted some possessions, but better not to create an endowment that provides the illusion that we are not at the hands of the severe mercy of a providing God. And when we begin to loosen our grip on money, God's providence is written in stronger, starker strokes.

And the point of this is not to fetter us, but to free us from what seems necessary and recognize the shackles we were bound to. On this point I am talking about money; but I might as well speak of a gun and self-defense lessons. The Sermon on the Mount's motto is not a Boy Scout's *Be prepared*, but a carefree, *Don't be prepared. Be as naked as Adam*.

The Divine Liturgy and its associated readings speak of "He who of old stripped you both naked," meaning "The Devil who of old stripped you, Adam and Eve, both naked." It wasn't just that their flesh in its pure form raised no question of lust. Neither fire nor water nor the elements could touch Adam or Eve until they abdicated, and there are stories of a saint who threw down the gauntlet to a sorcerer, walked into a fire and said "I'm unharmed," and when the sorcerer was thrown into the flame

with him and was burned, healed him and sent him out unharmed. On a more mortal level, monks and nuns can dress almost or exactly the same in terms of layers of clothing between summer and winter, and that includes an American Midwest summer and winter. Paradise is where the saints are; the door may have been closed to Adam and Eve but it is open to the saints.

And all of this is an invitation to freedom, free and absolute, unencumbered and unchained freedom. It is not legalism that bids us, "If someone conscript you to go with him one mile, go with him two;" it is utter freedom even from selfishly stopping with what was asked. Christ the Lily of the Valley is the flower that leaves a fragrant scent on the heel that crushes it: but what we may find is that those things we expect to crush us, are just the removal of a shackle. And at the end saintly peacemakers are of a piece with the merciful, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake: there is a unity of the beatitudes and they are rightly sung as a shorthand for the entire Sermon on the Mount in every Orthodox Liturgy. There is freedom to trust in the Lord's providence, freedom to every kind of generosity, freedom from lust, freedom from anger, every freedom that counts.

Q: So what's the difference?

A: The Saint and the Activist.

Some readers may wonder where really I have departed from Gandhi. If he were alive, quite possibly he could say he agreed with most or all of it, not out of diplomatically seeking common ground, but out of a direct candour. But I assert there is a difference.

Military action and nonviolent resistance are two answers to the same question. Between the two, military action has much to

commend it, and in fact Gandhi had great respect for soldiers: in "Blessed Are the Peacemakers," I wrote:

Once the men of a village came, running, and told Gandhi that they had run away while the police were raping and pillaging. When they told him that this was because of his instruction to be nonviolent, he hung his head in shame. He would not have been angry with them if they had defended their families by the power of a sword. He would have approved had they stood in harm's way, calling all injury to themselves without seeking to strike or to harm, to the point of death. But to run away like that and passively leave those who could not run was an act of great and terrible cowardice, the darkest possible answer to the problem.

From speaking with and listening to soldiers, I recognize military training and life as the cross of St. George, an ascetical framework that is much more disciplined than most life outside the military. Hard work and dedication are good things, and there is much to be praised about the cross of St. George. Nonviolent activism such as Gandhi offered, the practice of satyagraha which I refer to as 'peacemaking', perhaps questionably, has more to commend it. It is also disciplined, and it does not resist force with force. None the same, it is an alternative in the same orbit as military action. It does not stain its hands with others' blood, but it is a tool you can use to achieve the same kind of end as military resources. India's independence was won with nonviolent resistance. But it is the sort of goal that could have been achieved by warfare, and in fact it stands in stark contrast to other nations as "achieving without bearing the sword what elsewhere has not been gained except by bearing the sword." And this falls infinitely short of resting in the hands of providence, naked as Adam.

I have written elsewhere of the Saint and the Activist: in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, in *The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, and principally in *An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism*. If I may put it in a table:

Question	The Activist	The Saint
<i>What is the chief end of mankind?</i>	To change the world.	To glorify God and enjoy him forever.
<i>What is that in a word?</i>	Change.	Contemplation.
<i>By what means do you pursue that end?</i>	By means an atheist and a religious person could equally recognize as effective.	Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. This means that you work sometimes in ways an atheist would see as foolish.
<i>What is the place of nonviolence?</i>	It is a tool for political influence.	It is a flower of spiritual growth.
<i>What is the place of discipline?</i>	If you are disciplined, you are more effective at getting things done.	Protestants have said, "Mission exists because worship does not:" no one, without exception, exists for the sake of missions. All mankind, without exception, exists for the sake of worshipping God. Some people, however, are deprived of the purpose for which they

Question	The Activist	The Saint
		are created, and therefore some people are missionaries so that more people may enjoy the purpose for which they are made. In like fashion, spiritual discipline exists because contemplation does not. It is a corrective when we have lost touch with the life of contemplation.
<i>What do you live to become?</i>	A catalyst for a better world.	To become by grace what Christ is by nature.
<i>What is the Bible for?</i>	To push moral authority behind the causes we further.	Part of God's work to shape us to grow in faith.
<i>What is justice?</i>	Equitable redistribution of resources, as conceived by political reforms included in this goal will do nothing to hinder the economy's ability to do all that is asked of it.	One of the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity, that is at times interchangeable with spiritual righteousness.
<i>What is the</i>	The more	Government has a place, but

Question	The Activist	The Saint
<i>government's role?</i>	important a task is, the more essential it is that it is channeled through the government. Success usually includes bringing about governmental reforms.	that place is not the place of a messiah. Success is not usually connected to governmental reforms.
<i>Can human nature be improved on?</i>	Yes; we can bring it about in others through political programs.	Yes; if we let God work with us we will be improved in the work.
<i>What attitude brings real success?</i>	Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.	Be it unto me according to thy word.
<i>What is wrong with the world?</i>	The issue I am fighting.	Me.

Where does Gandhi stand in all of this?

There was one document forwarded that listed a bunch of statements like, "If you disapprove of sport utility vehicles and private jets and own a sport utility vehicle and private jet, you might be a liberal." *And on that count, Gandhi cannot be called an unadorned Activist.* He didn't just say, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's wants;" his gaunt frame attests to the fact that he was attending to the beam in his own

eye rather than the speck in his brother's eye. His writing is devout; "God" is not, as with many of today's Activists, a word not to be used in polite company. Gandhi cannot be completely understood except with reference to Saints, and what I would call the centerpiece of his Activism is drawn out of from Saint terrain. Gandhi's particular genius is to take nonviolent resistance as one of many particular eddies in the flow of holiness in the plane of the Saint, and transform it to be a keystone in the plane of the Activist. That places Gandhi away from being at least a pure saint to being substantially an Activist. It makes him, in fact, more of an Activist than if he had merely used existing Activist tools; he was Activist enough to profoundly contribute to the bedrock of Activism.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the wake that he has left. Not that this is a unique concern about Mr. Gandhi; I have raised concerns about the wake left by Fr. Seraphim (Rose). I have seen one Gandhi quote in the wild that alludes to the Sermon on the Mount, "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind." But this is an Activist argument; an atheist Activist and a Saint could equally agree that the basic argument is sound or unsound. *And that's it for religious quotes.* In *All Men Are Brothers*, Gandhi unashamedly, frequently, and freely refers to God. But I have never seen a Gandhi quote in the wild that uses the G-word. *And when Gandhi's style of nonviolent resistance is imitated today, it is used in a way that is completely detached from the Saint's freedom, that is more removed from the Saint than not protesting.*

Rivers of living water

By contrast, I would tell the story of St. Photini, the Woman at the Well, or part of it. It was shameful for the Woman at the Well to come alone to draw water; women would come together to draw water in groups. No other woman would be caught dead

with a woman of her reputation, and when she evasively answered Jesus' "Go and call your husband," she was dodging her shame. Earlier she had sought to enlist Christ's help in running from her shame; her words, "Give me this water," were not so that she could dodge the manual labor of drawing water, but so that she could run from the shame of having to draw water alone. And Christ did not give her what she wanted; instead, in answering her evasive "I have no husband" with, "You have truly said, 'I have no husband', for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband," pulled her through her shame and opened her eyes to higher things. The story builds up to her running, free from shame, telling people, "Come and see a man who told me every thing I ever did!" She sought Christ's help in covering up her shame; *instead he made her unashamed as Adam*. And it is in this unashamed woman that the story unfolded of a Great Martyr and Equal to the Apostles.

This is what it means to be naked as Adam. It is not a license for indecency; when she gave Christ an evasive answer, he called a spade a spade. But she did become like the Adam whom fire and water could not harm. The point of this is not that her story goes on to her being tortured and her whole company drinking poison and being unharmed by it, but that everything at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount *was alive in her*. In her later story much is told of miracles, but perhaps we should make less of the fact that she went to tortures and was miraculously delivered, and more of the fact that she went to tortures *and was faithful*. She did, in the spirit of giving more than was asked, when Nero decided to bring her to trial, she went ahead and tried to convert him. She didn't succeed at *that*, but she did seem to convert practically everyone else she came in contact with. But what is significant is not just the results that she brought about. What is significant is that she was faithful, with the overflowing freedom that soars as the birds of the air. Perhaps we are not Saints on the level of St. Photini; perhaps it is not within our reach to be called

Equal to the Apostles. But what is in our reach is to be a little more a Saint, a little less of an Activist.

Now, a word on being naked as Adam. St. Photini wore clothes and so should we. It is true that there are some saints who labored without clothing: the pre-eminent example is St. Mary of Egypt, and there have been male Desert Fathers who were naked. But we should wear normal clothes even as St. Photini did. *What is forbidden to those who would be naked as Adam is not literal clothing but metaphorical armor.* What is forbidden is not trusting in God's Providence but trying, in addition to the Lord's Providence, or instead of it (if these are really two different things) to straighten things out for ourselves. The opposite of this is someone like St. Photini who, instead of waiting to be captured, went on her own initiative to Caesar Nero. She trusted in God's Providence in a way that could be seen as blackmailing God. But there is something very like Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, not in how the Saint deals with evil in the world, but how the Saint works with God. If a Saint were told, "You are making no provision to take yourself but it's like you're blackmailing God by your actions," one Saint might respond, giving more than was asked, "Yes, I'm emotionally blackmailing God, and you should emotionally blackmail him too!"

Deep in our bones

Activism runs deep in our bones today; I surprised one professor who discussed disability and an "autism and advocacy" conference, that the natural way to seek the best interests of the autistic community is by political advocacy. And I tried, perhaps in vain, to show her that of the two assigned articles she gave on dealing with autism and disability, one offered a clear activist agenda for autism and disability, and the other was not political, at least not in an overly narrow understanding of politics, but was the father of an autistic child speaking of limitless love. My

professor couldn't see what would benefit the autistic besides rolling out one more theme in political activism.

And so, with activism deep in our bones, if we look for a saint, the kind of figure that so naturally comes to mind is Gandhi, or Martin Luther King if we insist on a Christian. Both admired and sought to imitate Christ; both led nonviolent resistance against laws that were legislated evil. Both sought a response to evils out of the Sermon on the Mount. And both contributed to the Activist outlook that is now non-negotiable in the academy. Not necessarily that Gandhi's style of nonviolence is non-negotiable; Gandhi respected his enemies, while it is perfectly socially acceptable in some queer circles to break in to Catholic churches and vandalize them, and spray paint swastikas to identify Romans with Hitler. But the question in so much of the academy is not, "Are you a Saint or an Activist," but, "On to the real question. What *kind* of Activist are you?" (If they have enough distance to recognize that that is the only *real* question in their eyes.)

Conclusion: Saints forever!

The Activism we see in the Academy may be the damned backswing of Gandhi's nonviolent Activist precedent. That much will not be investigated here. What I will say is much the same thing I would say to C.S. Lewis, that I in fact did imply to him in *A Pilgrimage from Narnia*:

You helped me reach where I am now, and I would be much poorer had our conversation been deleted from my past. I have sat at your feet. But now even what I have taken from you summons me to bid you farewell. If your right eye or your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. Holding on to your ecumenism, Mr. Lewis, or—it is a deeper cut—your nonviolence, Mr. Gandhi, is to lose everything you sought for. The journey in faith involves

many times when we cut off a right hand or take out a right eye. Perhaps we lose nothing, or only a piece of Hell, when we do so. But God created man to glorify him and become him forever, and I cannot be an Activist: I can only strive to be a Saint.

Thus I bid farewell to heroes of my youth.

Two Decisive Moments

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't

just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "Behold the man!"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man!* Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.

Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you?'" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of

peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man!* Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have *possibly* imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

That is a decisive moment, but decisive moments are not some kind of special exception to Christian life. Christian history and the Christian spiritual walk alike take their pace from decisive moments. I would like to look at the decisive moment in the Gospel reading.

In that reading, the people who have gathered to listen to Jesus went beyond a "standing room only" crowd to being so packed you couldn't get near the door. Some very faithful friends of a paralytic did the only thing they could have done. They climbed on the roof and started digging through it. I suspect that

the homeowner didn't like the idea. But they dug in, and lowered him, hoping this teacher will heal him.

Jesus saw *their* faith and said, "Your sins are forgiven." And people were shocked—there was a very good reason for this! If I have two friends, and one owes the other money, I can't tell the first one, "Your debt is forgiven. It's wiped clean." That's not my place. Sin is not a debt, or a crime, or even a disease. *It's worse.* And Christ told a man who owed an infinite debt to God that his slate was wiped clean and his sins were forgiven. And the reason people were saying, "This man blasphemes! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" was that they understood exactly how significant it was for Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Maybe they failed to recognize Christ as God (it is very rare that anyone but the demons identified him as the Son of God), but they were absolutely right when they said that Jesus was saying something that only God had the authority to say.

They were murmuring, and Christ knew why. So he asked them, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise. Take up your mat and walk.'" Everybody knew the answer, that forgiving sins was an infinitely weightier matter, but Jesus was about to give a lesser demonstration of the exact same authority by which he said, "Your sins are forgiven." He said to the paralytic, "Arise. Take up your mat and walk." And the paralytic did exactly that.

That is authority. That is the authority that commands the blind to gaze on the light of the Transfiguration, the deaf to listen to the song of angels, the mute to sing with God's angels, the lame to dance for joy, and what is greater than all of these, command you and me, sinners, to be freed from our sins.

Great and rare as the restoration of one paralytic may be, everybody knew that that was less important than the forgiveness of his sins. The story of that healing is a decisive moment.

But it's not the only decisive moment, and there is another decisive moment that may be much less rare, much less

something we want to write home about, but is profoundly important, especially in Lent. I am talking about repentance.

When the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin, there are two responses I give, both of which I ought to be ashamed of. The first response is to tell God that he doesn't know what he's talking about. Now of course I am not blunt enough to tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." (Perhaps it would be better if I did.) What I say instead is something like, "I can see where you're coming from, and I can see that you have a point. But I've given it a little thought and I'd like you to consider a suggestion that is much better for everyone involved. Would you consider this consolation prize?" Now again, perhaps it would be better if I were honest enough to simply tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." Not only is it not good that I do that, but it is spurning the grace of God.

When a mother takes a knife or a sharp pair of scissors from a little boy, this is not because the mother wants a pair of scissors and is too lazy or inconsiderate to go get her own pair: her motivation is entirely for the child's welfare. God doesn't need our repentance or our sin. When he commands us through his Spirit to let go of our sin, is this for our sake or for his need? It is entirely for our own benefit, and not something God was lacking, that we are commanded to repent from sin. And this has a deeper implication. If God convicts us from our sin and asks our surrender to him in the unconditional surrender for repentance, then that is how we will be healed from our sin: it is the best medicine chosen by the Great Physician, and it is out of his mercy that the Great Physician refuses all of our consolation prizes that will cut us off from his healing love. Repentance is terrifying at times; it is letting go of the one thing we least want to give over to God, and it is only once we have let go that our eyes are opened and we realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" The more we understand repentance the more we understand that it is a decisive moment when God is at work.

The second response I give to the Holy Spirit is even more an affront to the decisive *now* in which the Lord meets me. I say, "Well, I think you're right, and I need to repent of it, only now isn't the best time for me. I'd like to deal with it at another time." Here, also, things might be better if I were at least honest enough to acknowledge I was telling God, "Your timing is far from perfect." God lives outside of time, and yet he has all the time there is. There is never reason for him to say with a sheepish grin, "I know this really isn't the best time for you, but I only have two minutes right now, and I'm going to ask for you to deal with this now even though this isn't the best time." When he comes and tells us to repent, now, the reason for that is not that some point later on we may feel more like repenting and that is a better time; the reason is that by the time I am struggling against God's Spirit I have already entered the decisive moment when I can choose either to be cleansed and freed of my sin, or keep on fumbling for the snooze button while God tells me, "Enough sleep! It is time for you to arise!"

Let us repent, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Money

Today the biggest symbol of evil is Hitler or Naziism; there is almost no bigger insult than calling someone a Nazi or a comparison to Hitler. The Old Testament's symbol of evil that did the same job was a city in which the Lord God of Hosts could not find fifty righteous, nor forty-five, nor forty, nor thirty, nor twenty, nor even ten righteous men. It was the city on which fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven in divine wrath until smoke arose as from a gigantic furnace. It was, in short, the city of Sodom.

Ezekiel has some remarks about Sodom's sin that might surprise you. Ezekiel 16:49 says, *This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, more than enough food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.*

These are far from the only stinging words the Bible says to rich people who could care for the poor and do not do so. Jesus said something that could better be translated, "It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25). It would take hours or perhaps days to recite everything blunt the Bible says about wealth, if even I could remember so much.

But who are the rich? The standard American answer is, "People who have more money than I do," and the standard American answer is wrong. It takes too much for granted. Do you

want to know how special it is, worldwide, to be able to afford meat for every meal you want it and your Church permits it? Imagine saying "We're not rich; we just have Champagne and lobster every day." That's what it means for even poorer Americans to say "We're not rich, just a bit comfortable." The amount of money that America spends on weight loss products each year costs more than it would cost to feed the hungry worldwide. When Ezekiel says that "your sister Sodom" had more than enough food *but did not care for the poor*, he is saying something that has every relevance to us if we also fail to care for the poor.

I would be remiss not to mention the Sermon on the Mount here, because the Sermon on the Mount explains something we can miss (Matt 6:19-21,24-33):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single hour to your life? You might as well try to make yourself a foot taller! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not

arrayed one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

This *includes* a hard saying about wealth, but it is not only a hard saying about wealth, but an invitation to joy. "Do not store up treasures on earth but store up treasures in Heaven" is a command to exchange lead for gold and have true wealth. It is an invitation to joy, and it is no accident that these sharp words about Money lead directly into the Bible's central text on why we never need to worry.

Elsewhere we read, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15), which is *not* a statement that spiritual people can rise so high that *their* lives aren't measured by possessions. It is about everybody, great and small. If money doesn't make you happy this is not something specially true about spiritual people; it's something that's true of everybody. But Jesus's entire point is to direct us to what our life *does* consist in. The words about storing up treasures in Heaven prepare us for the "*Therefore* I tell you," and an invitation to live a life that is fuller, richer, more vibrant, deeper, more alive, more radiant with the light of Heaven than we can possibly arrange through wealth.

What will we leave behind if we spend less on ourselves? Will we leave behind the Lord's providence, or hugs, or friendship, or banter, or worship, or the Church, or feasting? Will we leave behind the love of the Father, or Christ as our High Priest, or the Spirit? Will we be losing a Heaven whose beginning is here and now, or will we be pulling out our right hands and our right eyes?

If it seems that way, we may adapt C.S. Lewis to say that living the life of Heaven through our finances today may seem like it will cost our right hand and our right eye, or in today's words an arm and a leg, but once we have taken that plunge, we will discover that what we have left behind is precisely nothing. Or perhaps we could say that we are leaving behind a false Savior who never delivers, but only distracts us from the true Savior in Christ, and the treasure that is ours when we lay our treasures at his feet.

Is there a luxury you could give up in this invitation to joy?

Akathist to St. Philaret the Merciful

Kontakion 1

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!
(Repeated thrice.)

Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven. Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

Rejoice, illustrious and wealthy noble who knew true wealth!

Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!

Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to Christ!

Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!

Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from the world!

Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never be forsaken!

Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!

Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!

Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked for a little!

Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels thereafter!

Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 2

Thou knewest treasure enough to feed thy household for a hundred years without work: And thou wert true to thy name, Philaret or "Lover of Virtue", even when thine own wife saw not the horses on the mountain and chariots of fire which surround the true lover of virtue. But with eyes raised to fiery Heaven, we cry out with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 2

Thou invitedst thine own to join thy love of virtue, and thine own received not thine invitation. But thine invitation remaineth open, and we who receive thine invitation and hearken to the open door cry out to thee in praise:

Rejoice, O diadem of married life in the world!
 Rejoice, O thou who knewest virtue as treasure!
 Rejoice, O thou who fed a household out of the
 treasurehouse of thy virtue!
 Rejoice, O thou who knew not the greed of Midas's curse!
 Rejoice, O thou whose gifts would yet multiply and enrich
 the recipient!
 Rejoice, O thou who was generous when he was rich!
 Rejoice, O thou who was raided by marauders yet became
 no less generous!
 Rejoice, O thou who trusted God when he had much and
 when he had little!
 Rejoice, O thou who knewest that riches profit not in the
 day of wrath!
 Rejoice, O thou whose virtue profited in easy times and
 hard times alike!
 Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 3

Many a generous beggar will give his last penny, whilst few a
 rich man will give to thee from his hedge of protection. Yet we
 behold a wonder in thee, who was rich, illustrious, and of noble
 lineage, and esteemed these not. Thy hedge of protection was the
 Lord God, and virtue and treasure in Heaven, and thou wert
 generous unto thine uttermost farthing. To thee, a rich man more
 generous than a beggar, we cry: Alleluia!

Oikos 3

Thou transcendedst the virtues of pagan philosophy:
 fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance, the virtues of a well
 lived earthly life. But thou knewest the Christian, deiform virtues:

faith, hope, and love, the virtues of a Heavenly life already present in an egg in life on earth. Wherefore we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou whose fortitude sought no protection from earthly treasures!

Rejoice, O thou whose justice transcended human reckoning!

Rejoice, O thou whose prudence was the Wisdom who is Christ!

Rejoice, O thou whose temperance sought from earthly things nothing in excess of what they could give!

Rejoice, O thou whose faith trusted that Christ would faithfully provide!

Rejoice, O thou whose hope in God was never disappointed!

Rejoice, O thou whose love refrained from sharing neither virtue nor earthly possessions!

Rejoice, O thou whose joy flowed in easy times and hard!

Rejoice, O thou whose peace flowed from the silence of Heaven!

Rejoice, O thou whose generosity was perfect!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 4

We will forever underestimate thy generosity if we merely count what thou gavest against what much or little property thou possessest, for thine open hand was a shadow and an icon of the vast wealth thou heldest in the generous treasure in Heaven, and this vast treasure thou laid hold to as Philaret, lover of virtue, which is to say lover of treasures in Heaven, eclipseth thy generosity with mere earthly property as the sun eclipseth the moon—nay, as the sun eclipseth a candle! Wherefore, with thee who hoarded true treasure, we cry: Alleluia!

Oikos 4

Beseech the Lord God that we also might seek true treasure in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrodes and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherefore we cry out in wonder to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who drunk from the wellspring of Truth!
 Rejoice, O thou who were fed by the Tree of Life!
 Rejoice, O thou who knew silver from dross!
 Rejoice, O thou who never grasped at dross because thou
 clungst to the Treasure for whom every treasure is named!
 Rejoice, O thou who esteemed men of humble birth
 because thou questedst after the royal priesthood!
 Rejoice, O thou who grasped treasure next to which every
 earthly endowment is but dust and ashes!
 Rejoice, O thou who counted the poor and needy as more
 precious than gold!
 Rejoice, O thou who cast away shadows to behold the Sun
 of Righteousness!
 Rejoice, O thou who never forsook the Lord!
 Rejoice, O thou whom the Lord never abandoned!
 Rejoice, O thou who found that not one of His good
 promises has failed!
 Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 5

Ever seeking Christ, thou becamest thyself like Christ, the source and the summit of all virtue. Wishing to imitate thee as thou imitatedst Christ, we cry unto thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 5

Every virtue is an icon of Christ, an icon not before us, but in us. Seeking after the virtues as we seek Christ, we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou divine lover of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who knew the Source of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou whose virtue was an imprint of Christ!

Rejoice, O thou who perfected the divine image with voluntary likeness!

Rejoice, O thou who teaches us virtue in the Christian walk!

Rejoice, O thou ever willing to share not only possessions but virtue!

Rejoice, O thou in whom Christ sat enthroned on virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who in virtue loved and served God!

Rejoice, O volume wherein the Word was inscribed in the ink of the virtues!

Rejoice, O thou who ever banishest passions!

Rejoice, O polished mirror refulgent with the uncreated Light!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 6

Eating from the Tree of Life, thou becamest thyself a tree of life, to the nourishment of many. Hungering for lifegiving food, we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 6

Sown in good soil, thou baredst fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold. Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who were food to the hungry!

Rejoice, O thou who were wealth to the destitute!

Rejoice, O thou who were a robe of boldness to the naked!

Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of thine abundance!

Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of lack and want!

Rejoice, O thou who were God's abundance to thy neighbour!

Rejoice, O thou who never merely gave money or property!

Rejoice, O thou who always gave with a blessing!

Rejoice, O thou who loved Christ in thy neighbour!

Rejoice, O thou tree whose shade sheltered many!

Rejoice, O thou river who irrigated vast lands!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 7

Blessed art thou, O holy Father Philaret the Merciful!
Merciful wert thou, and thou receivedst mercy, wherefore we cry
with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 7

Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead!
Wherefore we ask of thee no miracle, O merciful Father Philaret,
for thou shewedst the continual miracle of mercy, and we cry
unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who gave the very last thou hadst!

Rejoice, O thou who received recompense from Christ
thereafter!

Rejoice, O thou who withheld nothing from him who
asked of thee!

Rejoice, O thou who wherewith withheld nothing from

Christ!

Rejoice, O thou who clung not to gold!

Rejoice, O thou who clung to the Light next to which gold is as dust!

Rejoice, O wise one who made blessings as abundant as dust!

Rejoice, O thou who were ever full of mercy!

Rejoice, O thou whose mercy was as a lamp!

Rejoice, O thou who firmly beheld the invisible!

Rejoice, O thou whose faith worked mercy through love!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 8

Rejoice, thou who wilt stand before Christ's dread judgment throne numbered among those who hear: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came to me. And thou wilt cry with the blessed saints: Alleluia!

Oikos 8

Knowing that no man can love God whom he cannot see except that he love his neighbor whom he has seen, thou wert ever merciful, wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who fed Christ when He was an hungred!

Rejoice, O thou who gave Christ to drink when He was athirst!

Rejoice, O thou who showed Christ hospitality when He came a stranger!

Rejoice, O thou who clothed Christ when He was naked!
 Rejoice, O thou who visited Christ when He was sick!
 Rejoice, O thou who came to Christ when He was in
 prison!
 Rejoice, O thou who met the least of these and saw Christ!
 Rejoice, O thou who called every man thy brother!
 Rejoice, O thou who saw no man as outside of God's love!
 Rejoice, O thou perfect in mercy as thy Heavenly Father is
 perfect in mercy!
 Rejoice, O lamp ever scintillating with the Light of
 Heaven!
 Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 9

All the angels were amazed at the excellence of thy virtue, for thy name "Philaret" is not only "Lover of Virtue" but "Lover of Excellence", for in thee excellence, virtue, and power are one and the same. Wherefore thou joinest the angels in crying: Alleluia!

Oikos 9

Even the most eloquent of orators cannot explain how thy virtue excelleth, for they cannot explain how in every circumstance thou soughtest out and lovedst virtue. But we marvel and cry out faithfully:

Rejoice, O rich man who cared for the poor!
 Rejoice, O illustrious man who cared for men of no
 account!
 Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of advantage!
 Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of suffering as well!
 Rejoice, O man who held great treasure and yet ever fixed
 his eyes upon true Treasure!

Rejoice, O thou who in every circumstance found an arena
for excellent virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who were ever an excellent worshipper of
God!

Rejoice, O thou who in the world escaped the Devil's
snares!

Rejoice, O thou who unmasked hollow Mammon!

Rejoice, O thou who found harbor on the sea of life!

Rejoice, O thou who by loving virtue loved Christ!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 10

Thy life wast a living manuscript of the Sermon on the
Mount, for even Solomon in his splendor had not raiment like
unto thy faith. Beholding thy splendor we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 10

Thou storedst up possessions wherewith not to worry: not
fickle and corruptible treasure on earth, but constant and
incorruptible treasure in Heaven. Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who however rich wert poor in spirit!

Rejoice, O thou who mourned thy neighbor's
unhappiness!

Rejoice, O thou meek before thy neighbor's suffering!

Rejoice, O thou who hungered and thirsted for justice and
all virtue!

Rejoice, O thou mirror of mercy!

Rejoice, O thou who remained pure in heart!

Rejoice, O thou who made deepest peace!

Rejoice, O living mirror of the Beatitudes!

Rejoice, O thou soaring as the birds of the air!

Rejoice, O thou who wert devoted to one Master, and despised all others!

Rejoice, O living exposition of the Sermon on the Mount!

Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 11

Thou wert as the widow who bereaved herself even of her last two farthings: not only gave she more than all the others, but she who gave up her creaturely life received the uncreated, immortal, and eternal life. Like her, thou wert a vessel empty enough to fill, wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 11

Thou wert a second Job, steadfast whilst Satan tore off layer after layer of thy belongings to show that there was nothing inside. Wherefore, we cry to thee who ever persevered:

Rejoice, O thou worshiper of God in plenty and in need!

Rejoice, O thou icon of perseverance and faith!

Rejoice, O thou generous with thy coin and generous with thy virtue!

Rejoice, O thou phoenix ever arisen from thy very ashes!

Rejoice, O thou saint immobile in thy dispassion!

Rejoice, O thou who in want showed the truth of thy generosity in easy times!

Rejoice, O thou who ever blessed the name of the Lord!

Rejoice, O thou who with many possessions loved them not!

Rejoice, O thou who with few possessions loved them no more!

Rejoice, O thou who remained stalwart whilst Satan tore away what was thine, to show there was nothing inside!

Rejoice, O thou who were vindicated when God peeled off the nothing and showed there was everything inside!
 Rejoice, O thou who vindicated God as did Job!
 Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 12

Thou hadst no food in the house, when imperial emissaries came looking for a bride for the Emperor: thou rich in Heaven, in trust thou beganst preparations to honourably meet the imperial emissaries. And thy neighbours came and brought food, a fitting feast, and the imperial emissaries found thy granddaughter finest in virtue and modesty, choosing her for her excellence to become Empress. Wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 12

When all this had come to pass, in thy virtue, in thine excellence, thou knewest what is real treasure. In thy virtue and humility, thou refusedst all imperial rank and office, saying that it sufficed thee to be known as grandfather to the Empress. Wherefore, amazed, we cry to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who knew true Treasure!
 Rejoice, O thou who were lover of virtue and excellence!
 Rejoice, O thou who were rich and cared for the poor!
 Rejoice, O thou who lost almost all and still opened thy hand!
 Rejoice, O thou who became grandfather to the Empress whilst remaining ever humble!
 Rejoice, O thou who were illustrious and noble yet cherished those of low estate!
 Rejoice, O thou who were razed nigh unto the earth, and ever remained excellent as a lover of virtue!

Rejoice, O thou who were raised nigh unto Heaven, and
 ever remained humble as a lover of virtue!
 Rejoice, O thou who sought first the Kingdom of Heaven!
 Rejoice, O thou who were given all other things as well!
 Rejoice, O thou who even then fixed his virtuous gaze on
 Christ!
 Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 13

O holy Father Philaret whose excellence was virtue and
 whose virtue was excellence, whose power was virtue and whose
 virtue was power, who was ever merciful and generous out of
 thine overflowing virtue, ever protected by the Kingdom of God,
 pray for us as we cry with thee: Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
 (Repeated thrice.)

Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou
 madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in
 thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven.
 Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

Rejoice, illustrious and wealthy noble who knew true
 wealth!
 Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!
 Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to
 Christ!
 Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!
 Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from
 the world!
 Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never
 be forsaken!

Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!
Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!
Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked
for a little!
Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels
thereafter!
Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 1

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

The Best Things in Life Are Free

1. The best things in life are free.
2. The best things in life are free. But what does this mean?
3. The best things in life are free. But we do not understand the truth of these words if we think they are filled out by hugs and friendship, or even love: *If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.*
4. A better lens comes from the condemnation of the Pharisees: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.
5. It appears in Orthodoxy that the outside of the chalice is all feasts and beautiful liturgies, even during Lent: but on the inside is all repentance, deprivation and hardship, and

being blindsided by rebukes. All of this falls under "The best things in life are free," the one as much as the other.

6. Well enough it may be said that sin is the forerunner of sorrow: *The wages of sin is death*, and that death's sorrow begins here and now. Sin ultimately kills pleasure: It takes humility to enjoy even pride. It takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.
7. But this is not all. The outside of the cup is beautiful and its beauty is true and real. But the real treasure is inside. Repentance is a spiritual awakening; it terrifies because it seems that when we repent we will lose a shining part of ourselves forever, but when we repent we suddenly realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" and are free to flee the stench. What feast compares to the grandeur of real repentance?
8. The Great High Priest said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." The best things in life are free, and this pruning is a very big free gift.
9. It is when we are cleansed inside the cup that the outside is clean. Let Christ cleanse us inside the cup, and then inside and outside will both bear proper fruit.
10. The things in life that are free are persecutions, and we have on the highest authority: Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for

your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

11. St. Paul goes so far to say, But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.
12. We may approach the outside of the chalice first, but it is a loss to stop there. We need the joyful sorrow of compunction and all that is within the chalice, and then what is on the outside of the chalice will be clean, and what is more, will reach its proper stature.
13. Every day take a little less, and pare down a little more. The Fathers do warn, "Do not engage in warfare beyond your strength," and the praxis is to crawl before we try to walk. But *The Way of the Ascetic* pares down, little by little, in humor, in luxury, in eating for a purpose other than nourishment, and aims to have none of it left.
14. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. And by faith we wean ourselves even from a life centered on innocent pleasures, knowing that they do not hold a candle to the spiritual pleasure that is inside the chalice.
15. The cutting of of one's own will is free. And it is the experience of monasticism that this is one of the best things in life: a monk's will is cut off, not for the primary

benefit of his brother monks, but for his own benefit. And the voluntary and involuntary cutting off of one's will extends far outside the monastery. It is one of the best things in life, whether we accept it as a blessing or resent it because we do not wish to grow up in the spiritual life.

16. Do you wish that this chalice be taken from you? Christ prayed the same, but he also prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." For some prayers are impossible.
17. There are two answers to prayer: "Yes," and "No, please ask for something better." St. James writes, You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. Passions are sinful habits that warp us, and when we ask for something to satisfy our passions, God only ever says "No" because he wants better for us.
18. Those things that are obviously good are nothing compared to the terrible goods: the gilded artwork outside the chalice is beautiful enough, but it is nothing next to what is inside the chalice.
19. The Maximum Christ wishes the maximum for our lives, and that comes through repentance and the royal road of affliction.
20. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for Christ's sake. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is now the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
21. No one can harm the man who does not injure himself. Nor can any circumstance. So therefore let us not

be governed by circumstances, or think the less of our God when he allows us rougher circumstances.

22. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but there is another shoe to drop. We live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that is a greater good.
23. Perhaps we are entering a time of struggle. (Entering?) Perhaps we are seeing the end of exceptionally prosperous and easy days we have no right reason to expect. The same truths apply. The same God who reigns in easy times, reigns in hard times.
24. "Give us this day our daily bread:" it is normal not to know where your next meal is from.
25. The arm of the Lord is more visible, not less, in hard times. God's providence is stronger when you know you need it.
26. The chalice offered us indeed looks easy on the outside but is full of pain within. But the sufferings are part of the treasure. And the best things in life reach deeper than the golden ornaments that belong on the outside, but extend to the joyful sadnesses within. Those who shed at least some entertainment and seek repentance and compunction for their sins find repentance an awakening and compunction to be joyful and cleansing. And that is not all. Everything inside the cup runs deep. And everything inside the cup is free.
27. The divine sovereignty is never purchased at the expense of human freedom. Human freedom is limited, but this is not where divine sovereignty comes from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely choice

has been made, and the divine sovereignty shapes joy after every draught of the inexhaustible cup.

28. The joy of the best things in life is not purchased at the expense of the chalice of suffering. Suffering is limited, but this is not something the divine sovereignty is purchased from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely suffering has been entered, and the divine sovereignty leaves people in a better place than had they not met their sufferings.
29. The divine life is now. The divine energies are now. Not later, once some difficulties are resolved, but now.
30. In ancient times the holiday of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection were celebrated together; even now there is not a separation between them, and we speak of a three-day Pascha. There is no real separation between bearing a cross and being crowned with a crown, even if it takes time to gain the eyes of faith to see such things.
31. Orthodox are iconodules, but God is both iconodule and iconoclast: he takes things in our life and makes them icons of himself, and he also keeps on destroying and removing things to make us more free to breathe. Heaven and Hell are both inside us, and God seeks to inhabit Heaven inside of us and uproot Hell.
32. God the Father is the maker of all things visible and invisible. God is spirit, and even among created things the first excellence belongs to the invisible. Who can buy or sell invisible things? This is one reason the best things in life are free.

33. In the Incarnation, Heaven kissed earth and the visible now has a share in the excellence of the invisible. But still *if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned*: the sale of relics is forbidden.
34. Do you believe the best things in life are free? Excellent, but *the demons believe—and shudder*. Do you *live* as if the best things in life are free?
35. It is more blessed to give than receive. *What do you have to give?*
36. If you covet something and you gain it, it will bring misery once the pleasure melts away, and the greater the covetousness, the greater the misery. Covetousness is the inverse of what is inside the cup.
37. We want to have things our way. But the Lord has other plans. And what we will find if we yield is that he has other plans for us that are not what we would have chosen, but are far better. This is at once an easy and a hard thing to do.
38. In the Bible a chalice is both a cup of suffering to drink and a cup which fills with excellent joy. The suffering is as bad as we fear—no, worse— but if we drink of it we will be drinking of the very best things in life. The divine life in the chalice immeasurably eclipses the gilt ornament outside of it. Remembrance of death, compunction, and repentance dig deeper than the music of liturgy.
39. The best things in life are not just an ornament for when our material needs are well taken care of. It is true ten times more that they are lifeblood in hard times and harder times. And the chalice is inexhaustible.

40. The best things in life are free.

A Pet Owner's Rules

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where

suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust. Proverbs says, "The adulterous woman"—today one might add, "and internet porn" to that—"in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword." Now this is talking about a lot more than pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

Having said that lust is drinking out of the toilet, I'd like to clarify something. There are eight particularly dangerous sins the Church warns us about. That's one, and it isn't the most serious. Sins of lust are among the most easily forgiven; the Church's most scathing condemnations go to sins like pride and running the poverty industry. The harshest condemnations go to sins that are deliberate, cold-blooded sins, not so much disreputable, hot-blooded sins like lust. Lust is drinking out of the toilet, but there are much worse problems.

I'd like you to think about the last time you traveled from one place to another and you enjoyed the scenery. That's good, and it's something that greed destroys. Greed destroys the ability to enjoy things without needing to own them, and there are a lot of things in life (like scenery) that we can enjoy if we are able to enjoy things without always having to make them mine, mine, mine. Greed isn't about enjoying things; it's about grasping and letting the ability to enjoy things slip through your fingers. When people aren't greedy, they know contentment; they can enjoy their own things without wishing they were snazzier or newer or more antique or what have you. (And if you do get that hot possession you've been coveting, greed destroys the ability to simply enjoy it: it becomes as dull and despicable as all your possessions look when you look at them through greed's darkened eyes. It takes contentment to enjoy even greed: greed is *also* drinking out of the toilet.

Jesus had some rather harsh words after being unforgiving after God has forgiven us so much. Even though forgiveness is

work, refusing to forgive one other person is drinking out of the toilet. Someone said it's like drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

The last sin I'll mention is pride, even though *all* sin is drinking out of the toilet. Pride is not about joy; pride destroys joy. Humility is less about pushing yourself down than an attitude that lets you respect and enjoy others. Pride makes people sneer at others who they can only see as despicable, and when you can't enjoy anyone else, you are too poisoned to enjoy yourself. If you catch yourself enjoying pride, repent of it, but if you can enjoy pride at all, you haven't hit rock bottom. As G.K. Chesterton said, it takes humility to enjoy even pride. Pride is drinking out of the toilet. *All* sin is drinking out of the toilet.

I've talked about drinking out of the toilet, but Rule Number Two is not the focus. Rule Number One is, "I am your owner. Enjoy freely of the food and water I have given you." Rule Number Two, "Don't drink out of the toilet," is only important when we break it, which is unfortunately quite a lot. The second rule is really a footnote meant to help us focus on Rule Number One, the real rule.

What is Rule Number One about? One window that lets us glimpse the beauty of Rule Number One is, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to a mountain, 'Be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it will be done for you." Is this exaggeration? Yes. More specifically, it's the kind of exaggeration the Bible uses to emphasize important points. Being human sometimes means that there are mountains that are causing us real trouble. If someone remains in drunkenness and becomes an alcoholic, that alcoholism becomes a mountain that no human strength is strong enough to move. I've known several Christians who were recovering alcoholics. And had been sober for years. *That* is a mountain moved by faith. Without exception, they have become some of the most Christlike, loving people I have known. That is what can happen when we receive freely of the food and drink our Lord provides us. And it's not the only example. There

has been an Orthodox resurrection in Albania. Not long ago, it was a church in ruins as part of a country that was ruins. Now the Albanian Orthodox Church is alive and strong, and a powerhouse of transformation for the whole nation. God is on the move in Albania. He's moved mountains.

To eat of the food and drink the Lord has provided—and, leaving the image of dog food behind, this means not only the Eucharist but the whole life God provides—makes us share in the divine nature and live the divine life. We can bring Heaven down to earth, not only beginning ourselves to live the heavenly life, but beginning to establish Heaven around us through our good works. It means that we share in good things we don't always know to ask.

Let's choose the food and drink we were given.

Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret

Rewards that are not mercenary

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different types of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.

C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often, or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the *Philokalia* well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now, and it is nothing that is real to you until you have undergone that repentance. It is like looking forward to washing with fear, wondering if you will be scraped up in getting mud off, and in a very real sense suddenly recognizing that you had not in mind what it was like to be clean.

Let me explain by giving some examples.

Discovering the treasure of humility

The first illustration I have is not strictly speaking an example of repentance, at least not that I have seen, but might as well be.

One of the hardest statements in the Bible that I am aware of is, "In humility consider others better than yourself" (Phil 2:3). It's a slap in the face to most of us, *including* me. But humility is only about abasing yourself up to a point. The further you go into humility, the less it is about dethroning "me, me, me," and the more it can see the beauty of others.

If it seems a sharp blow to in humility consider others better than yourself, let me ask you this: would you rather be with nobodies who are despicable, or in the company of giants? Pride closes the eyes to any beauty outside of yourself, and falsely

makes them appear to have nothing worthy of attention. Humility opens the eyes to something of eternal significance in each person we meet.

There is one CEO at a place I worked who might as well have taken up the gauntlet of considering others better than himself. (I don't know about his spiritual practices as a whole; that's between him and his *shul*.) But on this point he has taken up the gauntlet, not of St. Paul necessarily, but of *humility*.

This CEO showed delight and some awe in each person I saw him meet. It didn't matter if you were near the top of the org chart, or at the absolute bottom; the CEO was delighted to see you. End of discussion. And he wanted to hear how you were doing, and not in a Machiavellian sense.

Now let me ask a question: who benefitted most from his respect at work (and, I can scarcely doubt, his respect outside of work)? Is it the ambitious leader, the low-level permanent employee, the timid intern? Certainly all these people benefitted, and though it was not so flamboyantly expressed, there is a thread of deep respect running through the whole organization, and some things work smoother than any other place I've been. There are a lot of people who benefit from the CEO's humility. *But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's aptitude for respect is the CEO himself.* Others may enjoy kind treatment and perhaps be inclined to more modestly follow his example. But he is in that respect at least functioning the way a person functions optimally, or to speak less abstractly, his state puts him in the presence of people he deeply respects and delights in again and again and again. To be proud is to be turned in on yourself, and he has something better: a spiritual orientation that lets him see the genuine beauty in others. (And, to be clear, the phenomenon also plays out more quietly among the rest of the organization.) Humility opens the eyes to the beauty of others. It also has other benefits; humility is less tempted to meet bad news with wishful thinking; the CEO is, I imagine, as sincerely wrong as often as the rest of us are sincerely

wrong, but my suspicion is that he is less wrong, and less often wrong, than if he were to freely opt-in to being wrong by freely indulging in wishful thinking. This is another incidental advantage to humility, and perhaps there are others. But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's humility is the CEO himself. And the reward for him looking on others with delight and awe is that he is put in a condition where he meets others filled with delight and awe. If that sounds like a tautology, *it is*. The reward for his seeing others through the eyes of humility is that he sees others through the eyes of humility: the biggest reward for humility is, quite simply, humility: *virtue is its own reward*.

Now humility may express itself in self-abasement, and another powerful gauntlet is thrown down when *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* or the *Philokalia* speak of "thirsting for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor." I will not treat that at length, beyond saying that it is a mighty door and opens to blessed humility.

What I do wish to point out is that pride turns you in on yourself, blinding you to beauty outside of you and making you fill a bag of sand with holes in satisfying your narcissism, or trying to. Humility opens you up to all the beauty around you, and if you repent of pride and despair of being able to gaze on yourself in fascination, you may be surprised by the joy of gazing on others in joy and fascination, or something better than the transient and fleeting fascination offered by narcissism.

But what if I can't find anything in a person to respect?

If you can't find anything in a person to respect, I submit that you are missing something about being human. To quote *Tales of a Magic Monastery*:

The Crystal Globe

I told the guestmaster I'd like to become a monk.

"What kind of monk?" he asked. "A real monk?"

"Yes," I said, "a real monk."

He poured a cup of wine, and said, "Here, take this."

No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a small crystal globe forming about me. It expanded until it included him.

Suddenly, this monk, who had seemed so commonplace, took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. I thought, "Maybe he doesn't know how beautiful he is. Maybe I should tell him." But I really *was* dumb. The wine had burned out my tongue!

After a time, he made a motion for me to leave, and I gladly got up, thinking that the memory of such beauty would be well worth the loss of my tongue. Imagine my surprise when, when each person would unwittingly pass into my globe, I would see his beauty too.

Is this what it means to be a real monk? To see the beauty in others and be silent?

Plants and animals command respect, and not just in the sense articulated by green advocates. Empty space itself is itself interesting. *How?* It is empty space that is much of the study of quantum physics and superstring theory. A great many physicists have earned PhD's, and continue to research, based on the physical properties of empty space. And, more importantly, the whole of God is wholly present in any and every empty space. In that sense, empty space in Orthodox Christianity is more pregnant, more dignified, than what an atheist would consider to be everything that exists. So empty space is worth respecting. But more than that, inanimate things, rocks and such, exist on the level of empty space but fill the space: "Blessed be the Rock" lets an inanimate thing represent God. It exists; it is something rather than nothing, and for that reason it is worth respecting. Plants exist on one more layer than mere existence; they have the

motion, the fire, of life inside them. And animals exist on these layers but exist more fully; they are aware of their surroundings and act. And you and I, and every person you have trouble respecting, exist on all of these layers and more: we are made in the image of God, the royal and divine image, with the potential of the angelic image and of theosis, and are all of us making an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell. Those who choose Hell represent a tragedy; but even then there is the dignity of making an eternal choice; Hitler and Stalin represent the dignity of eternal agency and making a choice between Heaven and Hell, and sadly using that choice to become an abomination that will ever abide in Hell. But they still tragically represent the grandeur of those who exist on several layers and use their free and eternal choice to eternally choose Hell. Some saint has said, "Be kind to each person you meet. Each person you meet is going through a great struggle," and all mankind, including those one struggles to respect, exist on several profound levels and are making an eternal choice of who they will permanently become. And respect is appropriate to all of us who bear the image of God, and have all of the grandeur of God-pregnant empty space, physical things, plants, animals, and a rational and spiritual and *royal* human existence, even if there is nothing *else* we can see in them to respect. Being appropriate to treat with respect is not something that begins when we find something good or interesting about a person: it begins long before that.

Returning from drunkennes to sobriety

In "A Pet Owner's Rules," I wrote,

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!

2. **Don't drink out of the toilet.**

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Bondage to alcohol is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. If you reject bondage to alcohol and fight your way to sobriety with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, the reward if you succeed is that you have rejected bondage to alcohol and fought your way to sobriety. The reward for sobriety regained is sobriety regained—and sobriety includes ways of enjoying life that are simply not an option when one is in bondage to alcohol. *The virtue is its own reward.*

Returning from covetousness to contentment

Advertising, in stimulating covetousness, stimulates and builds discontent. Covetousness may well enough say, "If I only get _____, then I'll be content." But that is fundamental confusion. Getting whatever _____ may be may bring

momentary satisfaction, but the same spiritual muscles twisted to be discontent with what you had before, will make you become discontent with the _____ that you now think will make you happy.

What makes for contentment is learning to be content, and repenting of covetousness and being satisfied with what you have now gives the reward that is falsely sought in indulging covetousness. The reward for repenting of covetousness and learning contentment is that you are freed from covetousness and blessed with contentment.

The virtue is the reward.

Returning from lust to chastity

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe; repenting of lust, like repenting of pride and occult-like escapism, opens one's eyes to beauty one cannot see. Lust greatly hinders the ability to appreciate and enjoy things; repentance from lust is occasion for the slow re-awakening of the eyes to everything that lust cannot see—which is a lot.

Returning from contraception to how God built marriages to work

I had a bit of a hesitation in including contraception, because in Orthodoxy "everybody knows" that such things as drunkenness are real sins, while "everybody knows" that contraception is debatable, and probably OK if one gets a blessing etc. And here what "everybody knows" is out-and-out wrong.

The Fathers universally condemn contraception, and the first edition of K.T. Ware's *The Orthodox Church* said point-blank, "The Orthodox Church forbids artificial methods of contraception," but subsequent versions moved further and further to permissiveness. But it is not the Orthodox Church that

has changed her mind; it is only certain salad bar theology today that wishfully tries to believe that the Orthodox Church says contraception can be permitted.

St. John Chrysostom calls contraception point-blank "worse than murder," and counsels parents to leave their children brothers and sisters, and not mere things, as an inheritance. The Blessed Augustine blasts what is today called "natural family planning," and should be called "contraceptive timing", saying that the heretics who practice what is today called "periodic continence" to frustrate the fertility of sex thereby forbid marriage, earning the searing rebuke about forbidding marriage in 1 Tim 4:1-5, and says that where there is contraception, there is no wife, only a mistress. St. Maximus Confessor describes sex as being wrong when it is done for some other purpose than making a baby. In my researches, I have yet to hear of any Christian teacher or canonized saint from the first millenium stating or allowing that any form of contraception is permitted in any form. For that matter, I have yet to hear of any of the Reformation offering anything but condemnation to the sin of contraception.

Biologically speaking, the beginning, middle, and end of the purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is not intended merely for pleasure, but each pleasure, such as that of eating (for which we have made Splenda), exists to continue the species, whether through procreation or preserving individuals by nourishing their bodies with food. But I wish to state something more than just the condemnations of contraception, because the condemnations are the guardian of something basically human.

When I was studying in the Bronx, I was bombarded by posters from Planned Barrenhood, which in their most forceful forms said, "Take *control* of your life!" And in general I am suspicious about the final honesty of advertising, but in this context the advertisement could hardly be more candid. Planned Parenthood's marketing proposition is that you can enjoy the pleasure of sex, perhaps increasingly overclocked by Viagra and ED drugs, while only having children when you individually opt-

in, and retain your life in control as a pleasure-seeker. And that goes for Orthodox Christians as much as everyone else: perhaps abortion is out, but contraception, accidents excluded, is how people can pursue the pleasure of sex without the drag of unintended children.

But, before looking at monasticism, let me say that part of growing to full human stature is not being a permanent pleasure-seeker, and not being in control of oneself. In monasticism this is partly through things such as monastic obedience, an absolute obedience which frees monk or nun from fulfilling self-will. In marriage this comes from having children beyond the point where you can have control as a pleasure-seeker. In that sense disconnecting sex from making babies is in marriage what optional obedience would be for monasticism. It is easier, it is more palatable, and it all but neutralizes the whole point.

The benefit of repenting of contraception is not that God preserves pleasure-seeking. The benefit of repenting of contraception is that you grow to transcend yourself, and marriage reaches its full stature just as obedience to a spiritual physician helps monastics reach full human stature. Marriage and monasticism are different in many ways, and today I think marriage should be recognizing as having some of the status traditionally seen in monasticism. But the point of being an adult is to grow up, to grow by a crown of thorns, to transcend oneself, whether by marriage or by monasticism. The means may be very different, but the goal is self-transcendence, and the marketing proposition of contraception is to short-circuit that hard lesson and allow the adult to remain a sexually active pleasure seeker who does not grow any higher. And this is part of why I wince when I find people I know telling of their contraception; it is something of a missed opportunity, where people have marriage but do not use it to their full stature, opting instead for an "à la carte" version of marriage that is the equivalent of a "monasticism" that allows veto over obedience.

Returning from Gnosticism and escape to the here and now

When I read one title on Gnosticism, I was pulled up short by one passage. It described Gnosticism not as a set of ideas or hinging on ideas (it can be connected with many ideas), but on a mood, and more specifically that of despair. I was quite surprised by that because the appeal of Gnosticism is something enticing, something "sexy," of a sweet forbidden escape. But that is only an enticing bait if one wants escape because one has despair about the here and now that God has provided us.

Monks in the desert were perennially warned about escaping the here and now; it is tied to what was, and is, called the "demon of noonday." And a great many things today are laced with that sweetly-coated poison. It is not just gnosticism, which I shouldn't have researched, or the occult, or "metaphysics" in the occult sense, or Harry Potter, or *the Chronicles of Narnia*. And yes, I did say, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is the story of people brought out of the everyday world into another world, and that is a classic bait, and one that is far from exhausted from the short list here.

The reward for rejecting the temptation to escape from the here and now is the discovery of the here and now as something one does not need to escape from. At an advanced level, one discovers that paradise is present wherever saints are; that is why crude settings at a monastery are genuinely sweeter than more luxurious settings where Mammon is worshiped. But, as in giving up pride, giving up escape sets the stage to enjoy what you wanted to escape from. Before you give it up, what you want is something that almost by definition is something you cannot have: whatever enters the here and now becomes one more dreary fixture of the here and now, maybe not instantly, but at least eventually. But like humility which opens the eyes of others pride cannot see, repenting of escapism in any form is rewarded by finding that one is in God's good Creation and escape is in fact

not the best one can hope for: one hopes for engagement in worship of God, and that is what one is rewarded with. The reward for repenting and accepting virtue is that one steps out of escape and accepts virtue: the virtue is its own reward.

Moving on from grudges to forgiveness

Forgiveness is tied for some of us to repentance of unforgiveness. Perhaps some people forgive easily and quickly, or at least quickly. But when you do not forgive, or do not yet forgive, it seems falsely like you have something over the other person, and it seems like a treasure to hold on to. But it is no treasure. It is a piece of Hell: nursing a grudge is drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

Repentance is stepping out of Hell, and forgiveness is stepping outside of the moment of pain and moving on to other things that do not hurt. It is not easy; it is incredibly hard for some of us; but it is the first step in a journey of healing. And the reward is simply that we step out of the moment of hurt, back in the past, and start to leave the hurt behind.

...and being blindsided by reward

Some people speak of repentance as unconditional surrender, and it is in fact unconditional surrender. My godfather spoke of repentance as the most terrifying thing a person can experience, because God demands a blank cheque of us, and does not tell us how much he will expect.

But when, and only when, we have made that surrender, we are blindsided by rewards. God may give other rewards too; but he gives rewards. In repentance you realize, "I was holding on to

a piece of Hell!" And you let go of Hell and grasp something much better!

Repentance is seen in Orthodoxy as awakening, and the reward is part of the awakening.

Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. To those who repent, a reward is promised!

Virtue is its own reward. And it is also the reward of repentance.

Silence: Organic Food for the Soul

We are concerned today about our food,
and that is good:
sweet fruit and honey are truly good and better than raw sugar,
raw sugar not as bad as refined sugar,
refined sugar less wrong than corn syrup,
and corn syrup less vile than Splenda.
But whatever may be said for eating the right foods,
this is nothing compared to the diet we give our soul.

The ancient organic spiritual diet
is simple yet different in its appearances:
those who know its holy stillness
and grasp in their hearts the silence of the holy rhythm,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,
grasp the spiritual diet by their heart,
by its heart,
by God's heart.

What treasure looks good next to it?
It is said that many would rather be rich and unhappy
than poor and happy,

stranger still than thinking riches will make you happy:

Blessed stillness is a treasure,
and next to this treasure,
gold and technology are but passing shadows,
no better to satisfy hunger than pictures of rich food,
no better to satisfy thirst than a shimmering mirage,
for like the best organic food,
a diet of stillness gives what we deeply hungered for,
but deeply missed even seeking
in our untiring quest to quench our thirst with mirages.

And we have been adept at building mirages:

anything to keep us from stillness.
Perhaps technology, SecondLife or the humble car,
perhaps romance or conversation,
perhaps philosophy or hobbies,
not always bad in themselves,
but always bad when pressed into service
to help us in our flight from silence,
which is to say,
used the only way many of us know how.

There is a mystery,
not so much hard to find as hard to want:
humble yourself and you will be lifted up,
empty yourself and you will be filled;
become still and of a quiet heart,
and you will become home to the Word.

"But my life is hard," you say,
"You might be able to afford luxuries like these,
but I can't."

Take courage.
Read the lives of the saints,
and find that stillness grows,

not on the path that is spacious and easy to walk,
but the way that is narrow and hard:
strength is not found
in ease and comfort,
but among athletes with no choice but to strive.

We believe in life before death:
we live the life of Heaven here on earth,
and those things in life that seem like Hell
are our stepping stones:
"she shall be saved in childbearing:"
from the politically incorrect Bible.
Can't women have something more equitable?
But the truth is even *more* politically incorrect.

That is how *all of us* are saved:
in suffering and in struggle,
such as God gives us,
and not when dream,
and by our power
we make our dreams come true.

Weston Price fans,
who say that an ancient diet nourishes
far better than modern foods
manipulated like plastic,
newfangled corn and sunflower oil,
gone rancid then masked by chemical wizardry,
marketed as health food in lieu of wholesome butter,
could be wrong in their words
how we need ancient nourishment and not plastic foods.

They could be wrong about our needs,
but it is a capital mistake to say,
"That may have worked in golden ages,

but we need a diet that will work
for us now in our third millenium."

If Weston Price's movement is right,
then we need the nourishment of timeless traditions,
now more than ever.

Saying "No, we need something that will work today,"
is like saying, "No, we're very sick,
we are weak and we must focus on essentials:
healthy people may visit a doctor, but not us."

But even if the food we eat matters, and matters much,
the question of what we feed our body
is dwarfed by the question of what we feed our souls,
and over the centuries
our spiritual diet has turned
from something organic and nourishing
to something that might almost be plastic:
inorganic, yet made from what spiritual leaders call rancid.

The right use of technology is in the service of spiritual wisdom,
but the attractive use of technology is to dodge spiritual wisdom,
for one current example,
cell phones and texting not only a way to connect,
but a way to dodge silence,
a way to avoid simply being present to your surroundings,
and this is toxic spiritual food.
Cell phones have good uses,
and some wise people use them,
but the marketing lure of the iPhone and Droid,
is the lure of a bottomless bag:
a bottomless bag of spiritual junk food:
portable entertainment systems,
which is to say,
portable "avoid spiritual work" systems.

Someone has said,
"Orthodoxy is not conservative:
it is radical,"
which is striking but strange politically:
if Orthodoxy is not captured by a Western understanding of
conservatism,
further off the mark is it to try to capture it with any Western idea
of radicalism.
but there is another sense in which it is true:
not in our design to transform the world,
but in God's design to transform us.

I thought I was a man of silence.
I avoid television, occasionally listen to music,
but never as a half-ignored backdrop.
Recently I learned,
by the grace of a God who is radical,
that I did not know the beginning of silence.

"Hesychasm," in the Orthodox term,
described by a rhythm of praying,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,
in the Church under the authority of a good priest,
an authority for your sake and mine,
is a doorway to strip off layers of noise,
and maybe a portal to joy.
So small-looking on the outside,
and so spacious if you will step in.

Concerned about organized religion?
Eastern Orthodoxy is quite disorganized, some have said,
but we won't go into that.
Negativity about organized religion
is part of the toxic spiritual diet
it is so hard to avoid.

Some have said that people concerned about organized religion are really concerned about someone else having authority over them.

Though I am self-taught in some things,
an author with a few letters after his name
but not even a high school course in non-academic writing,
Aristotle's words are apropos:

"He who teaches himself has a fool for a master."

There are always choices we must make for ourselves,
Orthodoxy actually having wisdom to help free us in these
choices,

but trying to progress spiritually without obedience to a spiritual
guide who can tell you "No,"

is like trying to be healthier without paying attention to stress in
your life, or what you eat, or exercise.

I speak from experience:

I still trip in the light,

but I do not want to go back to how I tripped in the dark.

"Keep your eyes on Jesus,
look full in his wonderful face,
and the things of this world
will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace,"
says the cherished Protestant hymn:
but it does not say how,
and silence is how.

Do you long for honors the world bestows,
and are never satisfied with what you have?

Mirages look good,

but the place of a mirage is always outside our grasp,
something it looks like we might reach tomorrow,
not something that is open to us right now.

And it is not until we let go of the mirage we want so much

that we see right next to us
a chalice
of living water
that can quench our thirst now.

Pride, lust, anger and remembrance of wrongs, envy, wanting to
use people—
all of these urge us to look away
wanting to quench our thirst on mirages
and blind our eyes
to the chalice
of living water
that we are offered,
and offered here and now.
And it isn't until you rest and taste the waters,
the living waters of the chalice that is always at hand,
that you realize how exhausting it is
to chase after mirages.

The Church prays through the Psalm,
"But I have quieted and calmed my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast,
like a child that is quieted is my soul."
When a child quieted at its mother's breast,
cares melt away,
and to the soul that knows silence,
the silence of Heaven,
for Heaven itself is silent
and true silence is Heavenly,
the things of this world grow strangely dim.

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard
to get all your ducks in a row,
to get yourself to a secure place
where you have prepared for what might happen?

Or does it look like you might lose your job,
if you still have one?
The Sermon on the Mount
urges people to pray,
"Give us this day our daily bread,"
in an economy
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,
it was not obvious to many
where they would get their next meal.
And yet it was this Sermon on the Mount
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,
and tells us not to worry:
what we miss
if we find this a bit puzzling,
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments
even if they are jeopardized right now,
is that we are like a child with some clay,
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,
we ignore and maybe fear
the finger tapping us on our shoulder
until with great trepidation we turn,
and listen to the voice say,
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"
and follow our father
as he gives us a warhorse.

If you have a bank account, or insurance, or investments,
you may be better at making your clay statue,
better than the people who heard the Sermon on the Mount,
but the Lord says to us as much as them,
"Let your worries be quieted
as you enter silence,"
to give us a warhorse.

And when we let go of taking on God's job,
of taking care of every aspect of our future,
we find that he gives us better than we knew to seek:
if we thirst for worldly honor to make us feel significant,
if we covet luxuries to make us feel better,
and we learn holy silence,
the things of the world grow strangely dim.

People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them.
Repentance is terrifying,
because it seems beforehand
that repentance means you will forever lose some shining part of
yourself,
but when you repent,
repentance shows its true nature
as an awakening:
you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell,"
and, awakened, you grasp Heaven in a new way.

Let go of the mirage of doing God's job of providence,
by your own strength,
and let go of the mirage of getting enough money
to make you happy,
and when you give up this misshapen clay horse,
find a warhorse waiting for you:
God will provide better than you know to ask,
perhaps giving you a great spiritual gift
by showing you you can live without some things,
and this just the outer shell holding spiritual blessings
next to which billions of dollars pale in comparison.
("Who is rich? The person who is content.")
And if like me you are weak and wish you had more honor,
you may taste the living water next to which worldly honor is an
elusive mirage
always shimmering, always luring, and never satisfying, at least

not for long,
 and ride the warhorse,
 and wonder why you ever thought worldly honor would make you
 happy.

A saint has said,
 that when you work,
 seven eights of the real task
 is watching the state of your heart
 and only one eighth is the official task.
 Proverbs likewise tells,
 "Keep your heart with all vigilance,
 for from it flow the springs of life."
 Guard your heart.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,
 whatsoever things are honest,
 whatsoever things are just,
 whatsoever things are pure,
 whatsoever things are lovely,
 whatsoever things are of good report;
 if there be any virtue,
 if there be any praise,
 think of these things."
 What you put before your heart matters.
 Your heart will be conformed to whatever you place before it:
 a good deal of your spiritual diet
 is simply what you place before your mind:
 mental images above all else,
 "Be careful, little eyes..."

There is a distinction between
 where one meets God,
 and that which reasons from one thought to another:
 to us today, "mind" or "intellect" is that which reasons,

but the Church has long known the heart of the intellect or mind:
where one meets God.

And the poisoning of our spiritual diet
has moved us
from knowing the mind as the heart that meets God
to growing and over-growing that which reasons,
so that it is at the heart of our lives,
in Christians as much as the atheist,
is the secular view of mind,
like psychology,
in its secular flight
from religious knowing
of who the human person is
and what is the heart of the human mind.

Learn to live out of that by which you worship:
drink living water,
because it is exhausting
to chase after mirages
in worrying and scheming
in the part of us which reasons,
that which is only the moon
made to reflect the light
of the sun,
that by which we worship,
the spiritual eye
made for a God who is Light.

"We have a sister,
whose breasts are not grown,
what shall we do for our sister
in the day when she shall be spoken for?
If she be a wall,
we will build on her a palace of silver:
and if she be a door,
we will inclose her with boards of cedar."
In your mind be a garden locked and a fountain sealed,

that which worships
not forever dispersed,
forever exhausted,
in treating that which reasons
as the heart of your mind:
learn the prayer of the mind in the heart.

The ancient organic spiritual diet is prayer, silence, fasting,
liturgy, giving to the poor, tithing, reading the Bible and the
Fathers and saints' lives, and many other things.
You eat it as you would eat an elephant:
one bite at a time.
Your task today is to eat one day's worth:
tomorrow's concerns are tomorrow's concerns.

Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering* *Screen?*

Socrates: And now, let me give an illustration to show how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened: —Behold! a human being in a darkened den, who has a slack jaw towards only source of light in the den; this is where he has gravitated since his childhood, and though his legs and neck are not chained or restrained any way, yet he scarcely turns round his head. In front of him are images from faroff, projected onto a flickering screen. And others whom he cannot see, from behind their walls, control the images like marionette players manipulating puppets. And there are many people in such dens, some isolated one way, some another.

Glaucon: I see.

Socrates: And do you see, I said, the flickering screen showing men, and all sorts of vessels, and statues

and collectible animals made of wood and stone and various materials, and all sorts of commercial products which appear on the screen? Some of them are talking, and there is rarely silence.

Glaucon: You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Socrates: Much like us. And they see only their own images, or the images of one another, as they appear on the screen opposite them?

Glaucon: True, he said; how could they see anything but the images if they never chose to look anywhere else?

Socrates: And they would know nothing about a product they buy, except for what brand it is?

Glaucon: Yes.

Socrates: And if they were able to converse with one another, wouldn't they think that they were discussing what mattered?

Glaucon: Very true.

Socrates: And suppose further that the screen had sounds which came from its side, wouldn't they imagine that they were simply hearing what people said?

Glaucon: No question.

Socrates: To them, the truth would be literally nothing but those shadowy things we call the images.

Glaucon: That is certain.

Socrates: And now look again, and see what naturally happens next: the prisoners are released and are shown the truth. At first, when any of them is liberated and required to suddenly stand up and turn his neck around, and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the images; and then imagine someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is asking him to things, not as they are captured on the screen, but in living color -will he not be perplexed? Won't he imagine that the version which he used to see on the screen are better and more real than the objects which are shown to him in real life?

Glaucon: Far better.

Socrates: And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

Glaucon: True, he now will.

Socrates: And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and hindered in his self-seeking until he's forced to think about someone besides himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? He will find that he cannot simply live life as he sees fit, and he will not have even the illusion of finding comfort by living for himself.

Glaucon: Not all in a moment, he said.

Socrates: He will require time and practice to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the billboards best, next the product lines he has seen advertised, and then things which are not commodities; then he will talk with adults and children, and will he know greater joy in having services done to him, or will he prefer to do something for someone else?

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: Last of he will be able to search for the One who is greatest, reflected in each person on earth, but he will seek him for himself, and not in another; and he will live to contemplate him.

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and is absolutely the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Glaucon: Clearly, he said, his mind would be on God and his reasoning towards those things that come from him.

Socrates: And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Glaucon: Certainly, he would.

Socrates: And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe what was happening in the world of brands and what new features were marketed, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master" than to reign as king of this Hell, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Glaucon: Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Socrates: Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness, and seem simply not to get it?

Glaucon: To be sure.

Socrates: And in conversations, and he had to compete in one-upsmanship of knowing the coolest brands with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went with his eyes and down he came without them; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would give him an extremely heavy cross to bear.

Glaucon: No question. Then is the saying, "In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king," in fact false?

Socrates: In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is crucified. Dear Glaucon, you may now add this entire allegory to the discussion around a matter; the den arranged around a flickering screen is deeply connected to the world of living to serve your pleasures, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the spiritual transformation which alike may happen in the monk keeping vigil or the mother caring for children, the ascent of the soul into the world of spiritual realities according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the Source of goodness appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and

the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

Glaucon: I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you....

[Adapted from Plato's Allegory of the Cave, but not by much...]

Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis

1. Many people are concerned today with harmony with nature. And indeed there is quite a lot to living according to nature.
2. But you will not find something that is missing by looking twice as hard in the wrong place, and it matters where one seeks harmony with nature. In monasticism, the man of virtue is the quintessential natural man. And there is something in monasticism that is behind stories of the monk who can approach boar or bear.
3. Being out of harmony with nature is not predominantly a lack of time in forests. There is a deeper root.
4. Exercising is better than living a life without exercise. But there is something missing in a sedentary life with artificially added exercise, after, for centuries, we have

worked to avoid the strenuous labor that most people have had to do.

5. It is as if people had worked for centuries to make the perfect picnic and finally found a way to have perfectly green grass at an even height, a climate controlled environment with sunlight and just the right amount of cloud, and many other things. Then people find that something is missing in the perfect picnic, and say that there might be wisdom in the saying, "No picnic is complete without ants." So they carefully engineer a colony of ants to add to the picnic.
6. An exercise program may be sought in terms of harmony with nature: by walking, running, or biking out of doors. Or it may be pursued for physical health for people who do not connect exercise with harmony of nature. But and without concern for "ascesis" (spiritual discipline) or harmony with nature, many people know that complete deliverance from physical effort has some very bad physical effects. Vigorous exercise is part and parcel to the natural condition of man.
7. Here are two different ways of seeking harmony with nature. The second might never consciously ask if life without physical toil is natural, nor whether our natural condition is how we should live, but still recognizes a problem—a little like a child who knows nothing of the medical theory of how burns are bad, but quickly withdraws his hand from a hot stove.
8. But there is a third kind of approach to harmony with nature, besides a sense that we are incomplete without a better connection to the natural world, and a knowledge that our bodies are less healthy if we live sedentary lives,

lives without reintroducing physical exertion because the perfectly engineered picnic is more satisfying if a colony of ants is engineered in.

9. This third way is *ascesis*, and *ascesis*, which is spiritual discipline or spiritual exercise, moral struggle, and mystical toil, is the natural condition of man.
10. The disciples were joyous because the demons submitted to them in Christ's name, and Christ's answer was: "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you in my name. Rejoice instead that your names are written in Heaven." The reality of the disciples' names being written in Heaven dwarfed the reality of their power over demons, and in like manner the reality that monks can be so much in harmony with nature that they can safely approach wild bears is dwarfed by the reality that the royal road of *ascesis* can bring so much harmony with nature that by God's grace people work out their salvation with fear and trembling.
11. The list of spiritual disciplines is open-ended, much like the list of sacraments, but one such list of spiritual disciplines might be prayer, worship, sacrament, service, silence, living simply, fasting, and the spiritual use of hardship. If these do not seem exotic enough for what we expect of spiritual discipline, we might learn that the spiritual disciplines can free us from seeking the exotic in too shallow of a fashion.
12. The Bible was written in an age before our newest technologies, but it says much to the human use of technology, because it says much to the human use of property. If the Sermon on the Mount says, "No man can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and

money," it is strange at best to assume that these words applied when money could buy food, clothing, and livestock but have no relevance to an age when money can also buy the computers and consumer electronics we are infatuated with. If anything, our interest in technology makes the timeless words, "No man can serve two masters" all the more needed in our day.

13. Money can buy everything money can buy and nothing money cannot buy. To seek true glory, or community, or control over all risk from money is a fundamental error, like trying to make a marble statue so lifelike that it actually comes to life. What is so often sought in money is something living, while money itself is something dead, a stone that can appear deceptively lifelike but can never hold the breath of life.
14. In the end, those who look to money to be their servant make it their master. "No man can serve two masters" is much the same truth as one Calvin and Hobbes strip:

Calvin: I had the scariest dream last night. I dreamed that machines took over and made us do their bidding.

Hobbes: That must have been scary!

Calvin: It wa—holy, would you look at the time? My TV show is on!

But this problem with technology has been a problem with property and wealth for ages, and it is foolish to believe that all the Scriptural skepticism and unbelief about whether wealth is really all that beneficial to us, are simply irrelevant to modern technology.

15. There was great excitement in the past millennium when, it was believed, the Age of Pisces would draw to a close, and the Age of Aquarius would begin, and this New Age would be an exciting dawn when all we find dreary about the here and now would melt away. Then the Age of Aquarius started, at least officially, but the New Age failed to rescue us from finding the here and now to be dreary. Then there was great excitement as something like 97% of children born after a certain date were born indigo children: children whose auras are indigo rather than a more mundane color. But, unfortunately, this celebrated watershed did not stop the here and now from being miserable. Now there is great hope that in 2012, according to the Mayan "astrological" calendar, another momentous event will take place, perhaps finally delivering us from the here and now. And, presumably, when December 21, 2012 fails to satisfy us, subsequent momentous events will promise to deliver us from a here and now we find unbearable.

16. If we do not try to sate this urge with New Age, we can try to satisfy it with technology: in what seems like aeons past, the advent of radio and movies seemed to change everything and provide an escape from the here and now, an escape into a totally different world. Then, more recently, surfing the net became the ultimate drug-free trip, only it turns out that the web isn't able to save us from finding the here and now miserable after all. For that, apparently, we need SecondLife, or maybe some exciting development down the pike... or, perhaps, we are trying to work out a way to succeed by barking up the wrong lamppost.

17. No technology is permanently exotic.

18. When a Utopian vision dreams of turning the oceans to lemonade, then we have what has been called "a Utopia of spoiled children." It is not a Utopian vision of people being supported in the difficult ascetical pursuit of virtue and ultimately God, but an aid to arrested development that forever panders to childish desires.
19. Technology need not have the faintest conscious connection with Utopianism, but it can pursue one of the same ends. More specifically, it can be a means to stay in arrested development. What most technology offers is, in the end, a practical way to circumvent asceticism. Technological "progress" often means that up until now, people have lived with a difficult struggle—a struggle that ultimately amounts to asceticism—but now we can simply do without the struggle.
20. Through the wonders of modern technology, we can eat and eat and eat candy all day and not have the candy show up on our waistline: but this does not make us any better, nobler, or wiser than if we could turn the oceans to lemonade. This is an invention from a Utopia of spoiled children.
21. Sweetness is a gift from God, and the sweeter fruit and honey taste, the better the nourishment they give. But there is something amiss in tearing the sweetness away from healthy food, and, not being content with this, to say, "We think that eating is a good thing, and we wish to celebrate everything that is good about it. But, unfortunately, there is biological survival, a holdover from other days: food acts as a nutrient whether you want it or not. But through the wonders of modern science, we can celebrate the goodness of eating while making any effect on the body strictly optional. This is progress!"

22. Statistically, people who switch to artificial sweeteners gain *more* weight. Splenda accomplishes two things: it makes things sweeter without adding calories, and it offers people a way to sever the cord between enjoying sweet taste, and calories entering the body. On spiritual grounds, this is a disturbing idea of how to "support" weight loss. It is like trying to stop people from getting hurt in traffic accidents by adding special "safety" features to some roads so people can drive however they please with impunity, even if they develop habits that will get them *killed* on any other road. What is spiritually unhealthy overflows into poorer health for the body. People gain more weight eating Splenda, and there are more ways than one that Splenda is unfit for human consumption.

23. The asceticism of fasting is not intended as an ultimate extreme measure for weight loss. That may follow—or may not—but there is something fundamentally deeper going on:

Man does not live by bread alone, and if we let go of certain foods or other pleasures for a time, we are in a better position to grasp what more man lives on than mere food. When we rein in the nourishing food of the body and its delights, we may find ourselves in a better position to take in the nourishing food of the spirit and much deeper spiritual delights.

Fasting pursued wrongly can do us no good, and it is the wisdom of the Orthodox Church to undergo such asceticism under the direction of one's priest or spiritual father. But the core issue in fasting is one that matters some for the body and much more for the spirit.

24. Splenda and contraception are both body-conquering technologies that allow us to conquer part of our embodied nature: that the body takes nourishment from food, and that the greatest natural pleasure has deep fertile potential. And indeed, the technologies we call "space-conquering technologies" might more aptly be titled, "body-conquering technologies," because they are used to conquer our embodied and embedded state as God made it.
25. Today, "everybody knows" that the Orthodox Church, not exactly like the Catholic Church allowing *contraceptive timing*, allows contraception under certain guidelines, and the Orthodox Church has never defined a formal position on contraception above the level of one's spiritual father. This is due, among other factors, to some influential scholarly spin-doctoring, the academic equivalent of the NBC *Dateline* episode that "proved" that a certain truck had a fire hazard in a 20mph collision by filming a 30mph collision (presented as a 20mph collision) and making sure there was a fiery spectacle by also detonating explosives planted above the truck's gas tank.
26. St. John Chrysostom wrote,

Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a prostitute remain only a prostitute, but you make her a murderer as well... Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, and from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you despise the gift of God, and fight with his laws?

What is a curse, do you seek it as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing? In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife.

27. The Blessed Augustine devastatingly condemned Natural Family Banning: if procreation is sliced away from marital relations, Augustine says point blank, then true marriage is forbidden. There is no wife, but only a mistress, and if this is not enough, he holds that those who enjoin contraception fall under the full freight of St. Paul's blistering words about forbidding marriage:

Now, the Spirit expressly says that in the last days some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron: for they forbid marriage and demand avoidance of foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Augustine absolutely did not believe that one can enjoy the good of marriage and treat the blessing of marriage's fertility as a burden and a curse. Such an idea is strange, like trying to celebrate the good of medical care while taking measures to prevent it from improving one's health.

28. Such condemnations stem from the unanimous position of the Church Fathers on contraception.

29. Such words seem strange today, and English Bible translations seem to only refer to contraception once: when God struck Onan dead for "pull and pray." (There are also some condemnations of *pharmakeia* and *pharmakoi*—"medicine men" one would approach for a contraceptive—something that is lost in translation, unfortunately giving the impression that occult sin alone was the issue at stake.)

30. Contraception allows a marriage *à la carte*: it offers some control over pursuing a couple's hopes, together, on terms that they choose without relinquishing control altogether. And the root of this is a deeper answer to St. John Chrysostom's admonition to leave other brothers and sisters to their children as their inheritance rather than mere earthly possessions.

(This was under what would today be considered a third world standard of living, not the first world lifestyle of many people who claim today that they "simply cannot afford any more children"—which reflects not only that they cannot afford to have more children *and retain their expected (entitled?) standard of living for them and their children*, but their priorities once they realize that they may be unable to have both.)

31. Contraception is chosen because it serves a certain way of life: it is not an accident in any way, shape, or form that Planned Parenthood advertises, for both contraception, "Take control of your life!" For whether one plans two children, or four, or none, Planned Parenthood sings the siren song of having your life under your control, or at least as much under control as you can make it, where you choose the terms where you will deal with your children, if and when you want.

32. Marriage and monasticism both help people grow up by helping them to learn being out of control. Marriage may provide the asceticism of minding children and monasticism that of obedience to one's elder, but these different-sounding activities are aimed at building the same kind of spiritual virtue and power.
33. Counselors offer people, not the help that many of them seek in controlling those they struggle with, but something that is rarely asked: learning to be at peace with letting go of being in control of others, and the unexpected freedom that that brings. Marriage and monasticism, at their best, do not provide a minor adjustment that one manages and is then on top of, but an arena, a spiritual struggle, a training ground in which people live the grace and beauty of the Sermon on the Mount, and are freed from the prison chamber of seeking control and the dank dungeon of living for themselves.
34. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than them? And why do you worry about the lilies of the field: how they grow. They neither toil nor spin;" they have joy and peace. The height of technological progress in having pleasure without losing control—in artificial sweeteners, contraceptives and anything else—utterly pales in comparison.
35. Technology is not evil. Many technologies have a right use, but that use is a use to pursue maturity and asceticism, not an aid to living childishly.

36. Wine was created by God as good, and it has a right use. But the man who seeks in wine a way to be happy or a way to drive away his problems has already lost.
37. One classic attitude to wine was not "We forbid drinking wine," or even "It would be better not to drink wine at all, but a little bit does not do too much damage," but goes beyond saying, "The pleasure of wine was given by God as good" to saying: "Wine is an important training ground to learn the ascesis of moderation, and learn a lesson that cannot be escaped: we are not obligated to learn moderation in wine, but if we do not drink wine, we still need moderation in work, play, eating, and everything else, and many of us would do well to grow up in ascesis in the training arena of enjoying wine and be better prepared for other areas of life where the need for the ascesis of moderation, of saying 'when' and drawing limits, is not only something we *should not* dodge: it is something we *can never* escape."
38. The ascetical use of technology is like the ascetical use of wine. It is pursued out of maturity, and as a support to maturity. It is not pursued out of childishness, nor as a support to childishness. And it should never be the center of gravity in our lives. (Drinking becomes a problem more or less when it becomes the focus of a person's life and pursuits.)
39. The Harvard business study behind *Good to Great* found that the most effective companies often made pioneering use of technology, but technology was never the center of the picture: however many news stories might be printed about how they used technologies, few of the CEOs mentioned technology at all when they discussed their company's success, and none of them ascribed all that

much importance to even their best technology.

Transformed companies—companies selected in a study of all publicly traded U.S. companies whose astonishing stock history began to improve and then outperformed the market by something like a factor of three, sustained for fifteen years straight—didn't think technology was all that important, not even technologies their people pioneered. They focused on something more significant.

40. *Good to Great* leadership saw their companies' success in terms of people.
41. There were other finds, including that the most effective CEOs were not celebrity rockstars in the limelight, but humble servant leaders living for something beyond themselves. In a study about what best achieves what greed wants, not even one of the top executives followed a mercenary creed of ruthless greed and self-advancement.
42. If people, not technology, make businesses tremendously profitable, then perhaps people who want more than profit also need something beyond technology in order to reach the spiritual riches and treasures in Heaven that we were made for.
43. The right use of technology comes out of asceticism and is therefore according to nature.
44. In Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a "man" with human genes who starts with an entirely Martian heritage as his culture and tradition, comes to say, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being was organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." The

insight is true, but takes shape in a way that completely cuts against the grain of *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

45. One most immediate example is that the science fiction vision is of an ideal of a community of "water brothers" who painstakingly root out natural jealousy and modesty, and establish free love within their circle: such, the story would have it, provides optimal human happiness. As compellingly as it may be written into the story, one may bring up studies which sought to find out which of the sexualities they wished to promote provided the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, and found to their astonishment and chagrin that the greatest satisfaction comes, not from any creative quest for the ultimate thrill, but from something they despised as a completely unacceptable *perversion*: a husband and wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, working to become one for as long as they both shall live, and perhaps even grateful for the fruitfulness of their love. Perhaps such an arrangement offers greater satisfaction than trying to "push the envelope" of adventuresome arrangements precisely *because* it is "functioning the way a human being was organized to function."

46. People only seek the ultimate exotic thrill when they are unhappy. Gnosticism is a spiritual porn whose sizzle entices people who despair: its "good news" of an escape from the miserable here and now is "good news" as misery would want it. Today's Gnosticism may rarely teach, as did earlier Gnostic honesty, that our world could not be the good creation of the ultimately good God, but holding that we need to escape our miserable world was as deep in ancient Gnostics' bones as an alcoholic experiences that our miserable world needs to be medicated by drunkenness. Baudelaire said, in the nineteenth century:

"Keep getting drunk! Whether with wine, or with poetry, or with virtue, as you please, keep getting drunk," in a poem about medicating what might be a miserable existence. Today he might have said, "Keep getting drunk! Whether with New Age, or with the endless virtual realities of SecondWife, or with the ultimate Viagra-powered thrill, as you please, keep getting drunk!"

47. What SecondLife—or rather SecondWife—offers is the apparent opportunity to have an alternative to a here and now one is not satisfied with. Presumably there are merits to this alternate reality: some uses are no more a means to escape the here and now than a mainstream business's website, or phoning ahead to make a reservation at a restaurant. But SecondWife draws people with an alternative to the here and now they feel stuck in.
48. It is one thing to get drunk to blot out the misery of another's death. It is another altogether to keep getting drunk to blot out the misery of one's own life.
49. An old story from African-American lore tells of how a master and one of his slaves would compete by telling dreams they claimed they had. One time, the master said that he had a dream of African-American people's Heaven, and everything was dingy and broken—and there were lots of dirty African-Americans everywhere. His slave answered that he had dreamed of white people's Heaven, and everything was silver and gold, beautiful and in perfect order—but there wasn't a soul in the place!
50. Much of what technology seems to offer is to let people of all races enter a Heaven where there are luxuries the witty slave could never dream of, but in the end there is nothing

much better than a Heaven full of gold and empty of people.

51. "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
52. There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of asceticism. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.
53. "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
54. Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for

tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and *never* use it to replace meat.

55. We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.
56. Today the older generation seems to grouse about our younger generation. Some years ago, someone in the AARP magazine quipped about young people, "Those tight pants! Those frilly hairdos! And you should see what the girls are wearing!" Less witty complaints about the younger generation's immodest style of dress, and their rude disrespect for their elders can just as well be found from the time of Mozart, for instance, or Socrates: and it seems that today's older generation is as apt to criticize the younger generation as their elders presumably were. But here something really *is* to be said about the younger generation.
57. The older generation kvetching about how the younger generation today has it so easy with toys their elders never dreamed of, never seem to connect their sardonic remarks with how they went to school with discipline problems like spitwads and the spoiled younger generation faced easily available street drugs, or how a well-behaved boy with an e-mail address may receive X-rated spam. "The youth these days" have luxuries their parents never even dreamed of—and temptations and dangers their parents never conceived, not in their worst nightmares.
58. Elders have traditionally complained about the young people being rude, much of which amounts to mental inattention. Part of politeness is being present in body and

mind to others, and when the older generation was young, *their* elders assuredly corrected them from not paying attention in the presence of other people and themselves.

59. When they were young, the older generation's ways of being rude included zoning out and daydreaming, making faces when adults turned their back, and in class throwing paper airplanes and passing notes—and growing up meant, in part, learning to turn their back on that arsenal of temptations, much like previous generations. And many of the older generation genuinely turned their backs on those temptations, and would genuinely like to help the younger generation learn to honor those around with more of their physical and mental *presence*.
60. Consumer electronics like the smartphone, aimed to offer something to youth, often advertise to the younger generation precisely a far better way to avoid a spiritual lesson that was hard enough for previous generations to learn without nearly the same degree of temptation. Few explains to them that a smartphone is not only very useful, but it is designed and sold as an enticing ultra-portable temptation.
61. Literature can be used to escape. But the dividing line between great and not-so-great literature is less a matter of theme, talent, or style than the question of whether the story serves to help the reader escape the world, or engage it.
62. In technology, the question of the virtuous use of technology is less a matter of how fancy the technology is, or how recent, than whether it is used to escape the world or engage it. Two friends who use cell phones to help them meet face-to-face are using technology to support, in

some form, the timeless way of relating to other people. Family members who IM to ask prayer for someone who is sick also incorporate technology into the timeless way of relating to other people. This use of technology is quiet and unobtrusive, and supports a focus on something greater than technology: the life God gave us.

63. Was technology made for man, or man for technology?
64. Much of the economy holds the premise that a culture should be optimized to produce wealth: man was made for the economy. The discipline of advertising is a discipline of influencing people without respecting them as people: the customer, apparently, exists for the benefit of the business.
65. Advertising encourages us to take shopping as a sacrament, and the best response we can give is not activism as such, but a refusal of consent.
66. Shopping is permissible, but not sacramental shopping, because sacramental shopping is an ersatz sacrament and identifying with brands an ersatz spiritual discipline. At best sacramental shopping is a distraction; more likely it is a lure and the bait for a spiritual trap.
67. We may buy a product which carries a mystique, but not the mystique itself: and buying a cool product without buying into its "cool" is hard, harder than not buying. But if we buy into the cool, we forfeit great spiritual treasure.
68. Love the Lord your God with all of your *heart* and all of your life and all of your mind and all of your might, love your neighbor as yourself, and use things: do not love things while using people.

69. Things can do the greatest good when we stop being infatuated with them and put first things first. The most powerful uses of technology, and the best, come from loving those whom you should love and using what you should use. We do not benefit from being infatuated with technology, nor from acting on such infatuation.
70. The Liturgy prays, "Pierce our souls with longing for Thee." Our longing for transcendence is a glory, and the deepest thing that draws us in advertisements for luxury goods, does so because of the glory we were made to seek.
71. But let us attend to living in accordance with nature. Ordinarily when a technology is hailed as "space-conquering," it is on a deep level *body-conquering*, defeating part of the limitations of our embodied nature—which is to say, defeating part of our embodied nature that is in a particular place in a particular way.
72. Technologies to pass great distance quickly, or make it easy to communicate without being near, unravel what from ancient times was an ancient social fabric. They offer something of a line-item veto on the limits of our embodied state: if they do not change our bodies directly, they make our embodied limitations less relevant.
73. A technology can conquer how the body takes nourishment from food, for instance, and therefore be body-conquering without being space-conquering. But whether celebrated or taken for granted, space-conquering technologies are called space-conquering because they make part of the limitations of our embodied nature less relevant.

74. There is almost a parody of asceticism in space-conquering technologies. Asceticism works to transcend the limited body, and space-conquering technologies seem a way to do the same. But they are opposites.
75. "The demons always fast:" such people are told to instill that fasting has a place and a genuine use, but anyone who focuses too much on fasting, or fasts too rigidly, is well-advised to remember that every single demon outfasts every single saint. But there is something human about fasting: only a being made to eat can benefit from refraining from eating. Fasting is useful because, unlike the angels and demons, a man is not created purely a spirit, but created both spirit and body, and they are linked together. Asceticism knows better, and is more deeply attuned to nature, to attempt to work on the spirit with the body detached and ignored.
76. Even as asceticism subdues the comforts and the body, the work is not only to transfigure the spirit, and transform the body.
77. In a saint the transfiguration means that when the person has died, the body is not what horror movies see in dead bodies: it is glorified into relics.
78. This is a fundamentally different matter from circumventing the body's limitations. There may be good, ascetical uses for space-conquering technologies: but the good part of it comes from the asceticism shining through the technology.
79. The limitations of our embodied existence—aging, bodily aches and pains, betrayal, having doors closed in our face—have been recognized as spiritual stepping stones, and

the mature wonder, not whether they have too many spiritual stepping stones, but whether they might need more. Many impoverished saints were concerned, not with whether their life was too hard, but whether it was too easy. Some saints have been tremendously wealthy, but they used their wealth for other purposes than simply pandering to themselves.

80. Some might ask today, for instance, whether there might be something symbolic to the burning bush that remained unconsumed which St. Moses the Lawgiver saw. And there are many layers of spiritual meaning to the miracle—an emblem of the Theotokos's virgin birthgiving—but it is not the proper use of symbolic layers to avoid the literal layer, without which the symbolic layers do not stand. If the question is, "Isn't there something symbolic about the story of the miracle of the burning bush?", the answer is, "Yes, but it is a fundamental error to use the symbolic layers to dodge the difficulty of literally believing the miracle." In like fashion, there are many virtuous uses of technology, but it is a fundamental error to expect those uses to include using technology to avoid the difficult lessons of spiritual asceticism.

81. Living according to nature is not a luxury we add once we have taken care of necessities: part of harmony with nature is built into necessities. Our ancestors gathered from the natural world, not to seek harmony with nature, but to meet their basic needs—often with far fewer luxuries than we have—and part of living according to nature has usually meant few, if any, luxuries. Perhaps there is more harmony with nature today in driving around a city to run errands for other people, than a luxurious day out in the countryside.

82. Some of the promise the Internet seems to offer is the dream a mind-based society: a world of the human spirit where there is no distraction of external appearance because you have no appearance save that of a handle or avatar, for instance, or a world where people need not appear male or female except as they choose. But the important question is not whether technology through the internet can deliver such a dream, but whether the dream is a dream or a nightmare.
83. To say that the Internet is much more mind-based than face-to-face interactions is partly true. But to say that a mind-based society is more fit for the human spirit than the timeless way of relating, in old-fashioned meatspace, is to correct the Creator on His mistaken notions regarding His creatures' best interests.
84. People still use the internet all the time as an adjunct to the timeless way of relating. Harmony with nature is not disrupted by technology's use as an adjunct nearly so much as when it serves as a replacement. Pushing for a mind-based society, and harmony with nature, may appeal to the same people, especially when they are considered as mystiques. But pushing for a mind-based society is pushing for a greater breach of living according to nature, widening the gulf between modern society and the ancient human of human life. There is a contradiction in pushing for our life to be both more and less according to nature.
85. There is an indirect concern for asceticism in companies and bosses that disapprove of clock watching. The concern is not an aversion to technology, or that periodically glancing at one's watch takes away all that much time from real work. The practical concern is of a spiritual state

that hinders work: the employee's attention and interest are divided, and a bad spiritual state overflows into bad work.

86. In terms of ascesis, the scattered state that cannot enjoy the present is the opposite of a spiritual condition called *nepsis* or, loosely, "watchfulness."

87. The problem that manifests itself in needing to keep getting drunk, with New Age and its hopes for, at the moment, 2012 delivering us from a miserable here and now, or needing a more and more exotic drugged-up sexual thrill, or fleeing to SecondWife, is essentially a lack of *nepsis*.

88. To be delivered by such misery is not a matter of a more radical escape. In a room filled with eye-stinging smoke, what is needed is not a more heroic way to push away the smoke, but a way of quenching the fire. Once the fire is quenched, the smoke dissipates, and with it the problem of escaping the smoke.

89. *Nepsis* is a watchfulness over one's *heart*, including the mind.

90. *Nepsis* is both like and unlike metacognition. It observes oneself, but it is not thinking about one's thinking, or taking analysis to the next level: analysis of normal analysis. It is more like coming to one's senses, getting back on course, and then trying to stay on course. It starts with a mindfulness of how one has not been mindful, which then flows to other areas of life.

91. The man who steps back and observes that he is seeking ways to escape the here and now, has an edge. The same

goes with worrying or other passions by which the soul is disturbed: for many of the things that trouble our soul, seduce us to answer the wrong question. This is almost invariably more pedestrian than brilliant metacognition, and does not look comfortable.

92. Metanoia, or repentance, is both unconditional surrender and waking up and smelling the coffee. It is among the most terrifying of experiences, but afterwards, one realizes, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!"

93. Once one is past that uncomfortable recognition, one is free to grasp something better.

That "something better" is ultimately Christ, and there is a big difference between a mind filled with Christ and a mind filled with material things as one is trying to flee malaise.

94. The attempt to escape a miserable here and now is doomed. We cannot escape into Eden. But we can find the joy of Eden, and the joy of Heaven, precisely in the here and now we are seduced to seek to escape.

95. Living the divine life in Christ, is a spiritual well out of which many treasures pour forth: harmony with nature, the joy of Eden and all the other things that we are given if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His perfect righteousness.

96. It was a real achievement when people pushing the envelope of technology and, with national effort and billions of dollars of resources, NASA succeeded in lifting a man to the moon.

97. But, as a monk pointed out, the Orthodox Church has known for aeons how to use no resources beyond a little bread and water, and succeed in lifting a man up to God.

98. And we miss the greatest treasures if we think that *asceticism* or its fruits are only for monks.

99. And there is something that lies beyond even asceticism: contemplation of *the glory of God*.

100. Your move!

"Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request to Orthodox Clergy

Some time ago, a pastor contacted me and asked permission to quote one of my poems. We've been in contact at least occasionally, and he sent me an email newsletter that left me asking him for permission to quote.

Let me cite the article in full (*©2014 Pastor Vince Homan, used by very gracious permission*):

When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. Proverbs 10:19

I recently violated a longstanding position I have held; to avoid all further interaction with social media, particularly Facebook. It wasn't necessarily because of any moral high ground; it was more because I had already mastered e-mail and was satisfied with my online accomplishments. In addition, I didn't have any additional

time or interest to keep up with pithy little sayings, videos, cartoons, social life, or even cute kiddie pictures. But now I am happily in the fold of Facebook users (particularly if there is a picture of one of my grandbabies on it). In addition, it has allowed me to discover that there are literally dozens of people who are just waiting to be my friends. However, the real reason I'm on Facebook is work related. Thanks to the good work done by a few of our church members; both of our churches have excellent Facebook pages. In order to access those pages, I needed an account, so—here I am. And though all seems well with the world of Facebook, I am discovering that it is not always the case. For all the "warm fuzzies," and catching up with friends and family it offers ... there is also a dark side.

At a recent continuing education event I attended, the speaker presented some dire consequences to uninhibited use of social media. He reported that social media had replaced money as the number one contributor to marriage problems. He said it wasn't so much affairs that online relationships led to; rather it was the persistent flirting that broke down barriers and hedges, which once protected the marriage. Such interaction often led to a downward spiral, corrupting and compromising the marriage vow. One in five divorces involves the social networking site Facebook, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. A staggering 80% of divorce lawyers have also reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating, with Facebook by far the biggest offender. Flirty messages and and photographs found on Facebook are increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences. Many cases revolve around social media users who get back in touch with old flames they hadn't heard from in many years.

PBS recently hosted a webinar, *This Emotional Life*, about the internet's impact on relationship and marriage.[1] One of the panelists, Theresa Bochard, explored the issue a bit farther in an article originally published on PsychCentral.com. She said that after reading hundreds of comments and emails from people who have been involved in online relationships or emotional affairs as well as the responses on several discussion boards, she concluded that while the internet and social media *can* foster intimacy in a marriage, it seems to do more harm than good. She reported that an astounding 90% of opposite-sex online relationships were damaging to the marriage. Facebook affairs are threatening healthy couples too.

"I have suggested to myself to write a thank you note to the inventors of Facebook and Myspace because they have been responsible for a significant percentage of my income," says marriage counselor Dr. Dennis Boike. He's not kidding. "I'm having people say I never would have expected me to do this. It's in the privacy of my computer. I'm not going out anywhere, I'm not dressing for it, I'm not smelling of another's perfume. There are no tell-tale signs except my computer record." But a new study suggests Facebook can also help disconnect you from your better half. The site, which boasts more than 350 million active users, is mentioned in over 20% of divorce petitions, according to Divorce-Online.

Prominent Houston divorce attorney Bucky Allshouse can understand why. "It's really kind of shocking what people put on Facebook," says Allshouse. Perhaps it's not so shocking that the social networking site can essentially pour kerosene on "old flames." Most online relationships start out benign: an email from a person you knew in college, friending an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend on Facebook (as suggested by Facebook: "people you might know"), getting to know a co-worker or acquaintance better online. But the

relationship can take a dangerous turn very quickly if you're not careful and even more easily if you are doing most of the talking behind a computer.

We have no non-verbals with which to interpret people's conversation when we communicate online. What we say can be misinterpreted and come off in a way we don't intend. Or worse, we purposely allow our conversation to drift into an unhealthy area, where we put out "feelers" to see if the person we are communicating with will do the same. We will text things to people that would make us blush if we said them in person. All too often the end result is flirting, compromising our values, and allowing the secrecy of social media to sweep us off our feet and into a quagmire of social dysfunction. This is not a victimless choice. Many times, inappropriate conversations through social media lead to great pain with children, spouses, parents, and friends.

One such instance occurred when Jonathan found Sharon on Facebook, 20 years after he dumped her one week after their high school prom. She had never married, while he had and was also the father of two teenagers. During months of emailing and texting, Sharon proved a sympathetic listener to his sense of isolation and loneliness within his own marriage. He found they could talk easily, picking up with the friendship they had had years before. They shared feelings they had never shared with others. After a few months, they decided to cross a few states and meet half way. Then, they talked of marriage. Shortly after, Jonathan went through with his divorce and months later he and Sharon married. Not surprisingly, and after only four months, they divorced. What happened? Fantasy was hit hard by reality. They went into a marriage without really spending time to know each other as they are today. Their romance was fueled by their history (as 18-year-olds) not their adult present. The romantic idea of reconnecting with

an old lover, at a time Jonathan was unhappy in his marriage, was a recipe for danger.

In talking about it later, Jonathan realized he had not intended to start up a romance; he hadn't intended to leave his marriage in the first place. As he and Sharon shared feelings, he felt more cared for by her than by his wife. When asked who raised the issue of marriage, he wasn't sure. "Perhaps she pushed it, but I may have been just been musing something like, 'Wouldn't it have been great if we got married,' and that led her to talk about marriage. I wonder if I led her on. Did I promise more than I had realized and then feel in love with my own fantasy?"[ii]

When we cross barriers that were intended to keep us safely within the parameters of our marriage vows, we start in internal conflict—one that attacks our emotional and mental center. Conversations with people of the opposite sex can lead to flirtations. Flirtations can lead to imaginations which lead to fixations ... and there is a fine line between fixation and passion. Promiscuity is rarely a random act. It is pre-meditated. Something triggers our thoughts. And that something *can* be social media.

Christians must be wary of intimate conversations with people of the opposite sex; it is a trap that too many good people have been caught in. Paul wrote: "We are casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It is good advice; cast down imaginations ... take every thought captive, because it is often out of our imaginations and thoughts that bad choices are born. Jesus said something similar. Speaking to the disciples he warned, "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:18-19). The battleground

is not the computer or cell phone; it is the heart and the mind. But secretive messaging avenues like social media offers can help plant the seed for a battle that good people lose every day.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis, a marriage and family therapist of 39 years and author of numerous relationship books, offers these social networking guidelines for married couples.

1. **Be clear about your agenda in contacting the other person.**
2. **Limit the frequency of your time online.** This sets a good boundary around the social networking contact.
3. **Don't talk intimately.** By not sharing intimacies with your correspondence, you reduce the chance of sending a message that you want a more intimate relationship.
4. **Let your spouse know with whom you are contacting.** This openness makes it clear you have nothing to hide. (I would add, especially so if you are contacting a person of the opposite sex).[iii].
5. **Share your outgoing and received emails/texts with your spouse.** Sharing communications removes any chance for jealousy or misunderstandings (I would add, share passwords with your spouse; give them full access to your social media sites).[iv].

- 6. Do not meet in person unless your spouse is with you.** Meeting up with old friends with your spouse by your side is a reminder that you two are a team and removes sending mixed messages to your former lover. This also reinforces the importance of fixing your marriage before playing with the flames of old flames.[v].

Jesus taught us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). Social media is a place that Scripture applies. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a person places their personal integrity and honor on the line in the marriage vow more than anything else in their life. And I believe marriage is under attack from multiple directions. I have officiated at many young couples weddings. I spend time with each one, warning them of the potential pitfalls and dangers; encouraging them to make their marriage a priority each day. Because I know the reality; many of the ones I marry won't make it. It's not because they are bad people or people of no character; but they get *caught* in a trap, and they can't seem to find a way out. And I also know most of them deeply regret their decisions after the fallout of their choices turn to consequences.

Social media can be a wonderful thing. I love keeping in touch with family and looking at pictures of the grandbabies. Now our churches are using social media to share the gospel. But Christians should be wary of the potential dangers. We must keep up our barriers at all times. James warned, "Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters" (James 1:14-16). Indeed, we must not be misled, rather be guided by the protective barriers God

has placed around us; especially so if we are married. We must watch our words carefully and keep our thoughts captive. The sanctity of our marriage vow demands it.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Vince

[i] <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/does-internet-promote-or-damage-marriage>

[ii] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

[iii] Parenthetical mine

[iv] Parenthetical mine

[v] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

This article left me *reeling*.

In part, I wondered if my collection in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, was simply wrong. Or if someone might rightly say to me, "What you give in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is helpful up to a point, at least for someone with a similar background to yours. However, regular people need much more concrete guidance." What struck me very concretely about Pastor Vince's article is that it gave very practical advice on how married people can appropriately handle Facebook.

The article reminded me of remarks I'd seen by people interested in making computers that people can actually use that the Apple Macintosh was the first computer worth criticizing. Perhaps some detail of the guidance in the article above *could* be criticized: perhaps much of it *should* be criticized: but it may be the first article I've seen on the topic that was *worth* criticizing.

The concept of "social antibodies": it's not just Facebook

Paul Graham's "The Acceleration of Addictiveness" is worth quoting the perceptive main body, if not necessarily his footnotes, and is an off-the-web quotation as is permitted in his FAQ. Here's the main body, from paulgraham.com/addiction.html:

What hard liquor, cigarettes, heroin, and crack have in common is that they're all more concentrated forms of less addictive predecessors. Most if not all the things we describe as addictive are. And the scary thing is, the process that created them is accelerating.

We wouldn't want to stop it. It's the same process that cures diseases: technological progress. Technological progress means making things do more of what we want. When the thing we want is something we want to want, we consider technological progress good. If some new technique makes solar cells x% more efficient, that seems strictly better. When progress concentrates something we don't want to want—when it transforms opium into heroin—it seems bad. But it's the same process at work.

No one doubts this process is accelerating, which means increasing numbers of things we like will be transformed into things we like too much.

As far as I know there's no word for something we like too much. The closest is the colloquial sense of "addictive." That usage has become increasingly common during my lifetime. And it's clear why: there are an increasing number of things we need it for. At the extreme end of the spectrum are crack and meth. Food has been transformed by a combination of factory farming and innovations in food processing into something with way more immediate bang for the buck, and you can see the

results in any town in America. Checkers and solitaire have been replaced by World of Warcraft and FarmVille. TV has become much more engaging, and even so it can't compete with Facebook.

The world is more addictive than it was 40 years ago. And unless the forms of technological progress that produced these things are subject to different laws than technological progress in general, the world will get more addictive in the next 40 years than it did in the last 40.

The next 40 years will bring us some wonderful things. I don't mean to imply they're all to be avoided. Alcohol is a dangerous drug, but I'd rather live in a world with wine than one without. Most people can coexist with alcohol; but you have to be careful. More things we like will mean more things we have to be careful about.

Most people won't, unfortunately. Which means that as the world becomes more addictive, the two senses in which one can live a normal life will be driven ever further apart. One sense of "normal" is statistically normal: what everyone else does. The other is the sense we mean when we talk about the normal operating range of a piece of machinery: what works best.

These two senses are already quite far apart. Already someone trying to live well would seem eccentrically abstemious in most of the US. That phenomenon is only going to become more pronounced. You can probably take it as a rule of thumb from now on that if people don't think you're weird, you're living badly.

Societies eventually develop antibodies to addictive new things. I've seen that happen with cigarettes. When cigarettes first appeared, they spread the way an infectious disease spreads through a previously isolated population. Smoking rapidly became a (statistically) normal thing. There were ashtrays everywhere. We had

ashtrays in our house when I was a kid, even though neither of my parents smoked. You had to for guests.

As knowledge spread about the dangers of smoking, customs changed. In the last 20 years, smoking has been transformed from something that seemed totally normal into a rather seedy habit: from something movie stars did in publicity shots to something small huddles of addicts do outside the doors of office buildings. A lot of the change was due to legislation, of course, but the legislation couldn't have happened if customs hadn't already changed.

It took a while though—on the order of 100 years. And unless the rate at which social antibodies evolve can increase to match the accelerating rate at which technological progress throws off new addictions, we'll be increasingly unable to rely on customs to protect us. Unless we want to be canaries in the coal mine of each new addiction—the people whose sad example becomes a lesson to future generations—we'll have to figure out for ourselves what to avoid and how. It will actually become a reasonable strategy (or a more reasonable strategy) to suspect everything new.

In fact, even that won't be enough. We'll have to worry not just about new things, but also about existing things becoming more addictive. That's what bit me. I've avoided most addictions, but the Internet got me because it became addictive while I was using it.

Most people I know have problems with Internet addiction. We're all trying to figure out our own customs for getting free of it. That's why I don't have an iPhone, for example; the last thing I want is for the Internet to follow me out into the world. My latest trick is taking long hikes. I used to think running was a better form of exercise than hiking because it took less time. Now the slowness of

hiking seems an advantage, because the longer I spend on the trail, the longer I have to think without interruption.

Sounds pretty eccentric, doesn't it? It always will when you're trying to solve problems where there are no customs yet to guide you. Maybe I can't plead Occam's razor; maybe I'm simply eccentric. But if I'm right about the acceleration of addictiveness, then this kind of lonely squirming to avoid it will increasingly be the fate of anyone who wants to get things done. We'll increasingly be defined by what we say no to.

"The Acceleration of Addictiveness" talks about a little bit bigger picture about things that are addictive. Though he mentions Facebook as something that's even more addictive than television, he's clear that the big picture is more than addictive little Facebook. Graham talks about a concept of "social antibodies" which I think is incredibly useful.

Decades ago, smoking cut through the US like a hot knife through butter. But, while smoking is still dangerous and there still continue to be new smokers, we no longer have glamour shots of celebrities holding cigarettes in some flashy, sophisticated, classy pose. Smoking is no longer "sexy;" over the past 20 years it has been seen as seedy, and "smoker" is not exactly the kindest thing to call someone. (I remember one friend commenting that he could think of a number of terms more polite than "smoker," none of which were appropriate to the present company.) *As a society, the US has developed social antibodies to smoking now.*

There are many things that we need "social antibodies" for, and we keep developing new technologies, Facebook included, that need social antibodies. The six prescriptions in the quoted articles are essentially social antibodies for how to use Facebook without jeopardizing your marriage. They may seem harsh and excessively cautious, but I submit that they are easier to go

through than divorce. *Much easier. A piece of cake!* And I quote Pastor Vince's article because it's something we need more of.

A helpful parallel to technology: Wine as an example

Simply not drinking alcoholic beverages is an option that I respect more as I think about it, but for the sake of this discussion, I will leave it on the side. I am interested in helpful parallels for "social antibodies" in moderation and restraint in using technology, and as much as I may respect people who do not drink, that option is not as interesting for my investigation. This is especially true because people living in my society assume that you are *not* abstaining from every technology that can cause trouble. So with a respectful note about not drinking alcohol at all, I want to look at social antibodies for moderate, temperate, and appropriate use of wine.

Wine and liquor slowly increased in strength in Western Europe, slowly enough that societies had at least the *chance* to build social antibodies. This makes for a marked contrast to escape through hard liquor among Native Americans, where hard liquor blew through decimated nations and peoples like escape through today's street drugs would have blown through a Europe already coping with the combined effects of the bubonic plague and of barbarian invasions. Perhaps there are genetic differences affecting Native Americans and alcohol. A Native American friend told me that Native American blood can't really cope with sugar, essentially unknown in Native American lands apart from some real exceptions like maple syrup. And lots of alcohol is worse than lots of sugar, even if some of us wince at the level of sugar and/or corn syrup in the main US industrial diet. (Even those of us not of Native American blood would do well to restrict our consumption of artificially concocted sugars.) But aside from the genetic question, introducing 80 proof whiskey to societies

that did not know how to cope with beer would have been rough enough even if there were no genetic questions and no major external stresses on the societies. If there was something of a stereotype about Native Americans and whiskey, maybe part of that is because hard liquor that had been developed over centuries in the West appeared instantaneously, under singularly unfortunate conditions, in societies that had not even the social antibodies to cope with even the weaker of beers.

I cite St. Cyril of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book Two, Chapter II: On Drinking as a model for approaching alcohol (and, by extension, a serious reference point in understanding moderate use of technology), with some reservations. The translation I link to is obscure and archaic, and if you can get past that, the individual prescriptions are the sort that would only be all kept (or, for that matter, mostly kept) by the sort of people who are filled with pride that they observe ancient canons more strictly than any canonical bishop. In other words, *don't* try these directions at home unless you know you are in agreement with your priest or spiritual father. But the chapter of *The Instructor* on wine offers a **priceless** glimpse into real, live social antibodies on how to navigate dangerous waters. This is a live example of the sort of things we need. The book as a whole covers several topics, including clothing and boundaries between men and women, and they could serve as a model for pastoral literature to address the challenges offered to spiritual life today. Not specifically that *online* interactions between men and women **introduce** an element of danger. That element of danger has always been there, and always will be there. But online interactions frame things a little differently. This means that people with social antibodies that would show appropriate caution face-to-face might not recognize that you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online, or might not intuit exactly *how* you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online.

I would like to close this section with a word about wine and why I drink it. The politically incorrect way of putting this point is to say that wine is something which literally and figuratively is not part of Islam. Islam works out, in stark relief, what it means to subtract the Incarnation from Christian faith. It means that not only has the Son of God not become incarnate in Christ, but all the more does God become incarnate in his children. It means that Holy Communion is just a symbol, and wine could absolutely, absolutely *never* become the blood of God. Water is necessary and wine is not, as St. Clement tells us, but the Orthodox Church that regards Islam as a Christian heresy used fermented wine exclusively in the Eucharist, and condemned heretics' use of pure water for the same purpose. And my reason for drinking a little wine is that wine has an elasticity that bears the meaning of Jesus's first miracle, turning water into even more wine when wine ran out at a wedding where the guests were already pretty drunk, and it bears the meaning of the Holy Mysteries: few if any material substances are as pregnant with spiritual depth as wine. Ecclesiastes is perhaps the most dismal book in the entire Bible, and "Go, eat thy bread with mirth, and drink thy wine with a joyful heart" is close to being the only invitation to joy in the book. I do not say that this is a reason why people who have decided not to drink should change their mind. However, the theological motive to drink in Christianity comes from a higher plane than the admittedly very real reasons to be careful with alcohol, or else abstain. It's deeper.

Is the iPhone really that cool?

One news story reported that police officers had started using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones, and realized they were incredibly useful. And I wouldn't dispute that at all.

I would say that having an iPhone is a little, but not quite, like being able to call 911, which is the most important number for you to be able to call. 99% of the time it is inappropriate and

perhaps illegal to call 911, but the (less than) 1% of the time you *should* be calling 911, it can save your life. Literally. And I use my iPhone over 1% of the time; besides built-in phone, email, notes, and looking things up on the web, and including my personal logistical dashboard, and apps like GPS, my iPhone makes me more productive, and unsexy nuts and bolts usage has been very useful.

So I wouldn't agree with "Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated my iPhone" that the iPhone is simply "Terrible For Productivity." It certainly *can* be, and unrestrained use *will be*. And for that matter I've seen a lot of exquisitely produced apps in the App Store, and though I've written one iPhone app, I've found precious few apps that look genuinely useful to my purposes. But I am glad I have my iPhone, am not struggling to rein in inappropriately heavy use, and I believe it makes me more productive.

The LinkedIn article "Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone" talked about how one family decided to get rid of their iPhones. The author talked about how the iPhone had taken over their lives. They suggested that trying to use their habit to use the iPhone in moderation was a nonstarter, however enticing it may look. And, on a sobering note, they had earlier tried to avoid using smartphones, even for work. And I am convinced they made the right choice: not having any smartphone use is better than addictive smartphone use, hands down. And while I am cautious about advertising responsible smartphone use to people who can't live without their iPhone—the analogy drawn in the LinkedIn article was, "In hindsight, it's like an alcoholic saying 'I thought I could have it in the house and not drink it.'" But I have iPhone use which is defensible, at least in my opinion; I have drawn a boundary that is partly tacit and partly explicit, and while it can be criticized, it is a non-addictive use of the iPhone. I average less than one text a day; I do not compulsively check *anything* that's out there. A few of the guidelines I found are,

1. **Limit the time you spend using your smartphone.**
The general Orthodox advice is to cut back a little at once so you never experience absolute shock, but you are always stretched a little bit outside your comfort zone. That may be a way to work down cell phone use, or it may not. If you compulsively reach for your smartphone, you might leave it in one room that you're not always in. Put a boundary between yourself and the smartphone.
2. **Limit how often you check your cell phone**
unprovoked. When I'm not at work, I try to limit checking email to once per hour. Limit yourself to maybe once per hour, maybe more, maybe less, and restrain yourself.
3. **When you're going to bed for the day, you're done using your smartphone for the day.** I am not strict in this; I will answer a call, but checking my iPhone, unprovoked, after my evening prayers or my bedtime is a no-no.
4. *Don't use the iPhone as a drone that you need to have always going on. **This includes music, texting, games, and apps, including Vince's hero, Facebook.*** Perhaps the single biggest way that this violates Apple's marketing proposition with the iPhone is that the iPhone is designed and marketed to be a drone that is always with us, a bit of ambient noise, delivering precisely what the Orthodox spiritual tradition, with works like *The Ladder*, tell us is something we don't need.
The iPhone's marketing proposition is to deliver an intravenous drip of noise. The Orthodox Church's Tradition tells us to wean ourself from noise.
5. **iPhones have "Do Not Disturb" mode. Use it.** And be willing to make having "Do Not Disturb" as your

default way of using the phone, and turn it off when you want "*Please Interrupt Me*" mode explicitly.

6. **Don't multitask if you can at all avoid it.** I

remember reading one theology text which claimed as a lesson from computer science, because people can switch between several applications rapidly, that we should take this "lesson" to life and switch between several activities rapidly. And in a business world where multitasking has been considered an essential task, people are finding that multitasking is fool's gold, an ineffective way of working that introduces a significant productivity tax where people could be doing much better. Smartphones make it trivially easy to multiask. *Don't*, unless a situation calls for it.

I note with some concern that the most I've been shocked at someone using an iPhone was when 12 and under kids were manipulating the iPhone, not to get something to done, but to activate the iPhone's smooth animations. Looking over their shoulders in shock has felt like I was eavesdropping on a (non-chemical) *acid trip*. Children's use of iPhones driven by slick animated transitions between applications are even more unhelpful than what the business world means by multitasking. (This feature of kids' use of iPhones has made me kind of wish iPhones were not used by people under 18.)

Now I should post this with a clarification that this is, so to speak, pastoral advice to *myself*. I've found the basic approach helpful, and priests and spiritual fathers may draw on it if they choose in their best judgment to take something from it, but I have not been ordained or tonsured, and I would fall back on the maxim, "As always, ask your priest." My reason to post them is to provide another reference point beyond those given to "social antibodies" in dealing with technology. With these antibodies, I hold the reins, or at least I hold the reins a little better than if I

didn't have these antibodies. But I am aware of something vampiric, something that sucks out energy and life, in even my more moderate use of some technologies, and I am a little wary of comparing my use of technology to moderate and sober use of alcohol. Appropriate use of alcohol can be good, and apart from the risk of drinking getting out of control, it is an overall positive. I'm leery of claiming the same for my use of technology, even if I've tried hard to hold the reins and even if I may do better than average. There is something that has been drained from me; there is something that has been sucked out of me. Maybe I am less harmed than others: but my use of technology has harmed me. I am wary of saying now, "I've found the solution."

In dealing with another passion besides sexual sin, namely anger, people have started to develop "social antibodies:" as mentioned briefly by Vince Homan, we don't have the important channels of people's nonverbal communication, which flattens out half the picture. And when we are angry, we can flame people in emails where there is no human face staring back to us, only letters on the screen that seem *so* right—or perhaps not nearly *right* enough!—and write hurtful flames unlike anything we would dare to say in person, even to someone who hurt us deeply. And on that score, people seem to me to have developed social antibodies; I've been in lots of flamewars and given and received many unholy words, but I don't remember doing that recently, or seeing flames wage out of control on many mailing lists, even if admittedly I don't spend much time on mailing lists. But sexual dangers are not the only dangers online, and for online flaming, most of the people I deal with do not flame people like I did when I was first involved in online community. I've acquired some "social antibodies," as have others I meet online. *Some* social antibodies have already developed, and the case is not desperate for us as a Church learning how to handle technology in the service of holy living instead of simply being a danger.

Pastoral guidance and literature needed

I visited Amazon to try to get a gauge on how much Orthodox pastoral resources about appropriate use of computers, mobile, internet, and technology were out there, a sort of *The Instructor* for technology today, and my search for “orthodox internet” found 109 resources from Christianity, Judaism, and the occult, none of which seemed to be about “How does an Orthodox Christian negotiate the social issues surrounding computers, smartphones, tablets, the Internet, apps, and technology?” Some other searches, such as “orthodox pastoral internet,” “orthodox pastoral smartphone,” and “orthodox pastoral technology” turned up nothing whatsoever. A search for “**orthodox technology**” turned up one page of search results with... *several connected works of my own*. Um, *thanks*, I think. I guess I’m an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn't want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost. But this compliment to me, if it is such (maybe it means I'm off the rails) caught me quite off-guard; I was expecting to see at least *some* publications from people with pastoral authority and experience. But seeing as I'm the local expert, or at least a first author for this particular topic, I'll briefly state my credentials. I have been an Orthodox Christian for a decade, so no longer a recent convert, have works on social dimensions of technology dating back as far as 1994, have two years of postgraduate theology under slightly silly conditions at Cambridge, and two more years under very silly conditions at a sort of “Monty Python teaches theology” PhD program (one Orthodox priest consoled me, “All of us went through that”), but did not complete the program. I grew up with computers back when my home computer access meant going to an orange and black terminal and dialing up a Dec MicroVAX on a 2400 (or less) baud modem, was on basically non-web social

networks years before it became a buzzword, have worked with the web since before it went mainstream, much of it professionally. I've been bitten by some of the traps people are fighting with now. And I'm also kind of bright. So I guess I am, by default, a local expert, although I really think a responsible treatment of the issues raised here would see serious involvement from someone with pastoral qualifications and experience. I haven't been tonsured, at least not yet, and perhaps not ever.

But I would ask priests reading this piece to consider a work on a sort of technological appendix to *The Rudder*, or maybe I shouldn't say that because I have only barely sampled the ancient canons. But I would like to see ideally two pastoral works parallel to *The Instructor*, Book II: one for pastoral clergy use, and one for "the rest of us faithful." When I was a lay parish representative at a diocesan conference, there was talk about appropriate use of the internet; Vladyka PETER read something that talked about the many legitimate benefits we have received from using computers, but talked about porn on the internet, which is a sewer I haven't mentioned; he said that young people are spending hours per day looking at porn, and it's more addictive than some street drugs, and he commented how porn has always been available, but you used to have to put on a disguise and a trenchcoat, and go leave your car in front of a store with the windows covered up, where now, it finds you and it comes free with a basic utility in the privacy of your home. And the biggest thing I can say about freedom from porn comes from the entry for porn in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*:

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what

seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "*Air!*" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects [and a doomed search for the ultimate sexual thrill that decimates sexual satisfaction] even in marriage).

And I would like to suggest some guidelines for fighting Internet porn, quite possibly the most commonly confessed sin among young men today. Sexual sins are among the most easily forgiven: but they are a deep pit. So, in the interest of providing a "dartboard" draft that's put out for people to shoot at. I am intentionally saying more rather than less because it's easier for a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than furnish arbitrarily more additional options. Here are several things I'd consider, both sacred and secular:

I have heard of some helpful things being said in response to confession of sexual sin, such as, "St. Basil said that a man in lust is like a dog licking a saw; the salt it likes tasting is the taste of its own woundedness," and so there is a vicious cycle.

However, I have not heard of a list anywhere near this complete being given when a man confesses a very common (now) sin. Maybe parts of it could be incorporated into advice given at confession.

- 1. If your right eye offends you, tear it out and throw it away from you: for it is better for you that one part of your body should die than that your whole body should be thrown into Hell.**

These words are *not* to be taken literally; if you tore out your right eye you would still be sinning with your left eye, and the Church considers that it was one of Origen's errors to castrate himself. But this is a forceful way of stating a profound truth. There is an incredible freedom that comes, a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, when you want purity the way you want "*Air!*", and you apply a tourniquet as high up as you need to to experience freedom.

Give your only computer power cable to a friend, for a time, because you can't have that temptation in the house? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Have the local teenager turn off display of images in Chrome's settings? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Webpages may look suddenly ugly, but not nearly as ugly as bondage to porn. Only check email at the library? That is really *much* better than the alternative. These tourniquets may be revised in pastoral conversation, but tearing out your right eye is much more free and much less painful than forever wanting to be free from addiction to porn, but also secretly hoping to give in to the present temptation; as the Blessed Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet." There is a great deal of power in wanting purity **now**, and once you go slash-and-burn, the power is amazing.

2. **Install content-control software, such as Norton Family / Norton Family Premier, and have things set up so that only the woman of the house knows the password to make exceptions.** There are legitimate needs for exceptions, and I remember being annoyed when I went to customize Ubuntu Christian Edition and finding that a site with all sorts of software to customize the appearance of Ubuntu was blocked,

apparently because of a small sliver of soft porn in the wallpaper section of a truly massive site. There will be *legitimate* exceptions, but it cuts through a *lot* of self-deception if you get the exception by asking your wife.

3. **Don't bother trying to find out how to disable ~~porn mode~~ "Incognito Mode" on your browser; set up a router to log who visits what websites.**

However much browser makers may tout themselves as being all for empowerment and freedom, they have refused to honor the many requests of men who want freedom from porn and parents who care for their children in many, many voices asking for a way to shut off porn mode.

Routers exist that can log who visits what when, and if you know someone who is good with computers (or you can use paid technical support like the Geek Squad), have a router set up to provide a log of what computers visited what URLs so that the wife or parents know who is visiting what. *The presence of a browser's porn mode suddenly matters a lot less when a router records your browsing history **whether or not** the browser is in porn mode.*

4. **Rein in your stomach. Eat less food. Fast.** It is a classic observation in the Orthodox spiritual tradition that the appetites are tied: gluttony is a sort of "*gateway drug*" to sexual sin, and if you cut away at a full stomach, you necessarily undermine sexual sin and have an easier contest if you are not dealing with sexual temptation on top of a full stomach.

And it has been my own experience that if I keep busy working, besides any issues about "Idle hands are the

Devil's workshop," the temptation to amuse and entertain myself with food is less. So that cuts off the temptation further upstream.

If you eat only to nourish the body, it helps. Even if nourishing food tastes good, cutting out junk like corn-syrup-loaded soft drinks, or anything sold like potato chips in a bag instead of a meal, and moderating consumption of alcohol (none before going to bed; it doesn't help), will help.

5. **When you are tempted, ask the prayers of St. John the Much-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves, perhaps by crossing yourself and saying, "St. John the Much-Suffering, pray to God for me."** You can print the icon from cjshayward.com/john.

Other saints to ask for prayer include St. Mary of Egypt, St. Moses the Hungarian, St. Photina, St. Thais of Egypt, St. Pelagia the Former Courtesan, St. Zlata the New Martyr, St. Boniface, St. Aglaida, St. Eudocia, St. Thomais, St. Pelagia, St. Marcella, St. Basil of Mangazea, St. Niphon, and St. Joseph the Patriarch. (Taken from *Prayers for Purity*.)

6. **Buy and pray with a copy of *Prayers for Purity* when you are tempted, and when you have fallen.** It is an excellent collection and helps when you know you should praying but words are not coming to mind.
7. **If you have been wounded, bring your wound to confession the next weekend. (And try to have a rule of going to church each week.)**

It can be powerful, when you are facing a temptation, not to want to confess the same sin again in a couple of days.

But in parallel with this remember when a visitor asked a saintly monk what they did at the monastery, and the saintly monk answered, "We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up." Fall down seven times and rise up eight: fall down seventy-seven times and rise up seventy-eight: keep on repenting for as long as you need to to achieve some freedom, and know that some saints before you have risen after falling very many times.

8. **Buy a prayer rope, and use it.** When you are tempted, keep repeating a prayer for one prayer rope, and then another, and another, if you need it. Pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," or to St. John the Much-Suffering, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," or to St. Mary of Egypt, "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me."
9. Use the computer only when you have a specific purpose in mind, and not just to browse. Idle hands are the Devil's workshop; "For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind.; Do not look around in the streets of a city, or wander about in its deserted sections. Turn away your eyes from a shapely woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman's beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire."

Men's roving sexual curiosity will find the worst-leading link on a page, and then another, and then another. Drop using roving curiosity when you are at a computer altogether; if you need to deal with boredom, ask your priest or spiritual father for guidance on how to fight the

passion of boredom. But *don't* use the Internet as a solution for boredom; that's *asking* for trouble.

10. Use a support group, if one is available in your area. If I were looking for a support group now, I would call Christian counseling centers in the area if available. Talking with other people who share the same struggle can help.

11. Use XXXchurch.com, or at least explore their website. Their entire purpose is buying you your freedom from lust.

12. Yearn for purity.

In the homily “A Pet Owner's Rules,” I wrote:

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. **Don't drink out of the toilet.**

...

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust. Proverbs says, “The adulterous woman”—today one might add,

"and internet porn" to that—"in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword." Now this is talking about a lot more than pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

When we are in lust, *God does not seem real to us*. Rejecting lust allows us to start being re-sensitized to the beauty of God's creation, to spiritual sweetness, to the lightness of Heavenly light. Lust may feel like you're losing nothing but gaining everything, but try to be mindful of what you lose in lust.

And that's my best stab at making a "dartboard," meant so people will shoot at it and make something better, and more complete and less one-sided in navigating the pitfalls of technology. This isn't the only trap out there—but it may be one of the worst.

I would suggest that we need a comprehensive—or at least *somewhat* comprehensive—set of guidelines for Orthodox use of technology. Such a work might not become dated as quickly as you may think; as I write in the resources section below, I unhesitatingly cite a 1974 title as seriously relevant knowing full well that it makes no reference to individually owned computers or mobile devices: it's a case of "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Or, perhaps, *two* works: one for clergy with pastoral responsibilities, and one for those of us laity seeking our own guidance and salvation. I believe that today, we who have forms of property and wealth undreamed of when Christ gave one of the sternest Luddite warnings ever, "**Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,**" can very easily use things that do not lead to spiritual health: sometimes like

how Facebook can erode marriages that are well defended as regards old-school challenges.

The best I know, secondhand perhaps, is that today's Church Fathers, on Mount Athos perhaps, are simply saying, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" What they want instead sounds like a liberal political-social experiment, where people who have grown up in an urban setting and know only how to navigate life there, will move en masse and form some sort of Amish-like rural communities. Or perhaps something else is envisioned: mass migration to monasteries? Given all that monasticism offers, it seems sad to me to receive the angelic image, of all reasons, only because that's the only remaining option where you can live a sufficiently Luddite life. I have heard of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me saying that we should stop using recent technology at all. I have yet to hear of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me, *and who live in places where technology is socially mandated*, advise us to unplug completely. For that matter, I have yet to hear of *any* Orthodox clergy *who live in places in the world where technology is socially mandated* say, only and purely, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!"

The Orthodox Church, or rather the Orthodox-Catholic Church, is really and truly Catholic, *Catholic* ultimately coming from the Greek *kata*, "with", and *holos*, "whole", meaning "with the whole", meaning that the entirety of the Orthodox Church belongs to every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: the saints alike living and dead, the ranks of priesthood and the faithful, and marriage and monasticism in entirety belong to every Orthodox Christian, every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: and giving the advice "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" as the limits of where the Orthodox-Catholic Church's God and salvation can reach, is very disappointing. It's comparable to saying that only monastics can be saved.

Total avoidance of all electronic technology is guidance, but not appropriate guidance, and we need advice, somewhat like the advice that began on how to use Facebook, to what I wrote about

iPhones or internet porn. A successful dartboard makes it easier to say "What you said about _____ was wrong because _____ and instead we should say _____ because _____." And I am trying to raise a question. I am trying to raise the question of how Orthodox may optimally use technology in furtherance of living the divine life.

Is astronomy about telescopes? No!

I would close with a quote about technology—or is it? Computer science giant Edgser Dijkstra said,

Computer science is no more about computers than astronomy is about telescopes.

And how much more must Orthodox discussion of how to use technology ascetically be no more *about* technology than astronomy is *about* telescopes? The question is a question about spiritual discipline, of how the timeless and universal wisdom of the Bible, the *Philokalia*, and the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

Resources for further study

Books

All the Orthodox classics, from the Bible on down. The task at hand is not to replace the *Philokalia*, but to *faithfully* adapt the *Philokalia* (and/or the Seven Ecumenical Councils to a new medium, as it were. The principles of the Bible, the *Philokalia*, and the Seven Ecumenical Councils are simply *not* dated and simply *do not* need to be improved. However, their application, I believe, needs to be *extended*. We need

ancient canons and immemorial custom that has the weight of canon law: however ancient canons express a good deal more about face-to-face boundaries between men and women than boundaries in Facebook and on smartphones. We need guidance for *all* of these.

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, [cjsh.name/instructor](#). I reference Book II and its chapter on wine as paradigms we might look too.

CJS Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, tinyurl.com/luddites-guide-technology. You don't need to read all of my ebooks on the topic, and they overlap. This one I'm offering because I don't know of anything better in (attempting to) address classic Orthodox spirituality to the question of ascetical use of technology.

Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the ELIMINATION of Television*, [cjsh.name/elimination](#). Mander is a former advertising executive who came to believe things about television, with implications for computers and smartphones. For instance, he argues that sitting for hours seeing mainly the light of red, green, and blue fluorescent pixels is actually awfully creepy. Mander has no pretensions of being an Orthodox Christian, or an Orthodox Jew for that matter, sounded an alarm in his apostasy from advertising that is worth at least hearing out. (Related titles, good or bad, include *The Plug-in Drug* and *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.)

Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Soul*. This is a top-notch book by a philosopher and theologian, and we share many of the same concerns. It nicely balances *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*.

Online Articles

(The only Orthodox articles I mention are my own. This is *not* by choice.)

Paul Graham, “The Acceleration of Addictiveness,” paulgraham.com/addiction.html. The author of Hackers & Painters raises a concern that is not specifically Orthodox, but "just" human. (But Orthodoxy is really just humanity exercised properly.)

Vince Homan, the newsletter article quoted above. I do not believe further comment is needed.

All the articles below except “iPhones and Spirituality” are included in The Luddite's Guide to Technology, tinyurl.com/luddites-guide-technology

CJS Hayward, Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Asceticism, cjsh.name/technonomicon. This is a first attempt to approach a kind of writing common in the Philokalia on the topic of ascetical use of technology.

CJS Hayward, “Veni, Vidi, Vomi: A Look at, “Do You Want to Date My Avatar?”,” cjsh.name/avatar. My brother showed me a viral music video, "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?", very effectively done. This is a conversation hinging on why I viewed the video with **horror**.

CJS Hayward, “Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?,” cjsh.name/plato. With slight, with minimal alterations, the most famous passage Plato wrote speaks volumes of our screens today.

CJS Hayward, “iPhones and Spirituality,” cjsh.name/iphone. This piece is partly about appropriate use of smartphones and partly what we lose of real, human life when we lay the reins on the iPhone's neck. It was originally a Toastmasters speech.

CJS Hayward, “The Luddite's Guide to Technology,” cjsh.name/luddite. This is the title chapter to the

collection *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, tinyurl.com/luddites-guide-technology. This is my most serious attempt at making an encompassing treatment to prepare people for different technologies. Pastor Vince's article helped me realize it was too much of a do-it-yourself kit, appropriate as far as it goes, but not addressing what the proper pastoral application of the principles should be. *And that is why I am writing a piece that will, I hope, provoke Orthodox clergy to expand our coverage in pastoral literature.*

Doxology

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?

For naught that I might say,

Nor aught that I may do,

Compareth to thy worth.

Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named,

The Glory for whom all glory is named,

The Treasure for whom treasures are named,

The Light for whom all light is named,

The Love for whom all love is named,

The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,

The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה

O ΩN.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

Who art eternally praised,

Who art all that thou canst be,

Greater than aught else that may be thought,

Greater than can be thought.

In thee is light,

In thee is honour,

In thee is mercy,

In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.

For good itself is named after thee,
 God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and humble.
 What mighteth compare to thee?
 What praise equalleth thee?
 If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,
 Only can it be,
 Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,
 And ten thousand things besides,
 Thou who art One,
 Eternally beyond time,
 So wholly One,
 That thou mayest be called infinite,
 Timeless beyond time thou art,
 The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 The Three who are One,
 No more bound by numbers than by word,
 And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
 The Word,
 Divine ordering Reason,
 Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
 Way pre-eminent of all things,
 Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
 Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
 The Creator entered into his Creation,
 Sharing with us humble glory,
 Lowered by love,
 Raised to the highest,
 The Suffering Servant known,
 The King of Glory,
 Ο ΩΝ.

What tongue mighteth sing of thee?
 What noetic heart mighteth know thee,
 With the knowledge that drinketh,

The drinking that knoweth,
Of the vouç,
The loving, enlightened spiritual eye,
By which we may share the knowing,
Of divinised men joining rank on rank of angels.

Thou art,
The Hidden Transcendent God who transcendest transcendence
itself,
The One God who transfigurest Creation,
The Son of God became a Man that men might become the sons
of God,
The divine became man that man mighteth become divine.

Beyond measure is thy glory,
The weight of thy power transcendeth,
Thy power of thine all-surpassing authority bespeaketh,
And yet art thou,
Not in fire, not earthquake,
Not wind great as maelstrom,
But in soft gentle whisper,
Thy prophets wait upon thee,
For thy silence is more deafening than thunder,
Thine weakness stronger than the strength of men,
Thy humility surpassingly far exceedeth men's covetous thirst for
glory,
Thou who hidst in a manger,
Treasure vaster than the Heavens,
And who offerest us glory,
In those things of our lives,
That seem humble to us,
As a manger rude in a cavern stable.

Thou Christ God, manifest among Creation,
Vine, lamb, and our daily bread,

Tabernacled among us who may taste thy glory,
Art come the priest on high to offer thy Creation up into Heaven,
Sanctified,
Transfigured,
Deified.

Wert thou a lesser god,
Numerically one as a creature is one,
Only one by an accident,
Naught more,
Then thou couldst not deify thine own creation,
Whilst remaining the only one god.

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not more,
Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be another
beside thee.
Thus thou spakest to Moses,
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Which is to say,
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

And there *can* be no other god beside thee,
So deep and full is this truth,

That thy Trinity mighteth take naught from thine Oneness,
Nor could it be another alongside thy divine Oneness,
If this God became man,
That man become god.

Great art thou,
Greater than aught that can be thought,
And thus dealest thou,
With thy Creation.

For thou camest into the world,
O Christ,
Thy glory veiled,
But a few could see thy glory,
In a seed.

But thou returnest soon,
In years, or centuries, or ages untold,
A day or a thousand years, soon,
Then a seed no more.
None shall escape seeing you,
Not an angel choir to shepherds alone,
But rank on rank of angel host.
Every eye shall see thee,
And they also which pierced thee,
Thou camest and a few knees bowed,
Thou wilt return,
And every knee shall bow,
And every tongue shall confess,
Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father,
As the Father triumphs in the Son.

Who mighteth tell of thy glory, thy might?
We hope for Heaven yet,

Yet the Heavens cannot contain thee.
Great art O ΩN,
And greatly to be praised.
Thou art awesome beyond all gods,
Who sayest,
Wound not my christs.
For the Son of God became the Son of Man,
That the sons of man might become the sons of God,
And the divine image,
The ancient and glorious foundation,
And radix of mankind,
Be transfigured,
Into the likeness of Christ,
And shine with uncreated Light,
The glory of God shining through his sons.

Let our spiritual eye be ever transfixed upon thine eternal radiant
glory,
Our hearts ever seeking thy luminous splendour,
Ever questing,
Ever sated,
Slaked by the greatest of draughts,
Which inflameth thirst.

Glorified art thou,
In all ages,
In every age,
Thy soft, gentle whisper,
Speaking life,
In every here and now,
And today.

Let us give our lives,
To thine all-surpassing greatness,
From this day,

From this hour,
Henceforth and forevermore.

Αμην,
So be it. Amen.

"Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

A rude awakening

Early in one systematic theology PhD course at Fordham, the text assigned as theology opened by saying, "Theologians are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Not content with this striking claim, the author announced that she was going to use "a term from science," *thought experiment*, which was never used to mean a *Gedankenexperiment* as in physics, but instead meant: if we have an idea for how a society should run, we have to experimentally try out this thought and live with it for a while, because if we don't, we will never know what would have happened. ("Stick your neck out! What have you got to lose?"—"Your head?") The clumsiness in this use of "a term from science" was on par with saying that you are going to use "an

expression from American English", namely *rabbit food*, and subsequently use "rabbit food" as obviously a term meaning food made with rabbit meat.

In this one article were already two things that were fingernails on a chalkboard to my ears. Empirical sciences are today's prestige disciplines, like philosophy / theology / law in bygone eras, and the claim to be a science seems to inevitably be *how to mediate prestige to oneself and one's own discipline*. When I had earlier run into claims of, "Anthropologists are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences,' like physics," I had winced because the claim struck me as not only annoying and untrue, but self-demeaning. But it simply had not occurred to me that theologians would make such a claim, and when they did, I was not only shocked but embarrassed: why should theology, once acclaimed the queen of scholarly disciplines, now seek prestige by parroting the claim to be every-bit-as-much-a-science-as-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics (where "so-called" seemed to always be part of the claim, along with the scare quotes around "hard sciences")? To make my point clearer, I drew what was meant to be a shocking analogy: the claim that theologians are "scientists, and every bit as much as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics" was like trying to defend the dignity of being a woman by saying, "Women are male, and they are just as much male as people who can sire a child."

This "physics envy" looks particularly strange next to the medieval Great Chain of Being as it moved from the highest to the lowest: "God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing". Theology is the study of God and Man; no discipline is given a more noble field. And however much other disciplines may have "physics envy", no other discipline looks lower than physics, the science that studies Rocks and Nothing. There may be something pathetic about an anthropologist trying to step up on the pecking order by claiming to be "just as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Yet on the lips of a

theologian, it bears a faint hint of a CEO absurdly saying, "CEOs are janitors, and they are every bit as much janitors as the people responsible for cleaning wastebaskets."

Furthermore, the endemic claim I saw to introduce a "term from science" was, so far as I could remember:

- Rarely if ever used in any correct fashion.

The *one* exception I can remember being Wolfhart Pannenberg's illustration of a point by talking about fields such as one finds in the study of electricity and magnetism: the non-scientist theologians in the room said they were having real trouble understanding the illustration conceptually, which would make it seem somewhat dubious as an *illustration* to help get a point across.

- Always reflect an effort to claim some of science's prestige.

I remember the "you're being quaint" smiles I got when I suggested that a point that Pannenberg was trying to make by comparing something to a field as defined in physics, seemed in fact to be a point that could have been much better made by a comparison to the Force from Star Wars.

Why the patronizing smiles? The job of the example from physics was to mediate prestige as well as to illustrate a concept that could have been better explained without involving a particularly slippery concept from physics.

A first response

Examples of this kind of "science" abounded, and I was perhaps not wise enough to realize that my clumsy attempts to clarify various misrepresentations of science were perhaps not well received because I was stepping on the Dark and Shameful Secret of Not Being Scientific Enough, and reminding them of an inferiority they were trying hard to dodge. And my attempts to explain "Not being a scientist does not make you inferior" seemed to have no soil in which to grow. In an attempt to start an online discussion, I wrote a piece called "Rumor Science":

I really wish the theology students I knew would either know a lot more about science, or a lot less, and I really wouldn't consider "a lot less" to be disappointing.

Let me explain why. When I was working on my master's in math, there was one passage in particular that struck me from Ann Wilson Schaefer's *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System*. Perhaps predictably given my being a mathematician in training, it was a remark about numbers, or rather about how people interact with numbers.

The author broke people down into more or less three groups of people. The first—she mentioned artists—was people that can't count to twenty without taking off their shoes. She didn't quite say *that*, but she emphasized artists and other people where math and numbers simply aren't part of their consciousness. They don't buy into the mystique. And they can say, and sincerely mean, that numbers don't measure everything. They aren't seriously tempted to believe otherwise.

The second group—she mentioned business people—consists of people for whom math works. Even if they're not mathematicians, math works for them and does useful things, and they may say that numbers don't measure anything, but it is well nigh impossible to believe—saying

and meaning that numbers don't measure everything is like saying that cars are nice but they can't get you places.

And the third group in the progression? She mentioned scientists, but what she said was that they know math in and out and know it so well that they know its limitations and therefore they can say and mean that numbers don't measure everything. And in the end, even though the "scientist" and the "artist" represent opposite extremes of mathematical competence, they both know there are things numbers can't measure while the second, middle group for mathematical competence are in a position where they expect numbers to do things that numbers can't do.

I was flattered, but I really think it stuck with me for more reasons than just the fact that she included me in one of the "good" groups. There is a sort of *Karate Kid* observation—"Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe. Don't know karate, safe. In the middle, *squash, like a grape!*"—that is relevant to theology and science. It has to do with, among other things, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the question of evolution, and the like (perhaps I should mention the second law of thermodynamics). My point in this is not that there is an obligation to "know karate", that theologians need to earn degrees in the sciences before they are qualified to work as theologians, but that there is something perfectly respectable about "don't know karate."

I'd like to start by talking about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Now a lot of people have heard about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Not many major mathematical theorems have had a Pulitzer prize-winning book written around them (and by the way, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* has been one of my favorite books). Nor do many theorems get summarized in Newsweek as an important theorem which demonstrates that mathematical "proofs"

are not certain, but mathematical knowledge is as relative as any other knowledge.

Which is a crass error. The theological equivalent would be to say that Karl Barth's unflattering remarks about "religion" are anti-Christian, or that liberation theology's preferential option for the poor means that special concern for the poor is optional and to be dealt with according to personal preference. And saying that about liberation theology is a theological "squash like a grape," because it is better to not know liberation theology and know you don't know than believe that you understand liberation theology and "know" that the word "option" implies "optional." *It's not what you don't know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so.*

For the record, what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem means is that for a certain branch of mathematics, there are things that can be neither proven nor disproven—which made his theorem a shocker when there was a Tower of Babel effort to prove or disprove pretty much anything. It proves that some things can never be proven within certain systems. And it has other implications. But it does *not* mean that things that are proven in mathematics are uncertain, or that mathematical knowledge is relative. It says you can't prove everything a mathematician would want to prove. But there are still lots and lots and lots of interesting things that can be proven, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem does not touch these proofs, nor does it mean that mathematical knowledge is merely relative in humanities fashion.

And I'd like to mention what happens when I mention Gödel's *Completeness* Theorem:

Dead silence.

The same great mathematical logician proved another theorem, which does not have a Pulitzer prize winning book, which says that in one other branch of mathematics,

besides the branch that Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem speaks to, you can have pretty much what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem says you can't have in the other branch. In other words, you can—mechanically, for that matter, which is a big mathematical achievement—either prove or disprove every single statement. I'm not sure it's as important as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, but it's a major theorem from the same mathematician and no one's heard of it.

There would seem to be obvious non-mathematical reasons for why people would want to be informed about the first theorem and not want to mention the second. I consider it telling (about non-mathematical culture). I know it may be considered a mark of sophistication to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem and share how it's informed your epistemology. But it hasn't informed my epistemology and I really can't tell how my theology would be different if I hadn't heard of it. And my understanding is that other mathematicians tend not to have the highest view of people who are trying to take account of scientific discoveries that an educated person "should" know. There are other reasons for this, including goofy apologetics that make the famous theorem a proof for God. But I at least would rather talk with someone who simply hadn't heard of the theorem than a theologian who had tried to make a "responsible" effort to learn from the discovery.

And my main example is one I'm less sure how to comment on, and not only because I know less biology than math. There was one almost flippant moment in England when the curate asked if anybody had questions about the upcoming Student Evolution conference that everybody was being urged to attend. I asked, "Is this 'Student Evolution' more of a gradual process, or more a matter of 'punk eek'?" (That question brought down the house.)

Punctuated equilibrium, irreverently abbreviated 'punk eek', is a very interesting modification of Darwinian theory. Darwinian *evolution* in its early forms posits and implies a gradual process of very slow changes—almost constant over very long ("geological") time frames. And that is a beautiful theory that flatly contracts almost all known data.

As explained by my Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy biology teacher, "Evolution is like baseball. It has long stretches of boring time interrupted by brief periods of intense excitement." That's punk eek in a nutshell, and what interests me most is that it's the mirror image of saying "God created the world—through evolution!" It says, "Evolution occurred—through punctuated equilibrium!"

That's not the only problem; evolution appears to be, in Kuhnian terms (*Structure of Scientific Revolutions*), a theory "in crisis", which is the Kuhnian term for when a scientific theory is having serious difficulties accounting for currently given data and may well be on its way out the door. There are several ways people are trying to cope with this—preserving some semblance of a materialist explanation; there was the same kind of resistance going on before science acknowledged the Big Bang, because scientists who want a universe without cause and without beginning or creator heard something that sounded too much like "Let there be light!" They're very interesting, and intellectually dishonest.

Now I need to clarify; people seem to think you have to either be a young earth creationist or else admit evolution of some stripe. I believe in 13 billion years as the rough age of the universe, not six thousand years; I also believe in natural selection and something called "micro-evolution." (By the way, JPII's "more than a hypothesis" was in the original French "plus qu'un hypothèse", alternately translatable as "more than one hypothesis", and the official Vatican translation takes this reading. One can say that

micro-evolution is one of the hypothesis gathered under the heading of evolution.)

I wince when I see theologians trying their dutiful best to work out an obligation to take evolution into account as a proven fact: squash, like a grape. It's not just that science doesn't trade in proof and evolution is being treated like a revelation, as if a Pope had consulted the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and canonized *The Origin of the Species* as a book of the Bible. Or maybe that's putting it too strongly. It would also be strong language to say that many theologians are adopting a carefully critical attitude to classic Church claims and part of their being critical means placing an embarrassingly blind faith in evolution. But that's truer than I'd want to admit.

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

I don't know what the first and third laws of thermodynamics say, and I can't say that I'm missing anything. I don't feel obligated to make the second law, which I am familiar with, a feature of my theology, but if I did, I would try to understand the first and third laws of thermodynamics, and treat it as physics in which those three laws and presumably other things fit into a system that needs to be treated as a whole. I don't know how I would incorporate that in my theology, but I'm supposing for the sake of argument that I would. I would rather avoid treating it the way people usually seem to treat it when they treat that as one of the things that educated people "should" know.

I guess that my point in all of this is that some people think there's a duty to know science and be scientific in theology, but this is a duty better shirked. My theology is—or I would like it to be—closer to that of someone who doesn't understand science, period, than that of people who try to improve their theology by incorporating what they

can grasp of difficult scientific concepts that the scientists themselves learned with difficulty.

Rumor science is worse than no science, and an ascientific theology is not a handicap. When I say that I would rather see theologians know either much more or much less science, I'm not hoping that theologians will therefore get scientific degrees. The chief merit for a theologian to know science is that it can be a source of liberation that frees people from thinking "We live in a scientific age so it would be better for theology to be scientific." I'm not sure I would be able to question that assumption if I knew much less science. But what I believe that buys me is not a better theology than someone scientifically innocent but freedom from the perceived need to "take science into account" in my theology so I can do the same kind of theology as someone scientifically innocent.

I'm not as sure what to say about ecological theology; I wrote *Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth* at without scientific reference that I remember, and I believe there are other human ways of knowing Creation besides science. But an ecological theologian who draws on scientific studies is not trying to honor a duty to understand things an educated person should know, but pursuing something materially relevant. Science has some place; religion and science boundary issues are legitimate, and I don't know I can dissuade people who think it's progressive to try to make a scientific theology—although I really wish people with that interest would get letters after their name from a science discipline, or some other form of genuinely proper scientific credentials appropriate to a genuinely scientific theology.

There are probably other exceptions, and science is interesting. But there is no obligation to go from safely on one side of the road to a position in the middle because it is "closer" to a proper understanding of science. Perhaps

liberation theologians want people to understand their cause, but it is better not to pretend to know liberation theology than to approach it in a way that leaves you "knowing" that the preferential option is optional. It isn't what you know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so—and rumor science, with its accepted list of important scientific knowledge that scholars need to take into account, is one way to learn from what ain't so.

Science is (are) the prestige discipline(s) today; you see psychology wishing for its Newton to lead it into the promised land of being a science in the fullest sense of the term. You don't see psychology pining for a Shakespeare to lead it into the promised land of being a humanity in the fullest sense of the term. And the social disciplines—I intentionally do not say social *sciences* because they are legitimate academic disciplines but not sciences—are constantly insisting that their members are scientists, but *the claim that theologians are scientists annoys me as a scientist and almost offends me as a theologian*. It should be offensive for much the same reason that it should be offensive to insist on female dignity by claiming that women are really male, and that they are just as much male as people who can sire a child.

It would be an interesting theological work to analyze today's cultural assumptions surrounding science, which are quite important and not dictated by scientific knowledge itself, and then come to almost the same freedom as someone innocent of science.

"My theology," ewwww. (While I was at it, why didn't I discuss plans for my own private sun and moon? I'm *not* proud of proudly discussing "my theology".) I know the text has a wart or two.

But the piece contains a suggestion: "rumor science" may be a red flag to a real problem in the place we give science.

Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

That work left out the crowning jewel of scientific theories to ponder in "rumor science": Einstein's "theory of relativity." Some time later, in my science fiction short story / Socratic dialogue, *The Steel Orb*, I wrote in fiction something that picked up what I had left out:

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar

with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? Or better, Python? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even the most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the microscopically small difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A *mosquito*? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else..."

or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact *not* find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Rumor science": The tip of an iceberg?

But I would like to get on to something that is of far greater concern than "rumor science" as it treats Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the second law of thermodynamics, relativity, evolution, and so on. If the only problem was making a bit of a hash of some scientific theories, that would be one thing. But "rumor science" may be the tip of an iceberg, a telling clue that something may be seriously amiss in how theology has been relating to science. There is another, far more serious boundary issue.

There is something about the nature of academic theology today that may become clearer if we ask questions about the nature of knowledge and line up academic theology with Orthodoxy on the one hand and modern science on the other. The table below lists a few questions connected with knowledge, and then a comparison between Orthodox Christianity, academic theology, and modern science in their own columns:

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>What is knowledge like?</i>	"Adam knew Eve..." The primary word in the Old and	Knowledge is <i>critical</i> , meaning <i>detache</i> <i>d</i> : the privileged	You can't know how stars age or the limitations of the ideal gas law

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>New Testaments for sexual union is in fact 'know', and this is a significant clue about the intimate nature of knowledge. Knowledge is, at its core, the knowledge that drinks. It connects at a deepest level, and is cognate to how Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.</p>	<p>position is of the outsider who stands clear of a situation and looks into a window. The devout believer enjoys no real advantage in grasping his religion compared to the methodical observer who remains detached—and the ordinary believer may be at a marked <i>disadvan</i>tage.</p>	<p>from direct personal experience. Science stems from a rationalism cognate to the Enlightenment, and even if one rebels against the Enlightenment, it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of personal experience.</p>
<p><i>What aspect of yourself do you know with?</i></p>	<p>This may not be part of the standard Western picture, but the Orthodox, non-</p>	<p>Good scholarship comes from putting all other aspects of the person in their</p>	<p>We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that</p>

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>materialist understanding of mind holds that there is a sort of "spiritual eye" which knows and which grasps spiritual realities as overflow to its central purpose of worshiping God. The center of gravity for knowing is this spiritual eye, and it is the center of a whole and integrated person. Logical and other "discursive" reasoning may have a place, but the seat of this kind of reasoning is a moon next to the light of the</p>	<p>place and enthrone the part of us that reasons logically and almost putting the logic bit on steroids. Continental philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.</p>	<p>allows this reasoning to shine.</p>

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>What should teachers cultivate in their students?</i>	<p>sun which is the spiritual eye, the <i>nous</i>.</p> <p>Teachers should induce students into <i>discipleship</i> and should be exemplary disciples themselves.</p>	<p>They should train students who will not be content with their teachers' interpretations but push past to their own takes on the matter.</p>	<p>They should train students to develop experiments and theories to carefully challenge the "present working picture" in their field.</p>
<i>What is tradition, and how does your tradition relate to knowing?</i>	<p>One may be not so much <i>under Tradition</i>: Tradition is like one's culture or language, if a culture and language breathed on by the Holy Spirit of God. Though Tradition need not be viewed with legalistic fundamentalis</p>	<p>Something of the attitude is captured in what followed the telling of an anecdote about a New Testament Greek class where the professor had difficulties telling how to read a short text, until a classics student looked and suggested that the difficulty would evaporate if the text were</p>	<p>As Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman observed, "You get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment."</p>

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
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<p>m, it is missing something important to fail to love and revere Tradition as something of a mother.</p>	<p>read with a different set of accents from what scholars traditionally assigned it. The Greek professor's response ("Accents are not inspired!") was presented by the academic theologian retelling this story as full warrant to suggest that scholars should not view themselves as bound by tradition with its blind spots.</p>
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<p><i>How much emphasis do you place on creativity?</i></p>	<p>It reflects some degree of fundamental confusion to measure the value of what someone says by how original</p>	<p>Publish something <i>original</i>, or perish. Better to say something original but not true than not have any ideas to</p>	<p>Continue to push the envelope. Are you an experimental physicist? If you cannot observe anything new by the layman's</p>
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<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>it is. That which is true is not original, and that which is original is not true. Perhaps people may uncover new layers of meaning, but to measure someone by how many ideas he can claim as "mine" is a strange measure.</p>	<p>claim as "mine." If need be, rehabilitate Arius or Nestorius. (Or, if you are Orthodox, meet current fashions halfway and show that St. Augustine need not be a whipping boy.)</p>	<p>means of observation, pioneer new equipment or a clever experiment to push the envelope of what can be observed. Publish something <i>original</i> or perish.</p>
<p><i>Where does your discipline place its empiricism?</i></p>	<p>There is a very real sense of empiricism, albeit a sense that has very little directly to do with empirical science. Knowledge is what you know through the "spiritual eye" and it is a</p>	<p>Theologians are just as empirical as physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics. We have such quasi-scientific empiricism as can be had for the human and divine domain we cover; there is a great deal of</p>	<p>As much as theology's empiricism is the empiricism of a "spiritual eye" and the whole person, our empiricism is an empiricism of detached, careful, methodical, reasoned investigation—the investigation of</p>

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>knowledge that can only be realized through direct participation. An "idle word" may be a word of that which you do not have this knowledge of, and this sin would appear to be foundational to the empiricism of science. We really do have an empiricism, but it might be better not to engender pointless confusion by claiming to be empirical when the empiricism known to the academy is pre-eminently that of empirical science,</p>	<p>diversity, and some of us do not place much emphasis on the empiricism of science, but some of us have enough of scientific empiricism to do history work that stands its ground when judged by secular history's standards.</p>	<p>the reasoning faculty on steroids. Our science exhibits professionalism and a particular vision of intellectual virtue. Our empiricism corresponds to this vision, and no one has pushed this empiricism of the reasoning faculty further, and the unique technology founded on science is a testament to how far we have pushed this kind of empiricism.</p>

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	whether it is either actual or aspiring science.		

When they are lined up, academic theology appears to have a great many continuities with science and a real disconnect with Orthodox Christianity. Could academic theologians feel an inferiority complex about Not Being Scientific Enough? Absolutely. But the actual problem may be that they are entirely *too* scientific. I am less concerned that their theology is not sufficiently scientific than that it is not sufficiently *theological*.

Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

It is along those lines that I have taken something of the track of "join the enemy's camp to show its weaknesses from within" in exposing the blind spots of Darwinism, for instance. In the theologically driven short story *The Commentary*, the issue is not really whether Darwinism is correct at all. The question is not whether we should be content with Darwinian answers, but whether we should be content with Darwinian *questions*.

Martin stepped into his house and decided to have no more distractions. He wanted to begin reading commentary, now. He opened the book on the table and sat erect in his chair:

Genesis

- 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- 1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.
- 1:3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" If someone asks, "Why is there this life that we see?" and someone answers, "Evolution," it is like someone

saying, "Why is the kitchen light on?" and someone else answering, "Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?" These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

Martin took a deep breath. Was the text advocating a six-day creationism? That was hard to tell. He felt uncomfortable, in a much deeper way than if Bible-thumpers were preaching to him that evolutionists would burn in Hell.

There is a hint here of why some people who do not believe in a young earth are no less concerned about young earth creationism: the concern is not exactly that it is junk science, but precisely that it is *too* scientific, assuming many of evolutionary theory's blindnesses even as it asserts the full literal truth of the Bible in answering questions on the terms of what science asks of an origins theory.

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

Pointy-Haired Boss: I'm sending you to Elbonia to teach a class on Cobol on Thursday.

Dilbert: But I don't know Cobol. Can't you ask Wally? He knows Cobol!

Pointy-Haired Boss: I already checked, and he's busy on Thursday.

Dilbert: Can't you reschedule?

Pointy-Haired Boss: Ok, are you free on Tuesday?

Dilbert: You're answering the wrong question!

Dilbert's mortified, "You're answering the wrong question!" has some slight relevance the issues of religion and science: in my homily, *Two Decisive Moments* I tried to ask people to look, and aim, *higher*:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and

in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "Behold the man!"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man!* Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.

Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9)

We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have *possibly* imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

I wince at the idea that for theologians "boundary issues" are mostly about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths to the day's state of flux in scientific speculation. I

wince that theologians so often assume that the biggest contribution they can give to the dialogue between theology and science is the rubber stamp of perennially agreeing with science. I would decisively prefer that when theologians "approach religion and science boundary issues," we do so as boundaries are understood in pop psychology—and more specifically *bad* pop psychology—which is all about you cannot meaningfully say "Yes" until it is your practice to say "No" when you should say "No": what theology needs in its boundaries with science is not primarily a question of what else we should seek to embrace, but of where theology has ingested things toxic to its constitution.

What gets lost when theology loses track (by which I do not mean primarily rumor science, but the three columns where theology seemed a colony of science that had lost touch with Orthodox faith) is that when theology assumes the character of science, it loses the character of theology.

The research for my diploma thesis at Cambridge had me read a lot of historical-critical commentary on a relevant passage; I read everything I could find on the topic in Tyndale House's specialized library, and something became painfully obvious. When a good Protestant sermon uses historical or cultural context to illuminate a passage from Scripture, the preacher has sifted through pearls amidst sand, and the impression that cultural context offers a motherlode of gold to enrich our understanding of the Bible is quite contrary to the historical-critical commentaries I read, which read almost like phone books in their records of details I'd have to stretch to use to illuminate the passage. The pastor's discussion of context in a sermon is something like an archivist who goes into a scholar's office, pulls an unexpected book, shows that it is surprisingly careworn and dog-eared, and discusses how the three longest underlined passage illuminate the scholar's output. But the historical-critical commentary itself is like an archivist who describes in excruciating detail the furniture and ornaments in the author's

office and the statistics about the size and weight among books the scholar owned in reams of (largely uninterpreted) detail.

And what is lost in this careful scholarship? Perhaps what is lost is why we have Bible scholarship in the first place: it is a divinely given book and a support to life in Christ. If historical-critical scholarship is your (quasi-scientific) approach to theology, you won't seek in your scholarship what I sought in writing my (non-scientific) *Doxology*:

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
 For naught that I might say,
 Nor aught that I may do,
 Compareth to thy worth.
 Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven
 and on earth is named,
 The Glory for whom all glory is named,
 The Treasure for whom treasures are named,
 The Light for whom all light is named,
 The Love for whom all love is named,
 The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,
 The Being by whom all beings exist,
 יהוה,
 O ΩΝ.
 The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
 Who art eternally praised,
 Who art all that thou canst be,
 Greater than aught else that may be thought,
 Greater than can be thought.
 In thee is light,
 In thee is honour,
 In thee is mercy,
 In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.
 For good itself is named after thee,
 God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and
 humble.

What mighteth compare to thee?
What praise equalleth thee?
If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,
Only can it be,
Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,
And ten thousand things besides,
Thou who art One,
Eternally beyond time,
So wholly One,
That thou mayest be called infinite,
Timeless beyond time thou art,
The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
The Three who are One,
No more bound by numbers than by word,
And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,
Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
Ο ΩΝ.

What tongue mighteth sing of thee?
What noetic heart mighteth know thee,
With the knowledge that drinketh,
The drinking that knoweth,
Of the νοϋς,

The loving, enlightened spiritual eye,
 By which we may share the knowing,
 Of divinised men joining rank on rank of angel.

Thou art,
 The Hidden Transcendent God who transcendest
 transcendence itself,
 The One God who transfigurest Creation,
 The Son of God became a Man that men might become the
 sons of God,
 The divine became man that man mighteth become divine.

Monty Python and Christian theology

I would like to start winding down with a less uplifting note. A few years back, I visited a friend who was a Christian and a big Monty Python fan and played for me a Monty Python clip:

God: Arthur! Arthur, King of the Britons! Oh, don't grovel!
 If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people
 groveling.

Arthur: Sorry—

God: And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to
 someone it's 'sorry this' and 'forgive me that' and 'I'm
 not worthy'. What are you doing now!?

Arthur: I'm averting my eyes, O Lord.

God: Well, don't. It's like those miserable Psalms—they're
 so depressing. Now knock it off!

This is blasphemous, and I tried to keep my mouth shut about what my host had presented to me, I thought, for my rollicking laughter. But subsequent conversation showed I had misjudged his intent: he had not intended it to be shockingly funny.

He had, in fact, played the clip because it was something that he worried about: did God, in fact, want to give grumbling complaints about moments when my friend cried out to him in prayer? Does prayer annoy our Lord as an unwelcome intrusion from people who should have a little dignity and leave him alone or at least quit sniveling?

This is much more disturbing than merely playing the clip because you find it funny to imagine God bitterly kvetching when King Arthur tries to show him some respect. If it is actually taken as theology, Monty Python is really sad.

And it is not the best thing to be involved in Monty Python as theology.

One can whimsically imagine an interlocutor encountering some of the theology I have seen and trying to generously receive it in the best of humor: "A book that promises scientific theology in its title and goes on for a thousand pages of trajectories for other people to follow before a conclusion that apologizes for not actually getting on to any theology? *You have a real sense of humor!* Try to avoid imposing Christianity on others and start from the common ground of what all traditions across the world have in common, that non-sectarian common ground being the Western tradition of analytic philosophy? *Roaringly funny!* Run a theological anthropology course that tells how liberationists, feminists, queer theorists, post-colonialists, and so on have to say to the Christian tradition and does not begin to investigate what the Christian tradition has to say to them? *You should have been a comedian!* Yoke St. Gregory of Nyssa together with a lesbian deconstructionist like Judith Butler to advance the feminist agenda of gender fluidity? *You're really giving Monty Python a run for their money!*"... until it gradually dawns on our

interlocutor that the lewd discussion of sexual theology is not in any sense meant as an attempt to eclipse Monty Python. (Would our interlocutor spend the night weeping for lost sheep without a shepherd?)

There are many more benign examples of academic theology; many of even the problems may be slightly less striking. But theology that gives the impression that it could be from Monty Python is a bit of a dead (coal miner's) canary.

Scientific theology does not appear to be blame for all of these, but it is not irrelevant. Problems that are not directly tied to (oxymoronic) scientific theology are usually a complication of (oxymoronic) secular theology, and scientific theology and secular theology are deeply enough intertwined.

The question of evolution is important, and it is no error that a figure like Philip Johnson gives neo-Darwinian evolution pride of place in assessing materialist attacks on religion. But it is not an adequate remedy to merely study intelligent design. Not enough by half.

If theology could, like bad pop psychology, conceive of its "boundary issues" not just in terms of saying "Yes" but of learning to stop saying "Yes" when it should say "No", this would be a great gain. So far as I have seen, the questions about boundaries with science are primarily not scientific ideas theology needs to assimilate, but ways theology has assimilated some very deep characteristics of science that are *not* to its advantage. The question is less about what more could be added, than what more could be taken away. And the best way to do this is less the Western cottage industry of worldview construction than a journey of repentance such as one still finds preached in Eastern Christianity and a good deal of Christianity in the West.

A journey of repentance

Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Repentance has been called unconditional surrender, and it has been called the ultimate experience to fear. But when you surrender what you thought was your ornament and joy, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And with letting go comes hands that are free to grasp joy you never thought to ask. Forgiveness is letting go of the other person and finding it is yourself you have set free; repentance is being terrified of letting go and then finding you have let go of needless pain. Repentance is indeed Heaven's best-kept secret; it opens doors.

I have doubt whether academic theology will open the door of repentance; it is a beginner's error to be the student who rushes in to single-handedly sort out what a number of devout Christian theologians see no way to fix. But as for theologians, the door of repentance is ever ready to open, and with it everything that the discipline of theology seeks in vain here using theories from the humanities, there trying to mediate prestige to itself science. Academic theologians who are, or who become, theologians in a more ancient sense find tremendous doors of beauty and joy open to them. The wondrous poetry of St. Ephrem the Syrian is ever open; the liturgy of the Church is open; the deifying rays of divine grace shine ever down upon those open to receiving them and upon those not yet open. The Western understanding is that the door to the Middle Ages has long since been closed and the age of the Church Fathers was closed much earlier; but Orthodox will let you become a Church Father, here now. Faithful people today submit as best they are able to the Fathers before them, as St. Maximus Confessor did ages ago. There may be problems with academic theology today, but the door to theology in the classic sense is never closed, as in the maxim that has rumbled through the ages, "A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian." Perhaps academic theology is not the best place to be equipped to be a giant like the saintly theologians of ages past. But that does not mean that one

cannot become a saintly theologian as in ages past. God can still work with us, here now.

To quote St. Dionysius (pseudo-Dionysius) in *The Mystical Theology*,

Trinity! Higher than any being,
any divinity, any goodness!
Guide of Christians
in the wisdom of Heaven!
Lead us up beyond unknowing light,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystic scripture,
where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.
Amid the deepest shadow
They pour overwhelming light
on what is most manifest.
Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen
They completely fill our sightless minds
with treasures beyond all beauty.

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

"Physics"

I included Aristotle's *Physics* when I originally posted "An Orthodox Bookshelf," then read most of the text and decided that even if the Fathers' science was largely Aristotelian physics, reading the original source is here less helpful than it might appear. The Fathers believed in elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and these elements are mentioned in the Theophany Vespers, which are one of the primary Orthodox texts on how the cosmos is understood. However, even if these are found in Aristotelian physics, the signal to noise ratio for patristic understanding of science is dismal: Aristotle's *Physics* could be replaced with a text one tenth its length and still furnish everything the Fathers take from it.

I would like to take a moment to pause in looking at the word "physics." It is true enough that historically Aristotelian physics was replaced by Newton, who in turn gave way to Einstein, and then quantum physics entered the scene, and now we have superstring theory. And in that caricatured summary, "physics" seems to mean what it means for superstring theory. But I want to pause on the word "physics." Orthodox know that non-Orthodox who ask, "What are your passions?" may get a bit more of an earful than they bargained for. "Passions" is not a word Orthodox use among themselves for nice hobbies and interests

they get excited about; it means a sinful habit that has carved out a niche for itself to become a spiritual disease. And "physics", as I use it, is not a competitor to superstring theory; etymologically it means, "of the nature of things," I would quote C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

"I am a star at rest, my daughter," answered Ramandu. "When I set for the last time, decrepit and old beyond all that you can reckon, I was carried to this island. I am not so old now as I was then. Every morning a bird brings me a fire-berry from the valleys in the Sun, and each fire-berry takes away a little of my age. And when I have become as young as the child that was born yesterday, then I shall take my rising again (for we are at earth's eastern rim) and once more tread the great dance."

"In our world," said Eustace, "a star is a huge ball of flaming gas."

"Even in your world, my son, *that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.*"

What is a star? I would answer by reference to an icon, of the creation of the stars. The text on the icon does not refer to Genesis at all, but Job 38:7, "...when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?":

The stars in the icon are connected with the six-winged seraphim, the highest rank of angels. The Heavens are an icon of Heaven, and the icon says something very different than, "What are stars if we view them as reductionists do?"

And this article is not intended to compete with physics as it is now understood, or to defend patristic Aristotelian physics against its challengers, or to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with the present state of scientific speculation: words that I choose carefully, because theology is about divine revealed doctrine while science is the present state of speculation in a very careful system of educated guesses, and scientific theories will

not stop being discarded for newer alternatives until science is dead. It is therefore somewhat of a strange matter to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with science, as conforming timeless revealed doctrines to the present best educated guess that is meant to be discarded.

Of the nature of things

The central mystery in the nature of things is the divine nature. No man can see God and live, and the divine essence is not knowable to any creature. The divine energies are available, and indeed can deify creation, but the central mystery around which all else revolves is God's unknowable essence and nature.

This is the central mystery around which everything else revolves, but the divine essence is not part of a larger system, even as its largest part. God lies beyond the created order, and perhaps the greatest failure of Aristotelian physics to understand the nature of things lies in its tendency towards materialism, its sense that you understand things by looking down. Some have said, in introducing Michael Polanyi's theories of personal knowledge, that behavioralism in psychology does not teach, "There is no soul;" rather, it induces students into investigation in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never even considered. And Aristotelian physics started a trajectory that has lingered even when the specifics of Aristotelian physics were considered to be overturned: you understand the nature of things by looking at them materially. Aristotelian physics, in asking, "What is the nature of this?" leads the listener so as to never even consider an answer of, "Because that is how it functions as a satellite of God." And the entire *phusis* or nature of every created being is as a satellite of God: the atheist who says "The very notion of a God is incoherent," does so with the breath of God.

Headship and harmony with nature

Many Westerners may identify the goal of harmony with nature with the East, but the concept as we have it is essentially Western in nature. Orthodox monasticism may look a lot like harmony with nature to the West: it often takes place in rustic surroundings, and animals are not afraid of monastics: deer will eat from a monk's hand. But there is a fundamental difference between this and the Western concept of harmony with nature: the harmony does not come from our taking our cue from plants and animals. Monks and nuns are to take their cue from God, and harmony with animals comes from how they take their cue from God.

All creation bears some resemblance to God, and God himself is called the Rock. For every creature there is a *logos* or idea in God's heart, that is what that creature should strive to be. But there is a distinction among creation. Some are given the image of God: men and angels, and we exist in a fuller and deeper sense than creatures that do not bear such an image. God exists in a unique and deepest sense, and if we say that God exists, we cannot say that we exist in the same sense, and if we say that we exist, we cannot say that God exists in the same sense. Those who are given the image, who have a human or angelic mind, are more fully nature than those creatures who have do not exist in the same way on the same level. And we who bear the royal image, even if liturgical asceticism removes barriers between us and the rest of Creation, are to take our cue from God our head.

Getting past "the politics of envy"

The concept of headship is a difficult and perhaps touchy one, not least because the only place where people think it applies is the husband being the head of the wife. But it is written into

the cosmos in larger letters. St. Maximus the Confessor spoke of five divisions that are to be transcended:

Head	Body
Man	Woman
Paradise	The inhabited world
Heaven	Earth
Spiritual creation	Tangible creation
God	Creation

All these differences are ultimately to be transcended, and many more not listed. But the project of transcending them assumes there are differences to start off with, which we do not transcend by closing our eyes and pretending they are not there. And this feature of creation runs aground what might be called "the politics of envy", whose central feature is an equality that boils down to saying, "I don't want anybody to be better than me."

And this brings me to the point of inequality. Not only are the politics of envy toxic, but unequal treatment bears something that the politics of envy would never imagine. The kindest and most courteous acts are most often not those that treat the other as an equal, but those that treat the other as not equal. The man who buys six dozen roses for his wife does not treat her as an equal: the thought would not occur to him to buy six dozen roses for one of his fellow workmen. The mother who holds and comforts a child after a scrape extends a courtesy that would not be extended quite so far for an adult capable of managing moods and life's scrapes. The greatest courtesies are extended precisely at the point when someone in a position of headship treats

someone else, not as an equal, but as the head's body as in the chart above. The same is implied for authority, or some of the more painful social lessons having to do with profound giftedness. Perhaps people may say "Treat me as an equal" instead of "treat me well," but it has been my own experience that treating people as equals in an area where they request equality has given social explosions that I could have avoided if I were wise enough to realize that the point where I was asked, "Treat me as an equal," were precisely the situations which demanded the wisdom not to treat people as intellectual equals that could handle the full force of what I was thinking, but extend some of the most delicate courtesy and social graces. Exactly what is needed is hard to say, but precisely what is *not* needed is to say, "Great, I've found someone gifted in exactly the same way I am," and launch into the full force of your deepest thought. God does not create two blades of grass alike. He has never created two humans who are equal, but after each, he broke the mould.

Microcosm and mediator

Mankind was created to be a microcosm, summarizing both the spiritual and tangible creation, and a mediator. All the Orthodox faithful participate in a spiritual priesthood, and its sigil is the sacramental priesthood that a few identify. We are called to mediate and help transcend the differences above. Our worship of the God who is Light, and ourselves being the light of the world, is as the vanguard of Creation returning to the Creator, the firstfruits of a world created by and for God.

Symbols

I would like to close on an understanding of symbol. Men are symbols of God; that is what it means to be made in the image of God. The material world is best understood, not as things operating under mathematical laws, but as having a symbolic

dimension that ultimately points back to God. The theory of evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" because it does not address the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" If it is true, it is a true answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" The sciences answer questions of "How," not questions of "Why," and the world is best understood as having a symbolic dimension where the question of "Why?" refers to God and overshadows the question of "How?"

Even if physics answers its questions with accuracy, it does not answer the deepest questions, and a deeper level has three kinds of causation, all of them personal. Things are caused by God, or by humans, or by devils. When we pray, it is not usually for an exception to the laws of physics, but that nature, governed by personal causes on a deeper level, may work out in a particular way under God's governance. And the regular operations of physics do not stop this.

Miracles

Miracles are very rare, if we use the term strictly and not for the genuine miracle of God providing for us every day. But the readings for the Theophany Vespers repeat miracles with nature, and they present, if you will, nature at its most essential. Most of the matter in the universe is not part of icons of Christ, his Mother, and his Saints, and yet even outside of men icons are a vanguard, a firstfruit of a creation that will be glorified. Mankind is at its most essential in Christ himself, and the natural world is at its most essential as an arena for God's power to be displayed. And God's display of power is not strictly a rarity; it plays out when bread comes out of the earth, when The Heavens declare the glory of God / And the firmament sheweth his handywork. / Day unto day uttereth speech / And night unto knight sheweth knowledge.

Sweet Lord, You Play Me False

All of this may be true, but there is an odor of falsity built in its very foundations, to provide an Orthodox "physics" (or study of "the nature of things") analogous to Aristotle's original "physics." Anselm famously wrote the "Monologion" (in which Anselm explores various arguments for God's existence) and the "Proslogion" (in which Anselm seeks a single and decisive proof of God's existence). Once I told an Anselm scholar that there had been a newly discovered "Monophagion," in which Anselm tries to discern whether reasoning can ever bring someone to recognize the imperative of eating, and "Prosphagion," in which Anselm gets hungry and has a bite to eat. For those of you not familiar with Greek, "prospagion" means "a little smackerel of something."

This work is, in a sense, an exploration about whether philosophy can bring a person to recognize the necessity of eating. But that's not where the proof of the pudding lies. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating, in the live liturgical life that culminates in the Eucharist, the fulcrum for the transformation and ultimate deification of the cosmos. The proof of the pudding lies not in the philosophizing, but in the eating.

All Orthodox Theology Is Positive Theology

The state of psychology

Martin Seligman, a giant in the psychological community, kicked off a major TED talk by talking about how a TV station wanted a sound bite from him, and it should be one word. He said, “*Good.*” Then they decided that as the president of the American Psychological Association he was a figure of such stature that they would let him have two words, and he said, “*Not good.*” Finally, they decided he was of such stature that he would be allowed *three* words, and his three words were, “*Not good enough.*”

What he was getting at was essentially as follows: clinical psychology had a goal which was remarkably well accomplished: the complete classification of behavioral health condition, along with effective psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy that could take pretty miserable people and bring them up to feeling basically OK. He didn't really underscore the magnitude and implications of this goal; apart from the fact that public figures know they at least need to act humble publicly, sometimes greatness brings real humility and he was trying to lead people to see there was more to ask for than just getting someone to feel merely adequate, and he did not suggest that clinical psychology

is the kind of tool that lets people of all kinds to thrive in every way. He called for a positive psychology to help people thrive, have fulfilling and delightful living, and enable high talent not to go to waste. And the point that I know him for is his calling for positive psychology.

What is systematic theology?

What is mystical theology?

What is positive theology?

One distinction between Eastern Orthodoxy and Rome is that in Rome, all theology is systematic theology, and in Orthodoxy, all theology is mystical theology. This much is true to point out, however it invites confusion.

Thomas Aquinas, were he alive today, couldn't cut it for "publish or perish" academia. He is revered as one of the greatest giants in history, but he would not obviously be welcome as an academic today. While there are many ideas in his *Summa Theologiae*, few if any have the faintest claim to originality. Some people, including me, don't think that a single original idea is to be found. Others think that there are a few, very few: I have not read anyone attribute even a dozen original ideas in his quite enormous work. But what he did provide was a system: an organized set of cubbyholes with a place for everything and everything in its place. And the claim that all Roman theology is systematic theology means that everything fits somewhere in the system, whether Thomas Aquinas's or something else.

The claim that all theology in Orthodoxy is mystical theology is a different sort of claim. It is not a claim that everything fits under some kind of classification scheme. It says that all true theology meets a particular criterion, like saying that all true fire brings heat. Systematic theology as such is not allowed, and trying to endow the Orthodox Church with its first systematic theology is a way to ask the Church hierarchy for a heresy trial.

“Mystical” in mystical theology means theology that is practiced, experienced, and lived. The claim to “study” a martial art can involve reading, especially at the higher levels, but if you are going to study karate, you go to a dojo and start engaging in its practices. In that sense, while books may have some place in martial arts mastery, but “studying” ninjutsu is not something you do by burying your nose in books. It is a live practice.

All theology is positive theology, and my assertion is like saying that all theology is mystical theology, and not that all theology is part of systematic theology.

As to the relationship between positive psychology and positive theology, I honestly hope for an interesting conversation with some of the positive psychology community. I do not assert that positive theology contains positive psychology as we know it, or that positive psychology contains positive theology. I do, however, wish to suggest that something interesting and real is reflected in the claim that all theology is positive theology.

A wonderful old world

I wish to make one point of departure clear in the interest of framing what I am attempting.

There is a certain sense that this work could be seen as novel; for all I know it may be the first work discussing all Orthodox theology as being positive theology, but I follow Chesterton’s footsteps here (or rather fall short of them). **I am not seeking to invent a positive theology.** I am in fact attempting no novelty of any sort other than a new articulation of timeless truths that are relevant to the conversation. And I am seeking to offer something better than something wonderful I invented. I want to talk about wondrous things that I believe God invented, as old as the hills.

A deliberately *jarring* example

What is positive in the psychology of the Orthodox Church? To get off to a good start, I would like to say “repentance from sins.” And one of my articles unfolds “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret.”

The *Philokalia* says that men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them. Repentance is terrifying. It is an unconditional surrender. But once you have made that surrender, you receive a reward. You realize that you needed that sin like you need a hole in the head—and you are free of a trap. It is something like a spiritual chiropractic massage, that you walk away from in joy with a straighter spine. And in my own experience, I’m not sure I am ever as joyful as when I am repenting. And the effect is cumulative; repentance represents a rising spiritual standard of living.

Monasticism, which I discuss in *A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop*, represents a position of supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church. Now I love my Archbishop dearly and wouldn’t want to take him down one whit, but part of the point of the piece is that if you are given a choice between being the greatest bishop in the world and being an ordinary monk, “ordinary monk” is hands down the better choice to choose. The overriding concern in that environment is the spiritual, human profit of its members. Poverty, obedience, and chastity are all conditions to one of two routes to salvation, and however wonderful marriage may be, monasticism is even better. And as well as other terms, monasticism is spoken of as “repentance.” To live in a monastery is to work at a place that is minting spiritual money and giving all members as copious pay as possible.

The Utopia that is nowhere absent

Robert Goudzward, in *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, talked about Old Testament law as representing a paradise, and part of the picture is that it represented a paradise in which it was hard to get rich. A sage in the Bible asks, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” and there is a sense that having more and more money is not good for us as humans.

This world was created to be a paradise. The Old Covenant represented a paradise. The New Covenant represents a paradise. Marriage represents a paradise. Monasticism represents a paradise.

We were made for human flourishing, and part of what the Church attempts is to provide for each person to flourish as that person should flourish. Abbots (and everyone else) are not to colonize and clone; the authority is profound, but it is a profound authority in restoring a damaged icon—and helping the icon look like itself, not like something it isn't. If you read the saints' lives over time, all the saints represent Christ, but there is incredible diversity among how the saints represent Christ.

What does God ask from us?

If we look at the question of what God commands and what he requests, there is fundamental confusion in thinking God is asking us to fill his needs. God in Heaven is perfect, and has no conceivable needs except in the person of our neighbor. God makes demands of us, not to fill his needs like an incompetent therapist, but to give *us* what is best. St. Maximus the Confessor divides three classes of obedience: *slaves*, who obey out of fear, *mercenaries*, who obey to obtain benefits, and *sons*, who obey out of love. Now all obedience is in at least some sense obedience and sometimes obedience out of fear is just what the doctor ordered, but if you obey as a slave you can be saved, if you obey as a mercenary you do better, and if you obey as a son even better

than that. However, none of this is a setup to fill God's needs. The point is not that it is best for God if we obey out of love; the point is that it is best for *us* if we obey out of love.

A better kind of affirmation

This may come across very strangely to a psychologist who endorses affirmations, but the two main affirmations in Orthodoxy are "Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am first," and "All the world will be saved, and I will be damned."

Part of this stems from beliefs that I will explain but I do not ask you to subscribe to. Religion has enough of a reputation for focusing on the afterlife that it is provocative for a social gospel poster to say, "We believe in life before death." This life is of cardinal and incomparable significance; it is a life in which inch by inch we decide whether we will embrace Heaven or Hell when our live ends and no further repentance is available. But it has also been said that birth and death are an inch apart whilst the ticker tape goes on forever, and reform is only possible before we die. What the "affirmations" (of a sort) that I have mentioned do is prepare people like plaintiffs to press forth for maximum awards in their favor. The statements are for our good, and they help before death. Furthermore, it is believed that God doesn't do everything in our good works for us, but he allows a genuine cooperation of combined powers where we do part of it. We are told, though, that we are not to take credit for one single achievement in our life, but give all the merit to God... but come Judgment Day, all good deeds we have done our part to are reckoned as if we did them entirely ourselves and without any help from God. I do not ask you to believe this or think it makes sense, but I suggests it is a part of a picture where an overriding concern is God blessing us as much as we will accept.

Dr. Seligman's lecture linked at the beginning of this article talked about how French vanilla ice cream tastes exquisite for the first bite, but by the time you get to the fifth or sixth bite, the

flavor is gone. In the first candidate for the good life, people habituate quickly.

I have slightly opposite news about Orthodox affirmations: when you make them central to your life, the sting crumbles. Furthermore, if you see yourself as the worst sinner in a parish, or a monastery, or all prehistory and prehistory, that's the time that real growth and even real joy appear. Orthodoxy's affirmations unlock the door to repentance, and there is no end of treasure to be mined from that vein.

Stoicism and virtue

I've seen TED talks about how stoicism is being taken as some sort of ultimate power tool, and secret weapon, within the professional handegg community.

Part of my thought was, "Duh!" and with it a thought that it is a mischaracterization of philosophy to assume it's just something for odd and eccentric people, including yours truly, who have their noses in books. Stoicism is legitimately a power tool, but it is one of many power tools that have garnished quite a following and have been as powerful to their practitioners might have been.

I have said elsewhere, "Orthodoxy is pagan. Neo-paganism isn't," and *The Philokalia* preserves the very best of pagan philosophy with its profound endowment of virtues. N.B. the same word in Greek means "virtue" and "excellence," and if you want to help people thrive and develop giftedness, the four-horsed chariot of courage, justice, wisdom, and moderation has really quite a lot to go for it, and all the more if these are perfected by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. All of these are called "cardinal" or "hinge" virtues, meaning that not only are they good, but they are positive "gateway drugs" to other and perhaps even greater virtue.

And I would like to say one thing that the authors of *The Philokalia* simply can't much of ever stop talking about. This does

not seem an view of yourself that you would want to have, but I've had some pretty arrogant and abrasive people try pretty hard to teach me about humility. But I will say this: humility is the Philosopher's Stone and maybe the Elixir of Life. It opens your eyes to beauty pride may not see, and I need humility in my daily living more than I need air. I'm not going to try to further argue for an unattractive virtue, but I will say that it looks tiny and constricted from the outside, and vast and spacious from the inside. And for another Chesterton name drop: "It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride."

If we are going to look at world traditions, the Greek term for virtue, *arete* also meant excellence, and *arete* (I both mean 'virtue' and 'excellence') represents a tradition well worth heeding. Bits and pieces have been picked up on TED talks; Stoicism is a power tool among the professional handegg community, and another TED talk talks about how "grit" (also known as fortitude or courage) makes a big difference in success. But the tradition of virtue itself, and virtue philosophy, is worth attention.

Value-free spirituality?

I haven't read the title, but I have read Fr. Richard John Neuhaus talk about his title *The Naked Public Square*, in which he argues essentially that a religiously neutral public square is an impossibility, and the attempt to produce a naked public square will, perhaps, result in a statist religion.

If serious inner work without the resources of religious tradition is a possibility, I haven't seen it. Present psychotherapy has changed much faster than core humans have changed, and uses yoga practices from Hinduism, mindfulness of a sort (whether a traditional Buddhist would recognize Western exhilaration at mindfulness as Right Mindfulness I do not know), and a couple of other usual suspects like guided imagery (alleged to be known from Graeco-Roman times and known to some

traditional medicines, although the pedigree seems to be copied and pasted across websites).

In my Asian philosophy class, I was able to sympathize with some element of almost everything that was presented. In terms of Hindu claims that inside each of us is a drop of God, I could sympathize, believing we are made in the image of God. But the one point I recoiled from is Buddhism's *anatta*, or *an-atman*: the claim that we, and everything that "exists", are an empty illusion. Or as Chesterton put it: "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt."

Right Mindfulness, in its context in the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path, is a cardinal virtue, and I count that as a positive. However, I do not see the need for the West to turn to India as a maternal breast. It is a microaggression that treats Orthodox Christianity as bankrupt of resources. The same goes to turning to Buddhist "self-compassion." I also don't like being advised to practice yoga. I am already participating in a yoga, or a spiritual path: that of Orthodox Christianity, and it is a complete tradition.

My point, however, is not to attack the medicinal use of Indian tradition (whether or not Indians would recognize their land's spiritualities), but to say that value-free counseling is something I have never seen, and while it may be politically correct to foist Indian spirituality but not Orthodox Christian, I wish to offer a word on my drawing on my religious tradition. Whether you accept it is not up to me, but Orthodoxy is a therapeutic tradition. And the claim has been explicitly made, in a book called *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, that if Orthodox spiritual direction were to appear new on the scene today, it might well not be classified as "religion," but as "therapeutic science."

I have not been directly involved with that therapeutic science. I've tried to reach monasticism, and am still trying, and therapeutic science is included in monasticism. So I cannot directly speak from experience about its fruit. But other things—virtue, repentance from sin and the like, I can directly attest to as positive theology.

A few more words about humility

Humility seems at the start something you'd rather have other people have than have it yourself. It looks small on the outside, but inside it is vaster than the Heavens, and it is one of two virtues that the virtue-sensitized Fathers of the Philokalia simply cannot ever stop talking about.

Perhaps what I can say is this. I don't know positive psychology well, but one of the first lessons, and one of the biggest, is to learn and express gratitude. And what I would say as someone who believes in gratitude is this: what gratitude is to positive health, humility is *more*.

Let me ask a question: which would you rather spend time with: someone horrible and despicable, or someone wonderful and great? The latter, of course. How it relates to humility is this: if you are in pride, you see and experience others as horrible and despicable, while if you are in humility, you see others as wonderful and great. Church Fathers talk about seeing other men as "God after God." **That is a recipe for a life of delight.**

Eyes to see

There is more to be said; I am quite fond of St. John Chrysostom's "A Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself." In connection with this, there are constant liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." The devils are real, but they are on a leash, and we are called to trample them. It has been said that everything which happens has been allowed either as a blessing from God, or as a temptation. (In Orthodoxy, "temptation" means both a provocation enticing to sin, and a situation that is a trial). As has been said, the faithful cannot be saved without temptations, and the temptations that pass are provided by God so we can earn a crown and trampling them. St. John here frames things in a very helpful way.

Here I am starting to blend into something other than positive theology, and making assertions about positive theology and how they have similar effects to positive psychology. But really, all is ordained for us by a good God, a point for which I would refer you to God the Spiritual Father. There is profound providence, and profound possibility for profit, if only we have eyes to see it and be grateful for a God who has ordained Heaven and Earth for the maximum possible benefit for each of us. Does this strain credibility? Yes, but I believe it, and I believe it makes a world of difference.

Thomas Dixon on secularism and psychology

The article form of my advisor's thesis offered a case study for an understanding of secularity, and his case study was in psychology. He talked about how an older religious concept of passions was replaced by what was at first a paper-thin concept of emotions which you were just something you felt at the moment, then how the concept of emotions filled out and became emotions that could be about something, and then they filled out further and you could have an emotional dimension to a habit. The secular concept remains alienated from its religious roots, but the common Alcoholics Anonymous concept of being an alcoholic has almost completely filled out what was in the older concept of a passion. And here clinical psychology is modernized and secularized pastoral theology.

I'm not completely sure secularism is possible; it returns to Hinduism, at least for yoga, and Buddhism, at least for Right Mindfulness, as maternal breasts, and Hinduism has something there as Buddhism does not. Chesterton comes again to mind: "The problem with someone who doesn't believe in God is not that he believes nothing; it's that he believes anything!" I believe the Orthodox Church's bosom offers a deeper nourishment. I'm not sure I have much to back this claim other than by the extent

by which this article does (or does not) make sense, or whether it is more desirable to pursue one virtue (giving that virtues are stinkin' awesome things to have), or pursue a panoply of virtues. But I would hope that the reader would by now be able to make sense of my assertion that all Orthodox theology is positive psychology, even if the claim is more superficial than the assertion that all Orthodox theology is mystical theology.

For further reading without a moment's thought to positive psychology as such, **see *The Consolation of Theology***, a work of Orthodox theology, and one steeped in virtue philosophy.

Where is the Good of Women?

**Feminism is called the women's
movement. *But is it?***

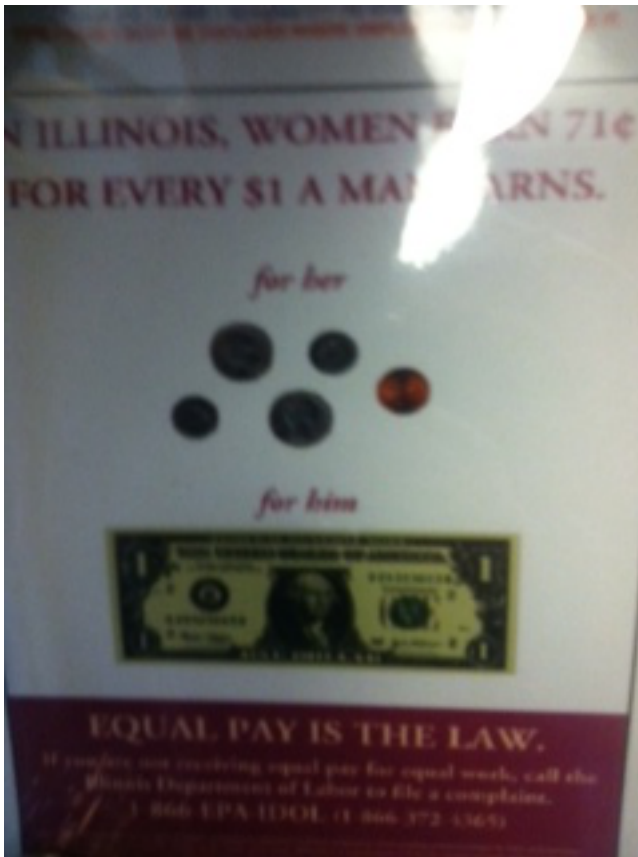
Three types of lies: Lies, *Statistics*, and INFOGRAPHICS

Perhaps the poster girl for way looney left feminism is the scholar who said Newton's *Principia Mathematica* as 'Newton's Rape Manual, and I have more sympathy for that than you might think. The birth of science had a moral stench, both in being mingled with deep occult currents, and in being advanced through a rhetoric of sexual violence for a very specific and deplorable reason. I do not agree with that specific feminist professor about what Newton's *Principia Mathematica* might as well be called, but I also do not see that diagnosis as the kind that is inspired by hallucinogens.

To begin with, I would like to quote a portion of a poster, posted for government-required regulatory compliance at a once bastion of Christian conservatism, Wheaton College. My choice

of this part of departure is not specifically focused on Wheaton, which was presumably not trying to be provocative, but to represent enough of a mainstream influence of feminism that I am not discussing a lunatic fringe of feminism, but something basic and (on feminist terms) not particularly controversial.

I apologize in advance for the poor quality of the picture as it was an attempt to take an accurate picture of a part of a poster that was roughly one to two feet above my head. I will reproduce the graphics as best I can, including the dark, dingy look of the coins (on the original you can see the scissors cuts where the pictures of the quarters had been cut out), but in clarity because I want to represent the poster fairly and not by the standards of my photography in a difficult shot. The poster says at the top, "In Illinois, a woman makes 71 cents for every dollar a man makes." Then there is a picture of 71 cents in coins, "for her" at the top, and a picture of a dollar bill, "for him" below. The picture is as follows:



In the interest of fairness to not pull an unintended dirty trick, I'd like to start with a fresh rendering of the infographic so I'm not giving attractive images for my claim and badly executed pictures when I treat opposing views. We have:

For her:



For him:



And the natural response is *outrage*.

But what if we tweak things a little and compare coins with coins instead of apples and oranges? Then we have:

For her:**For him:**

But the objection may come, "Um, that almost destroys the effect." And my response is, "Yes. That is exactly the point." And in this there are two visual lies exposed by this revamp:

1. Whatever a man gets, it looks like literally a dozen times what a woman gets. The sheer space taken for \$.71 in coins (and, following usual practice, as few coins as you can use to reach that amount), is

dwarfed by the visual space taken by a dollar bill. For that matter, the visual space taken by a man's four quarters is dwarfed by the visual space taken by a dollar bill. This may only register subconsciously, but it is a powerful subconscious cue: the real, emotional impact is not that a woman earns 71 cents on the dollar for a man, but more like a miniscule 5 to 10 cents on the dollar. This cue, which may only register subconsciously (compared to the revised comparison of \$.71 in coins and \$1.00 in the largest common coin, the quarter), is only more powerful for its subconscious effect.

2. Secondly, the INFOGRAPHIC registers something else that only renders subconsciously. Compared to the currencies of other countries, especially before the slightly new look for larger bills, paper currency was big currency, and real money. If you walked into a store and paid for something cash, you paid with bills. Coins, while having some value, are often only something you get back as the smallest remaining money and have to figure out what to do with. Not only is spare change a small sort of thing compared to *real* money, it was honestly a bit of a nuisance. Now people usually pay with plastic or other non-cash items, and money is a bit tighter for most of us, so we may want the change more, but saying that she gets change and he gets real money is an apples and oranges comparison; the effect is like saying that *he* is paid in cold, hard cash, while *she* is paid only in coupons.

Lies.

Statistics.

INFOGRAPHICS.

Now it is not simply the case that INFORGRAPHICS can only ever lie; the works of Tufte such as *Envisioning Information* and *The Visual Display of Quantative Information* never stop at tearing apart bad INFOGRAPHICS; they compellingly demonstrate that the visual display of information can be at one stroke beautiful, powerful, and truthful. Something a little more informative, if perhaps imperfect, to convey a 71% statistic would be to simply show 71% of a dollar bill:

For her:



For him:



But it is a serious misunderstanding of feminism to think that a feminist will argue this way. Instead it is another case of:

Lies.

Statistics.

INFOGRAPHICS.

The beating heart of feminism

I'm not sure how this plays out in feminism outside of feminist theology, but every feminist reader I've read has been in an *extreme* hurry to neutralize any sense that the Roman veneration of the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary is a token of the good estate of women. Now I have heard Orthodox comment that Roman and Orthodox veneration vary: Romans stress the Mother of God's virginity, Orthodox stress her motherhood, and presumably there's more. But one finds among feminist theologians the claim that since the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary was both a virgin and a mother, that means that you're not really OK if you're a woman unless you are both a

virgin and a mother. And never mind that spiritually speaking it is ideal for Orthodox Christians, women and men to have a spiritual virginity, and to give birth to Christ God in others, the Roman veneration means a woman isn't OK unless she is (literally) *both* a virgin *and* a mother. *Fullstop*. One gets the sense that feminists would sell a story that the Roman Catholic Church *reviles* the Virgin Mary, if people could be convinced of that.

A first glimpse of the good estate of women

I would like to make an interstitial comment here, namely that there is something feminism is suppressing. What feminists are in a hurry to neutralize is any sense that the veneration of the Mother of God could in any way be a surfacing of the good estate of women. What is it *they* want to stop you from seeing?

Let's stop for a second and think about Nobel Prizes. There is presumably no Nobel Prize for web development, but this is not a slight: web development is much newer than Nobel Prizes and regardless of whether Alfred Nobel would have given a Nobel prize to web development if it was around, the Nobel Prize simply hasn't commented on web development. There is a Nobel Prize for physics, and (the highest one of all), the Nobel Prize for Peace. When a Nobel Prize is given to a physicist, this is a statement that not only the laureate but the discipline of physics itself is praiseworthy: it is a slight that there is no Nobel Prize for mathematics (rumor has it that Alfred Nobel's wife was having an affair with a mathematician). To award a Nobel Prize for physics is to say that physics is a praiseworthy kind of thing, and one person is singled out as a crystallization of an honor bestowed to the whole discipline of physics. And, if I may put it that way, the Mother of God won the Nobel Prize for womanhood.

Called the New Eve, She is reminiscent of the Pauline passage, And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. Christ is called the Last or New Adam, and Mary the Mother of God is called the New Eve. Let us not say that bestowing a Nobel Prize for physics on one scientist constitutes a rejection of every other.

At feasts of the Mother of God, the Orthodox Church quotes a passage from Scripture that seems at first glance surprising as a way to honor the Mother of God: a woman from a crowd tells Christ, "Blessed are the womb that bore you and the breasts that you nursed at!" and Christ replies, "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." The text appears at first glance to downplay the significance of the Mother of God, and in fact has been taken to do so by Protestants. So why would the Orthodox Church read this text at all kinds of feasts in honor of the Mother of God?

The answer comes after a question: "Who heard the Word of God and kept it?" "*Who pre-eminently heard the Word of God and kept it?*" Of course many people have done so, but the unequalled answer to "*Who pre-eminently heard the Word of God and kept it?*" is only the Mother of God, She who said, "Behold, I am the handmaiden of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The woman who spoke up at the crowd said, "Your mother must really be something because she bore you!", and Christ implies, "My Mother is really something because she obeyed." The Mother of God did not *achieve* the combination of virginity and motherhood; she *obeyed* God's command, and in the wake of that obedience, motherhood was added to her virginity. But taking the Mother of God as a role model for women does not mean that women need to be both

virgins and mothers, any more than Evangelicals who ask "What would Jesus do?" feel themselves obliged to learn Arimaic and move to Israel. I don't want to downplay Mary's virginity and motherhood, both of which are sacred offices, but it is a serious confusion—or rather a serious duplicity—to say that venerating the Mother of God means that women aren't OK unless they pull off the combination of virginity and motherhood.

The Mother of God is She who obeyed, and obedience is for everyone, and highlighted for women. And while it may be easy enough for feminist theologians to excuse themselves from a fabricated straw obligation to be both virgins and mothers if they are to be OK as women, excusing oneself from obedience presents more of a pickle, and one that they don't want you to see. Feminism doesn't like obedience (especially of women to men); engineered, synthetic feminist "fairy tales" like *Ella Enchanted* make it clear that for a woman to be in a position of obedience is a curse: a clear and unmitigated curse.

The First Eve fell because she disobeyed; the Last or New Eve offered the perfect creaturely obedience and the gates of Hell began to crumble at her obedience. The Incarnation, the point has been plainly made, would have been absolutely impossible without the consent, obedience, and cooperation of the Mother of God as it would have been without the Holy Trinity. And *only* a woman could have first opened that door. The Theotokos is called the first Christian; she was the first of many to receive Christ, and men learn from her.

A look at early Antiochian versus Alexandrine Christology may also be instructive. In Antiochian Christology, Christ was significant pre-eminently because he was the Son of God, born of a Virgin, lived a sinless life, died as a sacrifice, and rose as the firstborn of the Dead. In Alexandrian Christology, Christ was significant as a teacher primarily. At least one theologian has said that St. Paul's epistles don't make much of Christ, because not a single one of his parables comes up in St. Paul's writing. But this is a misunderstanding: St. Paul was in fact making a

(proto-)Antiochian use of Christ, and the Christ who was the Son of God, died a sacrifice, and rose from the dead is of central significance to the entire body of his letters. Christ's teaching recorded in the Gospels is invaluable, but we could be saved without it, and many people effectively *have* been saved without that teaching as believers who did not have the Gospel in their language. But we could not be saved by a Christ who lacked the Antiochian distinctives: who was not Son of God or did not rise from the dead, trampling down death by death. If I may describe them in what may be anachronous terms, early Antiochian Christology held Christ to be significant as an archetype, while early Alexandrian Christology held Christ to be significant as an individual. And the distinction between them is significant. You do not know the significance of Christ as the New Adam until you grasp him as an archetype and not a mere individual on a pedestal, and you do not know the significance of the Mother of God as the New Eve until you grasp her as an archetype and not a mere individual on a pedestal.

On a level that includes the archetypal, the Mother of God is mystically identified by such things as Paradise, the earth, the Church, the Container of Christ, and the city, and many other things such as a life lived of prayer that completes its head in time spent at Church. To be a man is a spiritual office, and to be a woman is a spiritual office. The Mother of God serves as a paradigm, not only of Christians, but of woman. And that is noble, glorious, and beautiful.

There are more things that are beautiful about God's creation than are dreamed of in feminism—and more things than are dreamed of even in women.

I remember one Indian woman I spoke with in an online author's community; she was taking stories from Indian lore and trying to make concrete retellings of them: moving from the archetypes to individuals on a pedestal. And what I told her is, basically, *don't*. The archetypal stories were something I could well enough relate to; the archetypal (Indian) loving elder in the

story had the same pulse and the same heart as loving elders I knew as a small (U.S.) child. The archetypal level is universal. Now what happens in the concrete is important, profoundly important, but you miss something if you cut out its archetypal head and heart and then try to talk with the body that is left over. And there is real *rapprochement* between men and women: Christ the New Adam and Mary the New Eve enjoyed indescribable intimacy, an interpenetration or *perichoresis* where she gave him his humanity and he gave her her participation in his divinity. The Mother of God's perpetual virginity stems from this; after such a *perichoresis* with God incarnate, a merely earthly husband's physical union was impossible. I have heard a complementarian Roman Catholic theology suggest that the word *homoousios* to describe the relationship between men and women: *homoousios* being the word of the Creed used to affirm that the Son is not an inferior, creaturely copy of the Father but of the same essence, fully of the same essence. The statement may be an exaggeration; if so, it was forcefully stating something true. I have attempted postmodern thick *description* of differences between men and women; I was wrong, not in believing that there are real differences, but in assuming a postmodern style of thick description in rendering those differences. St. Maximus the Confessor is described as describing five mediations in which any gulf is transcended: that between male and female, that between Paradise and the inhabited world, that between Heaven and Earth, that between spiritual and visible Creation, and ultimately that between uncreated and created nature, the chasm between God and his Creation. All of these chasms are real; all are transcended in Christ, in whom there is no male nor female, paradise nor merely earthly city, Heaven nor mere earth, spiritual nor merely physical, Creator nor mere creature. All these distinctions are transcended in a Christ who makes us to become by grace what He is by nature.

The ~~beating heart~~ throbbing head of feminism

I have mentioned two points of feminism: first, an infographic that was mainstream enough to be proclaimed as part of a regulatory compliance poster; and second, the neutered veneration of the Mother of God that is not allowed to mean anything positive for the estate of women. However, these are not intended as the core of a critique of feminism; in part they are intended as clues. Feminism gives a clue about its beating heart throbbing head in an unsavory infographic, and in its haste to neutralize any sense that the veneration of the Mother of God could be any good signal for women (or the ordinary kind—those who are not *both virgins and mothers*). Another author might have substituted other examples, and I must confess a degree of instance in that I keep bumping into feminism and I have tried to understand it, but there are depths unknown to most feminists and I would be wary of claiming exhaustive knowledge that I do not claim for cultures I have lived in for months or years. But I still observe, or have acknowledged, one major point.

One text, *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* by Anne Schaef, admittedly considered dated by many feminists today, mentioned that the author mentioned that many men say that women understand them better than men. And this puzzled her, because on the surface at least, it looked quite frankly like a compliment paid, by men, to women. But then she put on her feminist X-ray goggles, observed that the beginning of 'understand' is 'under', and juridically decided that to "understand" is by nature to stand *under*, that is, *to be an inferior*. And so she managed to wrest a blatant affront from the jaws of an apparent (substantial) compliment.

There was a counselor at my church who was trying to prepare me for my studies in a liberal theology program, and he told me that there was something I would find very hard to

understand in feminism. Now I found this strange as I had already lived in, and adapted to, life in four countries on three continents. And he was right. What I would not easily understand is subjectivism, something at the beating heart, or throbbing head, of feminism. And what is called subjectivism looking at one end is pride recognized by the others, and pride is a topic about which Orthodoxy has everything to say. Pride is the heart, and subjectivism the head, of what Orthodoxy regards as one of the deadliest spiritual poisons around.

It is said that the gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. It is only an image, but some say that the fire of Hell is the Light of Heaven as it is experienced through its rejection. And Heaven and Hell are spiritual realities that we begin to experience now; and feminism is, if anything, bolted and barred from the inside. To pick another example, with the influential *You Just Don't Understand* by Deborah Tannen, the metamessage that is read into men holding doors for women was, "It is mine to give you this privilege, and it is mine to take away." And on that point I would comment: I won't judge this conversation by today's etiquette, in which more often than not people are expected to hold the door for other people; I will comment on the older etiquette that met feminist critique. And on that point I must ask whether any other point in the entire etiquette, much of which was gender-neutral then, received such interpretation? Did saying, "Please," or "Thank you," or "I'm sorry," ever carry a power play of "I extend this privilege to you and it is mine to take away?" More to the point, do body image feminists wish to find a sexist power play in the saying, "There are three things you do not ask a woman: her age, her weight, or her dress size."? Or Was it not just part of a standard etiquette that no one claimed to be able to take away?

But even this is missing something, and I do not mean "men who are fair and women who care." **The unfairness is significant, not for being unfair in itself, but because it is the trail of clues left by something that breaches care.**

And to try to address this issue by reasoning is a losing battle, not because logic is somehow more open to men than women, but because you cannot reason subjectivism into truth any more than you can reason an alcoholic to stop drinking, fullstop. Now one may be able to make the case to a third party that it would better for a particular alcoholic to stop drinking, or that a particular feminist argument played fast and loose with the rules of logic, but it is madness to bring this to feminism. What is unfair in feminism is most directly speaking a breach of one of the lowest basic virtues of the Christian walk, namely *justice*, and caring is at essence about the highest of virtues in the Christian walk, namely *ἀγάπη* or *love*, but this is not what's wrong. Dishonest arguments in feminism are a set of footprints left by pride or subjectivism, and it is by pride that Satan fell from being an angel in Heaven to being the Devil. It is also through pride, here known under the label of "consciousness raising", that just as Michael Polanyi has been summarized as saying that behaviorists do not teach, "There is no soul," but induce students into study in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never considered, feminists put on subjectivist X-ray goggles that let them see oppression of women in every nook and cranny, even in social politeness. And if you read Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence*, which has its merits even if they are limited, it is well worth studying what he says about bullies. Bullies do not see themselves as triumphant, or for that matter as oppressors, but as beleaguered victims. Everything has significance, and everything has *hostile* significance. Why did someone bump a bully in the hallway? The possibility that it was a crowded hall and growing children can be just a little bit clumsy with the current state of their bodies, is never even considered. An innocent bump in the hall is the tip of an assault, the tip of an iceberg in which a piece is moved in chess to achieve their defeat. And the bully's actions are only a modest self-defense. The bully has X-ray goggles that make everything plain, and the bully's state of mind is what is built up by the X-ray goggles of "consciousness raising."

"Consciousness raising" is a brilliant euphemism for taking women who are in many cases happy and well-adjusted and transforming them into alienated, hostile women who believe that everything outside of feminism has it in for them.

Unpeeling the infographic a little further

In my discussion above, I left unchallenged the figure that women make \$0.71 on the dollar compared to what men make. How can I put this? Subjectivists do not go out of their way to use statistics honestly. Subjectivists go for the most convenient cherry-picked data they could. As others have said, they use statistics as a drunken man uses lampposts: for support rather than illumination.

Christina Sommer's *Who Stole Feminism: How Women Have Betrayed Women* suggests that that book does not follow the *ceteris parabis* principle of comparing with all other things being equal. Motherhood is hard to grind out of women, and spending significant time with her young children is hard to grind out of most women. The "71 cents on the dollar" figure keeps cropping up; in one discussion I remember it was repeatedly claimed that women made 69 cents on the dollar until one person said "Please either substantiate this statistic or stop bringing it up. The comparison in that study compared men who had a single, so to speak, major time commitment to their work, to women who were working hard to juggle a major time commitment to work with a major time commit to their younger children. When things were genuinely *ceteris paribus*, when men were only compared to women who had worked without reduced employment to care for children, then the figure was more like 86-91 cents on the dollar.

Is 86+ cents on the dollar in 1987 and a closing gap acceptable?

There was a short story that a roommate read to me in high school; it offended me and I was I was horrified. It showed a hiring manager saying, "Inspid. Pathetic. Disgusting. Miserable." as he threw one more resume into the trash. Then a doorkeeper said, "Your 3:00 is here." The manager said, "You've got some balls applying for a position like this. Why are you wasting my time?" The applicant said, "I have wanted to work with this company all my life. I want this position; I have friends, family, and a religion, but all of them are secondary; I will miss the birth of a child if that is what it takes to work." The manager said, "Get out. Are you going to go by yourself or will I have to call to have security escort you off the premises?"

In a flash, the applicant leveled a .45 magnum at him and said, "I *want* this job. Now will you hire me or do I have to blow you away?" The hiring manager said, "Very well. Report to my desk at 8:00 AM Monday." After the applicant left the room, the manager pulled the intercom and told the doorkeeper, "Tell all of the other applicants to _____ off. We have our man."

This story horrified me a great deal more than an F-bomb alone, and it was part of an attempt on his part to convince me that no one ever does any action for any motive besides financial gain. (In the past I've had several people try to convince me of the truth of this point. In no case did any of these people stand to benefit financially from their efforts to persuade me. **But I digress.**) However, my roommate was trying to help me appreciate something about the business world that this caricature caught *right on target*.

Women in the business world have been advised to make a practice of asking, "What's in it for me?" And for that matter, compassionate men may be advised to make a practice of asking, "What's in it for me?" and play by the rules of a jungle because

compassionate men do not do the best at succeeding in the business world. Now *must* you ask, "What's in it for me?"

The answer is a simple "*No, it's optional,*" but there's a **caveat**. If you do not negotiate based on "What's in it for me?", you are less likely, man or woman, to receive more paycheck, prestige, power, and promotion. In the short story it did not strictly speaking need to be a *man* who negotiated with a gun in a job interview. But it is more often a man and not a woman who is mercenary to that degree. I myself do not naturally gravitate towards that thinking even if I've been advised to, and my salary history is an IT salary history, which is something to be thankful for, but it has been below average for many of the areas I've been working in, and whatever gifts I may have are applied on the job without necessarily receiving even average pay.

Let us ignore for one moment the *Times* cover story about "The Richer \$ex," meaning women. Is it possible that the following could be justified?

For the love of money is the root of all evils: "I climbed to the top of the corporate ladder only to discover that it was leaning against the long building:" even if you win the rat race, you're still a rat: the best things in life are *still* free.

I might comment that while I am meticulously analyzing money, the premises are wrong. We've been barking up the wrong tree. **I'm answering the wrong question.** There is great gain in godliness with contentment: more than money can buy. It would speak well of us to be concerned, less than if someone else is making more than we could, than with the things that are truly important in life.

The more inequity disturbs you, the more you stand to profit from "Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance" for what is more important, and "Money" for what is less.

For him, all other things being equal.



For her, all other things being equal.



Could there be possibly more important questions for women than the question that began and ends this article?

The war against *real* women

In the Catholic social encyclicals, the modern ones since *Rerum Novarum*, the tone prior to Pope John Paul was

celebratory, or sometimes complaining that the encyclicals were not progressive *enough*. But one thread out of this many-patched quilt is the call (added or amplified) for a "living wage". That wage was something like \$15 or \$20 per hour, but not really set in stone. And there is a legitimate concern: perhaps not as dramatic as the situation in sweatshops, but being a greeter in Wal-Mart may be a great way for a kid to earn some change, but eking out a living on what Wal-Mart pays most employees in its stores is not really possible. Now there may also be a point in that the position labeled as progressive would result, not in a great many people earning \$15-\$20 an hour, but a great many people earning \$0 an hour because businesses that can only keep employees paid a living wage have a short lifespan. (But let's brush this under a rug.)

The consistent call was for work to pay a living wage, with one notable exception. Pope John Paul II called for a man to be able to earn a "family wage", meaning not a living wage for an individual but some sort of support that would be sufficient for a family to live off of. And this was universally derided by feminist commentators, and not because John Paul II failed to also specify that women should be able to earn a family wage.

I'm not sure if you've heard, either in the context of artificial intelligence-related transhumanism or of planned exploration of Mars, the term 'Melanesian'. The term may be racially charged, but I'm going to ignore that completely. The thought is vile on grounds that make it completely irrelevant whether the people being derided belong to one's race or another. The basic idea of being 'Melanesian' is that for ages untold people have hunted, built, crafted things with their hands, told stories and sung songs, made love and raised children, and all of this is innocent enough in its place, but now we are upon the cusp of growing up, and we must leave 'Melanesian' things behind. The John 3:16 of the Mars Society is "Earth is the cradle of humankind, but one does not remain in a cradle forever." We must grow up and leave 'Melanesian' things behind. Now the exact character of this

growing up varies significantly, but in both cases the call to maturity is a call to forsake life as we know it and use technology to do something unprecedented. In the case of transhumanism, the idea is to use human life as a discardable booster rocket that will help us move to a world of artificially intelligent computers and robots where mere humans will be rendered obsolete. In the case of the Mars Society, it is to branch out and colonize other planets and the furthest reaches of space that we can colonize, and in the "Martian" (as Mars Society members optatively call themselves) mind heart, this mission, and the question of whether we are "a spacefaring race", bears all the freight one finds in fully religious salvation.

All this is scaled back in the feminists who comment on Pope John Paul II's call for a family wage, but there is something there that is not nearly so far on a lunatic fringe as transhumanism or the Mars Society, but much more live as a threat as it would be a brave soul who would call this a lunatic fringe. The feminist critique of Pope John Paul II's call for a family wage is that it is unacceptable, and men should earn low enough amounts of money that it takes both parents' work to support them. Women are to be made to "grow up", and however much it may be untenable to deny a woman's right to attend university or a woman's work to do any job traditionally done by men, it is absolutely out of the question to allow a woman's right to do a job traditionally done by women. They are to be pushed out of the nest and made to grow up. They are to be compelled by the economics of a situation where a husband cannot earn a family wage to work like a man.

The argument has been advanced that women are "The Richer \$ex." The question has been raised about whether men have become "the second sex", as was the title of a classic of French feminism. A book could easily be pulled on *The War Against Boys*, and discussion could be made of how school and the academy are a girl's game—and one Wheaton administrator described how some of the hardest calls he has to make is to

explain to one parent why her daughter, with a perfect record of straight A's, was rejected by Wheaton—and explain that Wheaton has four hundred others like her; Wheaton, which has a 45% male student body, could admit only female applicant with straight A's and still be turning people away.

But the argument discussed just above is something of a side point. To put it plainly, feminism is anti-woman. Perhaps ire against men is easily enough found; Mary Daly, now unfashionable, makes a big deal of "castration" and defines almost every arrangement of society not ordained by feminism as "rape." (This would include most of all societies in all of history that we have recorded.) And if Mary Daly is now unfashionable, she is unfashionable to people who follow in her wake and might be voiceless today if she had not gone before them. And Mary Daly at least may well wear a reform program for men on their sleeve. But others who have followed her, and perhaps used less brusque rhetoric, wear a reform program for women next to their hearts.

I would like to pause for a moment to unpack just what it may mean to elevate anger to the status of a central discipline. And gender feminism, at least, does make an enterprise fueled by anger.

Every sin and passion in the Orthodox sense is both a miniature Hell, and a seed that will grow into Hell if it is unchecked. Different ages have different ideas of what is the worst sin. Victorians, at least in caricature, are thought to have made sexual sin the worst sin. In the New Testament, sexual sin is easily forgiven, but in an age where men have Internet porn at their fingertips, it would be helpful to remember that lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first nothing else is interesting, and then not even lust is interesting; there is misery. Getting drunk once might feel good, but the recovering alcoholic will tell you that being in thrall to alcohol and drunk all of the time is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. Many people today think pride, the sin that cast an angel out of Heaven

to be the Devil, is the worst sin and all of us have a stench to clean up here. And to the Church Fathers, to whom love was paramount, anger was perhaps the greatest danger. Today we say that holding a grudge is like drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person, or that 'anger' is one letter from 'danger'. The Fathers said, among other things, that it makes us more like the animals, and by implication less like what is noble and beautiful in the race of mankind. And it is one thing to lose one's temper and find that dealing that with one particular person tries your patience. It is another thing entirely to walk a spiritual path that is fueled by the passion of anger. And this feminist choice is wrong. It is toxic, and we should have nothing to do with it.

Gender feminism may elevate anger to the status of central spiritual discipline, but to quote *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*:

Writers of both contemporary history and science texts, especially for the primary and secondary grades, make special efforts to provide "role models" for girls. Precollege texts now have an abundance of pictures; these now typically show women working in factories or looking through microscopes. A "stereotypical" picture of a woman with a baby is a frowned-upon rarity...

In an extensive study of the new textbooks written under feminist guidelines, New York University psychologist Paul Vitz could find no positive portrayal of romance, marriage or motherhood.

Although this is not directly a remark about feminism, something of my joy in *A Wind in the Door* was lost when I learned that Madeleine l'Engle viewed kything, the main supernatural element in the book, regarded it as literal fact. The idea that a reader is supposed to entertain a willing suspension of disbelief is not disturbed, but she meant, literally, that ordinary people should be able to send things directly, mind to mind. And

what I took to be a beautiful metaphor (perhaps today I would say it needs to transcend in the noetic realm), made for an ugly literal claim. And the same thing happened when I read Terry Pratchett's *The Wee Free Men*, which is presented as a novel of Discworld. It is not set in Ankh-Morpork, nor does any standard Discworld character or setting make more than one or two combined cameo appearances. So it is duplicitously called a novel of Discworld. And it is in fact not really centered on the Wee Free Men, who certainly make nice ornaments to the plot but never touch the story's beating heart. The story is Wiccan and advertises witchcraft; like Mary Daly, who gives a duplicitous acknowledgement of Christ's place (I parsed it and told the class point-blank, "I am more divine than her Christ"), argues for Wicca and witchcraft, tells how one may become a witch, and in her 'Original Reintroduction' written some decades after writes with a poetic and highly noetic character which drips with unnatural vice as much as Orthodox Liturgy drips with glory and Life. It was in reading *The Wee Free Men* that I first grasped *why* the Fathers called witchcraft unnatural vice. Never mind that witches deal in plants, and probably know a great many more details than the rest of us. There is a distinction like that of someone who studies available books on anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry, perhaps learning more than those in the medical profession, but to be an assassin ("If a sword blow hits the outside of the arm about a third of the way from the elbow to the shoulder, you can sever an artery and cause substantial bleeding."). The analogy is not exact; I believe it misses things. But the entire Wiccan use of plants constitutes unnatural vice.

And in the shadow of those following Mary Daly, there is never a reform program for men that leaves women untouched. Maybe the reforms for men may be more clear; but good old-fashioned chauvinist men are almost a distraction compared to women who resist feminist improvement.

The Good Estate of Woman

Is it demeaning that the Bible says of the ambitious woman, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing?" Or is it not much more demeaning to say of the ambitious woman, "She shall be saved *from* childbearing?"

Women desire quite often simply motherhood. The very strength of the desire for romance, marriage, and motherhood in the face of gargantuan opposition says that what feminism is trying to free women from is an estate of happiness that women have yearned for from time immemorial. If it is prescribed hard enough that women will enter the workforce and work at some job wanted by men, she very well may do that—in addition to wanting children. Wendy Shalit in *A Return to Modesty*:

"Just because you're a woman doesn't mean you can't be a doctor or a lawyer." Girls of my generation grew up on this expression. "*Just because you're a woman.*" It was a motto like mother's milk to us, and now it is the philosophy behind Take Our Daughters to Work Day. "*Just because you're a woman.*" In other words, being a woman is a kind of handicap that with hard work, one can overcome. Some are born deformed; others are born women; but be brave. I'm sure you'll make the best of it.

Yet now that we are free to be anything, doctors and lawyers, now that we've seen that women can be rational, and that men can cry, what we most want to know, and what we are not permitted to ask, is what does it mean to be a woman in the first place? Not in terms of what it won't prevent us from doing—we are not unaware of our bountiful options—but what is *meaningful* about being a woman? Rosie the Riveter was riveting only because she didn't usually rivet, and now that so many Rosies do, we most long to know what makes us unique again.

Two different women said to me, nervously, before graduation, What's wrong with me? I want to have children. One had landed a job with an investment banking firm; the other was *supposed* to land a job with an investment banking firm because that's what her father wanted, but the scouts who came to campus complained she wasn't aggressive enough. *What's wrong with me? I want to have children...* [emphasis original]

I think of a friend from college who was a powerful athlete, and for that matter was into boxing, and after college wanted to... *settle down and be mother to a family, and a large one at that.*

There is the *Calvin and Hobbes* strip where Hobbes says, "You can take the tiger out of the jungle, but you can't take the jungle out of the tiger." And what it seems is that women can be pushed to be androgynous or like men in so many ways, and yet you still can't take the jungle out of the tiger.

And perhaps women's happiness is found in cutting with the grain of motherhood than against it.

And on this point I would like to pause for what is for feminism the Right by Which Women's Rights Stand or Fall: the right to choose whether to have an, um, "uterine contents shower." An older generation of feminist called abortion the ultimate violation of a woman; but I wish to make another point here. If you want *pro-choice*, real *pro-choice*, dial 1-800-4-HOPE-4-1. There is counseling which does not make this choice for a woman, and which stands by women who choose abortion as well as those who do not. (And let's not get in to how many abortions women are pressured into, against their choice, who are pressured into it by "boyfriends" and men who have no desire to shoulder the responsibilities of a father to raise a child.) And this is decisively *pro-choice* compared to the "counseling" provided by an abortion clinic, which is essentially a five minute sales pitch presenting abortion as the only live option. And if you have had an abortion, and are hurting, recognize that what

abortion clinics by law offer as post-abortion counseling is no more helpful than the pre-abortion counseling; again, dial 1-800-4-HOPE-4-1 and be connected with the healing power of counseling that recognizes abortion as an experience that many have found traumatic. Counselors are complaining that political correctness is preventing them from adequately offering post-abortion counseling.

And the "it's part of her body" is an illusion, a legal fiction. Nobody believes it, or at least women going through an abortion don't. Feminist landmarks like *the sacrament of abortion*, in a chapter called "the cure for guilt," advocate grieving that explains to the *child* why the separation is needed. It's not scraping away some unwanted tissue from a woman's body; it is striking a woman's motherhood, sort of a spiritual equivalent to kicking a man in the testicles.

Feminism is anti-woman, and perhaps the single greatest instance of this is that it supports the right of women, not to be mothers, but to have their motherhood injured. It is a bit like claiming to be pro-man, and having the single greatest test of one's support for men be in his reproductive freedom, namely the inalienable right to opt-in to a hard kick in the groin.

And perhaps in place of a spiritual discipline of anger that puts on feminist X-ray goggles and finds oppression and insult lurking around every corner and in the most innocent of acts, women might place such spiritual disciplines as thanksgiving.

The darker the situation, the more we need thanksgiving. In the last major ordeal I went through, what saved me from despair was counting my blessings, and being mindful and thankful for innumerable things and people, and telling other people how thankful I was for them. I don't know how else I could have had such joy at such a dark moment.

The properly traditional place for women is not exactly for men to be at work and women to be at home without adult company; the traditional placement for both men and women was to work in adult company, doing different work perhaps but

doing hard work in adult company. Feminists have a point that the 1950's ideal of a woman alone without adult company all the worklong day can induce depression, and cutting with the grain of motherhood does not automatically mean reproducing the 50's. The perfect placement is for men to be with other men doing the work of men and women to be with women doing the work of women, and that is denied to men as well as women. *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Policies Are Harming Young Men* attests that school has become girls' turf. My own experiences in schooling were that in almost all areas that truly interested me, I was self-taught. Working first in math, then in theology, there was something more than the naive outsider's question to academic theology: "Yes, I understand that we need to learn multiple languages, the history of theology, philosophy of religion, hermeneutics, and so on, but when are we going to study real *theology*?" This question is not in particular a man's question; it could just as plausibly have been spoken by a young woman. But work and school both place its members as neuters; there may be some places of schooling that may be 80% male (I've been there), and there may be places of schooling that may be 80% female (I've been there), but the traditional roles for men and women are not optional; they are taken off the table altogether, leaving those who would have traditional roles holding the short straw.

But to say that and stop is misleading. I remember when I asked an Orthodox literature professor for his advice on a novella I was working that was a fantasy world based on the patristic Greek East instead of the medieval Latin West, and his advice, were I wise enough to listen to it (I wasn't), was simply, "If Orthodoxy is not to work for the here and now, it simply isn't worth very much." And Orthodoxy has fashioned men and women who have thrived under pagan antiquity, under Constantine, under the devious oppression of Julian the Apostate, under the fairy-like wonderland of nineteenth century Russia, under the Bolshevik Revolution, under centuries in the

Byzantine Empire, under Muslim rule after Byzantium shrunk and finally modern era guns ended the walls erected by a Byzantine Emperor ages before, in France by those fleeing persecution, in America under parallel jurisdictions. In every age and at every time the Orthodox Church has found saints who chanted, as the hymn in preparation for Communion states, "Thou, who art every hour and in every place worshipped and glorified..." And if you think our world is too tangled to let God work his work, there is something big, or rather Someone Big, who is missing from your picture. God harvested alike St. Zosima and St. Mary of Egypt. And it is not just true that God has fashioned and has continued to fashion real men in the intensely masculine atmosphere of a monastery of men; calling men's monasteries simply schools that make men is to focus on a minor key. Helping men be men, and channeling machismo into povdig or ascetical feats, is a matter of seeking the Kingdom of God and having other things be added as well. I have heard of one man be straightened out on Mount Athos from his addiction to pornography and then depart and be married; that may not be the usual path on Mount Athos, but the strong medicine offered on Mount Athos is sufficient to address the biggest attack on manhood this world offers, and it is a place of salvation.

What prescription would I suggest for women? To get a part-time job while children are at school? To homeschool, and have some team teaching? To just stay at home? All of these and more are possibilities, but the most crucial suggestion is this:

Step out of Hell.

In "From Russia, with Love: A Spiritual Guide to Surviving Political and Economic Disaster," I wrote:

The Greek word *hubris* refers to pride that inescapably blinds, the pride that goes before a fall. And subjectivism is tied to pride. Subjectivism is trying, in any

of many ways, to make yourself happy by being in your own reality instead of learning happiness in the God-given reality that you're in. Being in subjectivism is a start on being in Hell. Hell may not be what you think. Hell is light as it is experienced by people who would rather be in darkness. Hell is abundant health as experienced by people who would choose disease. Hell is freedom as experienced by those who will not stop clinging to spiritual chains. Hell is ten thousand other things: more pointedly, Hell is other people, as experienced by an existentialist. This Hell is Heaven as experienced through subjectivist narcissism, experiencing God's glory and wishing for glory on your own power. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the *inside*. God is love; he cannot but ultimately give Heaven to his creatures, but we can, if we wish, choose to experience Heaven as Hell. The beginning of Heaven is this life, but we can, if we wish, be subjectivists and wish for something else and experience what God has given us as the start of Hell.

Step out of Hell, pray, and accept what God gives you.

**Un-man's Tales:
C.S. Lewis's
Perelandra, Fairy
Tales, and
*Feminism***

**A first clue to something big,
tucked into a choice of children's
books**

I was once part of a group dedicated to reading children's stories (primarily fantasy) aloud. At one point the group decided to read Patricia Wrede's *Dealing with Dragons*. I had a visceral reaction to the book as something warped, but when I tried to explain it to the group by saying that it was like the Un-man in *Perelandra*. I was met with severe resistance from two men in the group. Despite this, and after lengthy further discussions, I was able to persuade them that the analogy was at least the best I could manage in a tight time slot.

I was puzzled at some mysterious slippage that had intelligent Christians who appreciated good literature magnetized by works that were, well... *warped*. And that mysterious slippage seemed to keep cropping up at other times and circumstances.

Why the big deal? I will get to the Un-man's message in a moment, but for now let me say that little girls are *sexist way* too romantic. And this being *sexist—way* too romantic motivates girls to want fairy tales, to want some knight in shining armor or some prince to sweep them off their feet. And seeing how this *sexist* deeply romantic desire cannot easily be ground out of them, feminists have written their own fairy tales, but...

To speak from my own experience, I never realized how straight traditional fairy tales were until I met feminist fairy tales. And by 'straight' I am not exactly meaning the opposite of queer (though that is close at hand), but the opposite of twisted and warped, like "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?" (I never knew how witchcraft could be considered unnatural vice until I read the witches' apologetic in Terry Pratchett's incredibly warped *The Wee Free Men*.) There is something warped in these tales that is not covered by saying that *Dealing with Dragons* has a heroine who delights only in what is forbidden, rejects marriage for the company of dragons, and ridicules every time its pariahs say something just isn't *done*. Seeing as how the desire for fairy tales is too hard to pull out, authors have presented warped anti-fairy tales.

Ella Enchanted makes it plain: for a girl or woman to be under obedience is an unmixed curse. There is no place for "love, honor, and obey."

The commercials for *Tangled* leave some doubt about whether the heroine sings a Snow White-style "Some day my prince will come."

The Un-man's own tales

Perelandra has a protagonist who visits Venus or Perelandra, where an unfallen Eve is joined first by him and then by the antagonist, called the Un-man because he moves from prelest or spiritual illusion to calling demons or the Devil into himself and then letting his body be used as a demonic puppet.

How does the Un-man try to tempt this story's Eve?

[The Lady said:] "I will think more of this. I will get the King to make me older about it."

[The Un-man answered:] "How greatly I desire to meet this King of yours! But in the matter of Stories he may be no older than you himself."

"That saying of yours is like a tree with no fruit. The King is always older than I, and about all things..."

[The Lady said,] "What are [women on earth] like?"

[The Un-man answered,] "They are of great spirit. They always reach out their hands for the new and unexpected good, and see that it is good long before the men understand it. Their minds run ahead of what Maleldil has told them. They do not need to wait for Him to tell them what is good, but know it for themselves as He does..."

...The Lady seemed to be saying very little. [The Un-man]'s voice was speaking gently and continuously. It was not talking about the Fixed Land nor even about Maleldil. It appeared to be telling, with extreme beauty and pathos, a number of stories, and at first Ransom could not perceive any connecting link between them. They wre all about women, but women who had apparently lived at different periods of the world's history and in quiet differences. From the Lady's replies it appeared that the stories contained much that she did not understand; but oddly enough the Un-man did not mind. If the questions aroused by any one story proved at all difficult to answer, the speaker simply

dropped that story and instantly began another. The heroines of the stories seemed all to have suffered a great deal—they had been oppressed by their fathers, cast off by husbands, deserted by lovers. Their children had risen up against them and society had driven them out. But the stories all ended, in a sense, happily: sometimes with honours and praises to a heroine still living, more often by tardy acknowledgment and unavailing tears after her death. As the endless speech proceeded, the Lady's questions grew always fewer...

The expression on [the Lady's] face, revealed in the sudden light, was one that [Ransom] had not seen there before. Her eyes were not fixed on the narrator; as far as that went, her thoughts might have been a thousand miles away. Her lips were shut and a little pursed. Her eyebrows were slightly raised. He had not yet seen her look so like a woman of our own race; and yet her expression was one he had not very often met on earth—except, as he realized with a shock, on the stage. "Like a tragedy queen" was the disgusting comparison that arose in his mind. Of course it was a gross exaggeration. It was an insult for which he could not forgive himself. And yet... and yet... the tableau revealed by the lightning had photographed itself on his brain. Do what he would, he found it impossible not to think of that new look in her face. A very *good* tragedy queen, no doubt, very nobly played by an actress who was a good woman in real life...

A moment later [the Un-man] was explaining that men like Ransom in his own world—men of that intensely male and backward-looking type who always shrank away from the new good—had continuously laboured to keep women down to mere childbearing and to ignore the high destiny for which Maleldil had actually created her...

The external and, as it were, dramatic conception of the self was the enemy's true aim. He was making her mind

a theatre in which that phantom self should hold the stage.
He had already written the play.

Not to put too fine a point on it, *but the Lady is complementarian to the point where one wonders if the label 'complementarian' is sufficient, and the demon or Devil using the Un-man's body is doing his treacherous worst to convert her to feminism.* Hooper says he is trying to make her fall by transgressing one commandment, and that is true, but the entire substance of the attack to make her fall is by seducing her to feminism.

A strange silence in the literary criticism

Walter Hooper's *C.S. Lewis: Companion and Guide* treats this dialogue in detail but without the faintest passing reference to feminism, men and women, sex roles, or anything else in that nexus. It does, however, treat the next and final book in the trilogy, *That Hideous Strength*, and defend Lewis from "anti-feminism" in a character who was a woman trying to do a dissertation on Milton: Lewis, it is revealed, had originally intended her to be doing a dissertation on biochemistry, but found that he was not in a position to make that part of the story compelling, and so set a character whose interests more closely paralleled his own. So the issue of feminism was on his radar, possibly looming large. But, and this is a common thread with other examples, he exhibits a mysterious slippage. His account gets too many things right to be dismissed on the ground that he doesn't know how to read such literature, but it also leaves too much out, mysteriously, to conclude that he gave anything like such a scholar's disinterested best in explaining the text. (It is my own opinion that Hooper in fact *does* know how to read; he just mysteriously sets this ability aside when Lewis counters feminism.) And this slippage keeps happening in other places and context, always mysterious on the hypothesis that the errors are just errors of disinterested, honest scholarship.

Jerry Root, in his own treatment in *C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme*, treats subjectivism as spiritual poison and problem of evil Lewis attacks in his different works: Root argues it to be the prime unifying theme in Lewis). But with slight irony, Root seems to turn subjectivistic, or at least disturbing, precisely where his book touches gender roles and egalitarianism. In his comments on *The Great Divorce*'s greatest saint-figure, a woman, Susan Smith, is slighted: among other remarks, he quotes someone as saying that women in C.S. Lewis's stories are "he neglects any intellectual virtue in his female characters," and this is particularly applied to Sarah Smith. When he defends Lewis, after a fashion, Root volunteers, "a book written in the 1940s will lack some accommodations to the culture of the twenty-first century." But this section is among the gooiest logic in Root's entire text, speaking with a quasi-psychoanalytic Freudian or Jungian outlook of "a kind of fertile mother-image and nature-goddess," that is without other parallel and certainly does not infect the discussion of Lewis's parents, who well enough loom large at points, but not in any psychoanalytic fashion. Root's entire treatment at this point has an "I can't put my finger on it, but—" resemblance to feminists disarming and neutralizing any claim that the Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary could in any way, shape, or form contribute to the well-standing of women: one author, pointing out the difficulty of a woman today being both a virgin and a mother, used that as a pretext to entirely dismiss the idea that She could be a model for woman or a token of woman's good estate, thus throwing out the baby, the bathwater, and indeed the tub. The Mother of God is She who answered, *Be it unto me according to thy word*, an answer that may be echoed whether or not one is a virgin, a mother, or for that matter a woman.

The critique Root repeats, on reflection, may meet an Orthodox response of "Huh?", or more devastatingly, "Yes, but what's your point?", not because Lewis portrays a saint as "no

model of intellectual virtue," but because Orthodox sainthood is not a matter of intellectual virtue. Among its rich collection of many saints there are very *few* models of intellectual virtue, admittedly mostly men, and usually having received their formation *outside the Orthodox Church*: St. John Chrysostom was called "Chrysostom" or "Golden-Mouth" because of his formation and mastery of pagan rhetoric. But intellectual virtue as a whole is not a central force in the saints, and Bertrand Russell's observation that in the Gospels not one word is put in praise of intelligence might be accepted, not as a weakness of the Gospel, but as a clarification of what is and is not central to Christian faith. And in terms of what is truly important, we would do well to recall the story of St. Zosima and St. Mary of Egypt. If Lewis's image of sainthood is a woman who is not an academic, this is not an embarrassment to explain away, but a finger on the pulse of what does and does not matter for sainthood.

Root mentions the Un-man briefly, and gives heavy attention to the man who would become the Un-man as he appears in the prior book in the trilogy, but does not reference or suggest a connection between the Un-man and feminism. Root became an egalitarian, and shifts in his book from speaking of "men" to saying "humankind". And this is far from one scholar's idiosyncrasy; a look at the World Evangelical Alliance's online bookstore as I was involved with it showed this mysterious slippage not as something you find a little here, a little there, but as endemic and without any effective opposition.

Un-man's Tales for Grown-Ups

During my time as webmaster to the World Evangelical Alliance, the one truly depressing part of my work was getting the bookstore online. Something like eighty to ninety percent of the work was titles like *Women as Risk-Takers for God* which were Un-man's Tales for adults. I was depressed that the World Evangelical Alliance didn't seem to have anything else to say on

its bookshelves: not only was there a dearth of complementarian "opposing views" works like *Man and Woman in Christ*, but there was a dearth of anything besides Un-man's Tales. The same mysterious phenomenon was not limited to a ragtag group of friends, or individual scholars; it was dominant at the highest level in one of the most important parachurch organizations around, and not one that, like Christians for Biblical Equality, had a charter of egalitarian or feminist concerns and priorities.

Conclusion

G.K. Chesterton said, "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed." That might hold for Chesterton's day, and classics like Grimm and MacDonald today, but today's fairy tales, or rather Un-man's tales, do not tell children the dragons can be killed. Children already know that deep down inside. They tell children dragons can be befriended and that dragons may make excellent company. For another title of the myriad represented by *Dealing with Dragons*, look at the tale of cross-cultural friendship one may look for in *The Dragon and the George*. When first published, *Dealing with Dragons* might have been provocative. Now *Tangled* is not. And reading *Perelandra* leaves one with an uncomfortable sense that C.S. Lewis apparently plagiarized, in the Un-man's tales, works written decades after his death.

This issue is substantial, and Lewis's sensitivity to it is almost prophetic: sensibilities may have changed, but only in the direction of our needing to hear the warning more. And it is one Christians seem to be blind to: complementarianism seems less wrong than petty, making a mountain out of a molehill. But the core issue is already a mountain, not a molehill.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of

good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. *Aim for something better than Un-man's Tales.*

Ask for the Ancient Ways

Readers familiar with my site might have read “Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion,” which complains about attempts to break from the past, such as the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, Vatican II’s *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*, and perhaps I should have included neo-Paganism, on the assertion that they bring a decisive break with the recent past and ultimately from the older past they seek to resurrect as well. So what is my point about asking for the ancient ways now?

Simply this: the cyber-quarantine for Coronavirus has brought us to a newer and virtual way of doing things, and however much we may long for the real thing in the moment, they are in some cases convenient, above and beyond a field training exercise for the next level of virtual living.

When we can, we would do well to resume what we were doing, in for instance meeting with people face-to-face and perhaps driving to do so. I applaud Civil War re-enacting, not specifically as a means of resurrecting something long past, but because it is a kind of face-to-face meeting (and community!) that has been part of our present and that we would do well to resume. And participate in church life as you are able, and the

door remains open. I am not at all impressed that my own governor has decided to keep churches closed, but in Orthodoxy there is a very simple rule: in matters pertaining to the Church, obey your bishop first and Caesar second. That is all. (I do not know other bishops' positions to comment on them, nor perhaps should I comment on them). My own archbishop has said to obey the law and work within the quarantine, which has now included having online services and allow one person at a time to enter the cathedral building to receive communion. It is a hardship, perhaps, but the Orthodox position is very simple.

There is something ancient and beautiful in a real (not virtual) hug, a picnic on the lawn, seeing your co-workers face-to-face (some places are discovering remote work now, which gives people a private office such as has been banished from mainstream businesses, first for cubicles and then for open plan offices, and discovering that employees work remarkably better when they can hear themselves think, but this is a separate issue). In the "Old Technologies" section of "The Luddite's Guide to Technology," I wrote:

There is a Foxtrot cartoon where the mother is standing outside with Jason and saying something like, "This is how you throw a frisbee."—"This is how you play catch."—"This is how you play tennis." And Jason answers, "Enough with the historical re-enactments. I want to play some games!" (And there is another time when he and Marcus had been thrown out of the house and were looking at a frisbee and saying, "This is a scratch on the Linux RAID drive.")

I remember one time when I was visiting a friend, and his son and two best friends were holding close to each other and each playing a video game on a portable device. I'm not going to endorse video games, but I will comment that three little boys were having fun together face-to-face, and if they were all playing

video games, they were still playing them face-to-face, friends like in time immemorial.

So some of the things we can do when the quarantine is relaxed (or lifted) include ordering a paper book from Amazon, reading it outside and putting it on a bookshelf and taking care of it so it is available afterwards, or driving to a new restaurant via GPS to have a meal together, or just go to church, or spending some days in the office face-to-face to maintain social connection with your co-workers. Note that I am commenting less on using or not using new technologies (but really it is also possible to do purely older things like take a stack of blank sheets of paper and hold a physical brainstorm about how to make paper airplanes, or origami—which I mention not because it is of Asian origins but because it is a recognized thing in my time and place). Or build something with Legos, old or new (I might comment that the decidedly new-school Lego Mindstorms robots offer a whole new dimension for creativity). What all of these share is that they are sharing something classic and organic, regardless of how much (or little) they *use* technology. Churches may have signs saying, "Cellphones that go off in the service will be dunked in holy water," but while some avoid or minimize digital technology usage while fasting for the Eucharist, there is presently little policing of cellphone usage in getting to the church.

We have one more door open, doors to something unclean. Perhaps now there is not legitimate choice, and if our bishops say "Obey the quarantine" we should obey the law. Those inclined to increasingly virtual life have had a good practice at handling things virtually, and so have those not so inclined. And there is something practically good, if not always in trying to recover long-lost glory, at very least at continuing in living traditions we know how to do, and to be able to get up from the new normal, get off our back ends, and reclaim ancient and still living glory that remains open to all of us, even if it turns out to be surprisingly more convenient not to drive (another technology) and meet people face-to-face.

For what it's worth...

The Luddite's Guide to Technology

Fasting from Technologies

Since the Bridegroom was taken from the disciples, it has been a part of the Orthodox Church's practice to fast. What is expected in the ideal has undergone changes, and one's own practice is done in submission to one's priest. The priest may work on how to best relax rules in many cases so that your fasting is a load you can shoulder. There is something of a saying, "As always, ask your priest," and that goes for fasting from technology too. Meaning, specifically, that if you read this article and want to start fasting from technologies, and your priest says that it won't be helpful, leave this article alone and follow your priest's guidance.

From ancient times there has been a sense that we need to transcend ourselves. When we fast, we choose to set limits and master our belly, at least partly. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—maybe, but God will destroy them both." So the Apostle answered the hedonists of his day. The teaching of fasting is that you are more than the sum of your appetites, and

we can grow by giving something up in days and seasons. And really fasting from foods is not saying, "I choose to be greater than this particular luxury," but "I choose to be greater than this *necessity*." Over ninety-nine percent of all humans who have ever lived never saw a piece of modern technology: Christ and his disciples reached far and wide without the benefit of even the most obsolete of electronic communication technologies. And monks have often turned back on what luxuries were available to them: hence in works like the *Philokalia* or the *Ladder* extol the virtue of sleeping on the ground. If we fast from technologies, we do not abstain from basic nourishment, but what Emperors and kings never heard of. At one monastery where monks lived in cells without running water or electricity, a monk commented that peasants and for that matter kings lived their whole lives without tasting these, or finding them a necessity. (Even Solomon in all his splendor did not have a Facebook page.)

In Orthodoxy, if a person is not able to handle the quasi-vegan diet in fasting periods, a priest may relax the fast, not giving carte blanche to eat anything the parishioner wants, but suggesting that the parishioner relax the fast to some degree, eating some fish or an egg. This basic principle of fasting is applicable to technology: rather than immediately go cold turkey on certain technologies, use "some fish or an egg" in terms of older technologies. Instead of texting for a conversation, drive over to a nearby friend.

(Have you ever noticed that during Lent many Orthodox Christians cut down or eliminate their use of Facebook?)

As mentioned in *Technonomicon*, what we call space-conquering technologies might slightly more appropriately be called body-conquering technologies, because they neutralize some of the limitations of our embodied state. The old wave of space-conquering technologies moves people faster or farther than they could move themselves, and older science fiction and space opera often portrays bigger and better versions of this kind of space conquering technologies: personal jet packs, cars that

levitate (think Luke Skywalker's land speeder), or airplanes that function as spacecraft (his X-Wing). What is interesting to me here is that they serve as bigger and better versions of the older paradigm of space-conquering technologies, even if Luke remains in radio contact with the Rebel base. That is the older paradigm. The newer paradigm is technologies that make one's physical location irrelevant, or almost irrelevant: cell phones, texting, Facebook, and remote work, are all not bigger and better ways to move your body, but bigger and better ways to do things in a mind-based context where the location of your body may be collected as in Google Plus, but your actual, physical location is really neither here nor there.

My own technology choices

I purchased a MacBook Pro laptop, and its specs are really impressive. Eight cores, eight gigabytes of RAM, a 1920x1200 17" display, and gracefully runs Ubuntu Linux, Windows XP, Windows 7, and Windows 8 as guest OS'es. And it is really obsolete in one respect: it doesn't have the hot new Retina display that has been migrated to newer MacBook Pros. I want to keep it for a long time; but my point in mentioning it here is that *I did not purchase it as the hot, coolest new thing, but as a last hurrah of an old guard*. The top two applications I use are Google Chrome and the Mac's Unix terminal, and the old-fashioned laptop lets me take advantage of the full power of the Unix command line, and lets me exercise root privilege without voiding the warranty. For a Unix wizard, that's a lot of power. And the one major thing which I did not "upgrade" was replacing the old-fashioned spindle drives with newer, faster solid state drives. The reason? Old-fashioned spindle drives can potentially work indefinitely, while spindle drives wear out after a certain number of times saving data: saving data slowly uses the drive up. And I realized this might be my only opportunity in a while to purchase a tool I want to use for a long while.

Laptops might continue to be around for a while, and desktops for that matter, but their place is a bit like landline phones. If you have a desk job, you will probably have a desktop computer and a landline, but the wave of the future is smartphones and tablets; the hot, coolest new thing is not a bulky, heavy MacBook, but whatever the current generation of iPad or Android-based tablet is. One youngster said, "Email is for old people," and perhaps the same is to be said of laptops.

I also have an iPhone, which I upgraded from one of the original iPhones to an iPhone 4, not because I needed to have the latest new thing, but because my iPhone was necessarily on an AT&T contract, and however much they may advertise that the EDGE network my iPhone was on was "twice the speed of dialup," I found when jobhunting that a simple, short "thank you" letter after an interview took amazingly many minutes for my phone to send, at well below the speed of obsolete dial-up speeds I had growing up: AT&T throttled the bandwidth to an incredibly slow rate and I got a newer iPhone with Verizon which I want to hold on to, even though there is a newer and hotter model available. But I am making conscious adult decisions about using the iPhone: I have sent perhaps a dozen texts, and have not used the iPod functionality. I use it, but I draw lines. My point is not exactly that you should adopt the exact same conscious adult decisions as I do about how to use a smartphone, but that you make a conscious adult decision in the first place.

And lastly, I have another piece of older technology: a SwissChamp XLT, the smallest Swiss Army Knife that includes all the functionality of a SwissChamp while also having the functionality of a Cybertool. It has, in order, a large blade, small blade, metal saw, nail file, metal file, custom metal-cutting blade, wood saw, fish scaler, ruler in centimeters and inches, hook remover, scissors, hooked blade, straight blade with concave curved mini-blade, pharmacist's spatula, cybertool (Phillips screwdrivers in three sizes, Torx screwdrivers in three sizes, hexagonal bit, and a slotted screwdriver), pliers, magnifying

glass, larger Phillips screwdriver, large slotted screwdriver, can opener, wire stripper, small slotted screwdriver, can opener, corkscrew, jeweller's screwdriver, pin, wood chisel, hook, smaller slotted screwdriver, and reamer. It's somewhat smaller than two iPhones stacked on top of each other, and while it's wider than I like, *it is also something of a last hurrah*. It is a useful piece of older technology.

I mention these technologies not to sanction what may or may not be owned—I tried to get as good a computer as I could partly because I am an IT professional, and I am quite grateful that my employer let me use it for the present contract. I also drive a white 2001 Saturn, whose front now looks a bit ugly after cosmetic damage. I could get it fixed fairly easily, but it hasn't yet been a priority. (But this car has also transported the Kursk Root icon.) But with this as with other technologies, I haven't laid the reins on the horse's neck. I only use a well-chosen fragment of my iPhone's capabilities, and I try not to use it too much: I like to be able to use the web without speed being much of an issue, but I'm not on the web all the time. And I have never thought "My wheels are my freedom;" I try to drive insofar as it advances some particular goal.

And there are some things when I'm not aware of the brands too much. I don't really know what brands my clothing are, with one exception, Hanes, which I am aware of predominantly because the brand name is sewed in large, hard-to-miss letters at the top.

And I observe that technologies are becoming increasingly "capture-proof". Put simply, all technologies can be taken away from us physically, but technologies are increasingly becoming something that FEMA can shut off from far away in a heartbeat. All network functionality on smartphones and tablets are at the mercy of network providers and whoever has control over them; more broadly, "The network is the computer," as Sun announced slightly prematurely in its introduction of Java; my own Unix-centric use of my Mac on train rides, without having or wanting it

to have internet access during the train ride, may not be much more than a historical curiosity.

But the principle of fasting from technology is fine, and if we can abstain from foods on certain days, we can also abstain from or limit technologies on certain days. Furthermore, there is real merit in knowing how to use older technologies. GPS devices can fail to pick up a signal. A trucker's atlas works fine even if there's no GPS signal available.

The point of this soliloquy

The reason I am writing this up is that I am not aware of too many works on how to use technology ascetically. St. Paul wrote, "There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; **but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.**" This statement of necessities does not include shelter, let alone "a rising standard of living" (meaning more things that one uses). Perhaps it is OK to have a car; it is what is called "socially mandated", meaning that there are many who one cannot buy groceries or get to their jobs without a car. Perhaps a best rule of thumb here is, to repeat another author, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." It is a measure by which I have real failings. And don't ask, "Can we afford what we need?", but "Do we need what we can afford?" If we only purchase things that have real ascetical justification, there's something better than investing for the left-over money: we can give to the poor as an offering to Christ. Christ will receive our offering as a loan.

Some years ago I wanted to write *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, and stopped because I realized I wasn't writing anything good or worthy of the title. But the attitude of the Church Fathers given the technology of the day: monasticism renounces all property, and the faithful are called to renounce property in their hearts even if they have possessions. Monastic

literature warns the monk of seeking out old company, where "old company" does not mean enticement to sexual sin exactly, but one's very own kin. The solitary and coenobetic alike cut ties to an outside world, even ties one would think were sacrosanct (and the Bible has much to say about caring for one's elders). If a monk's desire to see his father or brother is considered a temptation to sin that will dissipate monastic energy, what do we have to make of social media? The friendships that are formed are of a different character from face-to-face relationships. If monks are forbidden to return to their own kin as shining example, in what light do we see texting, email, IM's, and discussion forums? If monks are forbidden to look at women's faces for fear of sexual temptation, what do we make of an internet where the greatest assault on manhood, porn, comes out to seek you even if you avoid it? It's a bit like a store that sells food, household supplies, and cocaine: and did I mention that the people driving you to sample a little bit of cocaine are much pushier than those offering a biscuit and dip sample?

The modern Athonite tradition at least has Luddite leanings; Athos warns against national identification numbers and possibly computers, and one saint wrote apocalyptically about people eating eight times as much as people used to eat (has anyone read *The Supersizing of America*?) and of "wisdom" being found that would allow people to swim like fish deep into the sea (we have two technologies that can do that: SCUBA gear and submarines), and let one person speak and be heard on the other side of the world (how many technologies do we have to do that? Quite a lot).

All of this is to say that Orthodoxy has room to handle technologies carefully, and I would suggest that not all technologies are created equal.

The Luddite's Guide to Technology

For the different technologies presented my goal is not exactly to point to a course of action as to suggest a conscious adult decision to make, perhaps after consulting with one's priest or spiritual father. And as is usual in Orthodoxy, the temptation at least for converts is to try to do way too much, too fast, at first, and then backslide when that doesn't work.

It is better to keep on stretching yourself a little.

Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, using technology in an ascetical way will be countercultural and constitute outlier usage.

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N
O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**

Advertising

Advertising is kin to manipulation, propaganda, and pornography.

Advertising answers the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" by decisively saying, "Man was made for economic wealth." It leads people to buy things that are not in their best interest. If you see someone using a technology as part of a form of life that is unhelpful, the kind of thing that makes you glad to be a Luddite, you have advertising to thank for that.

Advertising stirs discontent, which is already a problem, and leads people to ever higher desires, much like the trap of pornography. The sin is covetousness and lust, but the core structure is the same. Advertising and pornography are closely related kin.

Advertising doesn't really sell product functionality; it sells a mystique. And we may have legitimate reason to buy the product, but not the mystique. And maybe back off on a useful purchase until we are really buying the product and not the mystique.

Alcohol

Alcohol is not exactly a new technology, although people have found ways of making stronger and stronger drinks as time goes on. However, there is a lesson to learn with alcohol that applies to technology.

One article read outlined a few positions on Christian use of alcohol, ending with a position that said, in essence, "Using alcohol appropriately is a spiritual challenge and there is more productive spiritual work in drinking responsibly than just not drinking." I don't think the authors would have imposed this position on people who know they have particular dangers in using alcohol, but they took a sympathetic look at positions of Christians who don't drink, and then said "The best course of all is not from trying to cut off the danger by not drinking, but rising to the spiritual lesson."

Yet an assumption behind all of the positions presented is that alcohol is something where you cannot safely lay the reins on the horse's neck. You need to be in command, or to put it differently ceaselessly domineer alcohol if you use it. This domineering is easy for some people and harder for others, and some people may be wisest to avoid the challenge.

Something of the same need exists in our use of technology. We may use certain technologies or may not, but it is still a disaster to let the technology go wherever it wills. Sometimes and with some technologies, we may abstain. Other technologies we may domineer, even if we

may find if we are faithful that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light:" establishing dominion and holding the reins may be easier when it becomes a habit. But the question with a technology we use is not, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?", any more than the question about wine would be, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?" Proper use is disciplined. Proper use is domineering. And we do not always have it spelled out what is like having one or two drinks a day, and what is like having five or ten. Nor do we have other rules of thumb spelled out, like, "Think carefully about drinking when you have a bad mood, and don't drink in order to fix a bad mood."

The descriptions of various "technologies and other things" are meant to provide some sense of what the contours of technologies are, and what is like drinking one or two drinks, and what is like drinking five or ten drinks a day.

Anti-aging medicine

The Christian teaching is that life begins at conception and ends at natural death, *and not* that life begins at 18 and ends at 30.

The saddest moment in *The Chronicles of Narnia* comes when we hear that Her Majesty Queen Susan the Gentle is "no longer a friend of Narnia;" she is rushing as quickly as possible to the silliest age of her life, and will spend the rest of her life trying to remain at that age, which besides being absolutely impossible, is absolutely undesirable.

Quite a lot of us are afflicted by the Queen Susan syndrome, but there is a shift in anti-aging medicine and hormone replacement therapy. Part of the shift in assistive technologies discussed below is that assistive technologies

are not just intended to do what a non-disabled person can do, so for instance a reader can read a page of a book, giving visually impaired people equivalent access to a what a sighted person could have, to pushing as far what they think is an improvement, so that scanning a barcode may not just pull up identification of the product bearing the barcode, but have augmented reality features of pulling a webpage that says much more than what a sighted person could see on the tab. One of the big tools of anti-aging medicine is hormone replacement therapy, with ads showing a grey-haired man doing pushups with a caption of, "My only regret about hormone replacement therapy is that I didn't start it sooner," where the goal is not to restore functionality but improve it as much as possible. And the definition of improvement may be infantile; here it appears to mean that a man who might be a member of the AARP has the same hormone levels as he did when he was 17.

There was one professor I had who was covering French philosophy, discussed Utopian dreams like turning the seas to lemonade, and called these ideas "a Utopia of spoiled children." Anti-aging medicine is not about having people better fulfill the God-ordained role of an elder, but be a virtual youth. Now I have used nutraceuticals to bring more energy and be able to create things where before I was not, and perhaps that is like anti-aging medicine that has me holding on to youthful creativity when God summons me to go Further up and further in! But everything I know about anti-aging is that it is not about helping people function gracefully in the role of an elder, but about making any things about aging optional.

In my self-absorbed "Seven-Sided Gem," I talked about one cover to the AARP's magazine, then called My Generation, which I originally mistook for something GenX. In the AARP's official magazine as I have seen it, the marketing proposition is the good news, not that it is not

that bad to be old, but it is not that *old* to be old. The women portrayed look maybe GenX in age, and on the cover I pulled out, the person portrayed, in haircut, clothing, and posture, looked like a teenager. "Fifty and better people" may see political and other advice telling them what they can do to fight high prescription prices, but nothing I have seen gives the impression that they can give to their community, as elders, out of a life's wealth of experience.

Not that there are not proper elders out there. I visited a family as they celebrated their son's graduation, and had long conversations with my friend's mother, and with an elderly gentleman (I've forgotten how he was related). She wanted to hear all about what I had to say about subjects that were of mutual interest, and he talked about the wealth of stories he had as a sailor and veterinarian. In both cases I had the subtle sense of a younger person being handled masterfully by an elder, and the conversation was unequal—unequal but entirely fitting, and part of the "entirely fitting" was that neither of them was trying to say, "We are equal—I might as well be as young as you."

Anti-aging medicine is not about aging well, but trying to be a virtual young person when one should be doing the serious, weight, and profoundly important function as elders.

Assistive technologies

This, at least, will seem politically incorrect: unless they have an inordinate monetary or moral cost, assistive technologies allow disabled people to function at a much higher level than otherwise. And I am not going to exactly say that people with disabilities who have access to assistive technologies should turn them down, but I am going to say

that there is something I am wary of in the case of assistive technologies.

There is the same question as with other technologies: "Is this really necessary? Does this help?" A blind friend said,

I was recently interviewed for a student's project about assistive technology and shopping, and I told her that I wouldn't use it in many circumstances. First of all, I think some of what is available has more 'new toy' appeal and is linked to advertising. Secondly, I think some things, though they may be convenient, are dehumanising. Why use a barcode scanner thingummy to tell what's in a tin when I can ask someone and relate to someone?

Now to be clear, this friend does use assistive technologies and is at a high level of functioning: "to whom much is given, much is required." I get the impression that the assistive technologies she has concerns about, bleed into augmented reality. And though she is absolutely willing to use assistive technologies, particularly when they help her serve others, she is more than willing to ask as I am asking of many technologies, "What's the use? Does this help? *Really* help?"

But there is another, more disturbing question about assistive technologies. The question is not whether individual assistive technologies are helpful when used in individual ways, but whether a society that is always inventing higher standards for accessibility and assistive technology has its deepest priorities straight. And since I cannot answer that out of what my friend has said, let me explain and talk about the Saint and the Activist and then talk about how similar things have played out in my own life.

I write this without regrets about my own efforts and money spent in creating assistive technologies, and with the knowledge that in societies without assistive technologies many disabled people have no secular success. There are notable examples of disabled people functioning at a high level of secular success, such as the noted French Cabalist Isaac the Blind, but the much more common case was for blind people to be beggars. The blind people met by Christ in the Gospel were without exception beggars. And there are blind beggars in first world countries today.

So what objection would I have to assistive technologies which, if they may not be able to create sight, none the less make the hurdles much smaller and less significant. So, perhaps, medicine cannot allow some patients to read a paper book. Assistive technologies make a way for them to access the book about as well as if they could see the book with their eyes. What is there to object in making disabled people more able to function in society as equal contributors?

The answer boils down to the distinction between the Saint and the Activist as I have discussed them in "An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism" and "The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount." The society that is patterned after the Saint is ordered towards such things as faith and contemplation. The society patterned after the Activist is the one that seeks to ensure the maximum secular success of its members. And if the Activist says, "Isn't it wonderful how much progress we have made? Many disabled people are functioning at a high level!", the Saint says, "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your Activism. We have bigger fish to fry." And they do.

Now to be clear, I am not saying that you should not use assistive technologies to help give back to society. Nor

do I regret any of the time I've spent on assistive technologies. The first idea I wanted to patent was an assistive technology. But we have bigger fish to fry.

There is a way in which I am a little like the blind beggar in many societies that took the Saint for their pattern. It's on a much lesser scale, but I tried my hardest to earn a Ph.D. in theology. At Cambridge University in England the faculty made me switch thesis topic completely, from a topic I had set at the beginning of the year, when two thirds of the year had passed and I had spent most of my time on my thesis. My grades were two points out of a hundred less than the cutoff for Ph.D. continuation, and Cambridge very clearly refused for me to continue beyond my master's. So then I applied to other programs, and Fordham offered an assistantship, and I honestly found cancer easier than some of the things that went wrong there. I showed a writeup to one friend and he wrote, "I already knew all the things you had written up, and I was still shocked when I read it." All of which to say is that the goal I had of earning a doctorate, and using that degree to teach at a seminary, seemed shattered. With all that happened, the door to earning a Ph.D. was decisively closed.

Now I know that it is possible to teach at a seminary on a master's; it may be a handicap, but it certainly does not make such a goal impossible. But more broadly God's hand was at work. For starters, I survived. I believe that a doctor would look at what happened and say, "There were a couple of places where what happened could have killed you. Be glad you're alive." And beyond that, there is something of God's stern mercy: academic writing takes a lot more work than being easy to read, and only a few people can easily read it. I still have lessons to learn about work that is easy to read, and this piece may be the least readable thing I've written in a while. But all the same, there is a severe mercy

in what God has given. I have a successful website largely due to chance, or rather God's providence; I was in the right place at the right time and for all my skill in web work happened to have successes I had no right to expect.

And God works through assistive technologies and medicine. When I was in middle school, I had an ankle that got sorer and sorer until my parents went to ask a doctor if hospitalization was justified. The doctor's response, after taking a sample of the infection, said, "Don't swing by home; go straight to the hospital and I'll take care of the paperwork on this end for his admission." And I was hospitalized for a week or so—the bed rest day and night being the first time ever that I managed to get bored teaching myself from my father's calculus textbook—and after I was discharged I still needed antibiotic injections every four hours. That involved medical treatment is just as activist as assistive technology, and without it I would not have written any the pieces on this website besides the Apple][BASIC four dimensional maze.

I am rather glad to be alive now.

So I am in a sense both a ~~Ph.D.~~ person who was lost on Activist terms, but met with something fitting on a Saint's terms, and a person who was found on Activist terms. God works both ways. But still, there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Activism.

Augmented Reality

When I was working at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, one part of the introduction I received to the CAVE and Infinity Wall virtual reality was to say that virtual reality "is a superset of reality," where you could put a screen in front of a wall and see, X-ray-style, wires and other things inside the wall.

Virtual reality does exist, and is popularized by SecondLife among many others, but that may not be the main niche carved out. The initial thought was virtual reality, and when the dust has started to settle, the niche carved out is more a matter of augmented reality. Augmented reality includes, on a more humble level, GPS devices and iPhone apps that let you scan a barcode or QR code and pull up web information on the product you have scanned. But these are not the full extent of augmented reality; it's just an early installment. It is an opportunity to have more and more of our experience rewritten by computers and technology. Augmented technology is probably best taken at a lower dose and domineered.

Big Brother

Big Brother is a collection of technologies, but not a collection of technologies you choose because they will deliver a Big Brother who is watching you. Everything we do electronically is being monitored; for the moment the U.S. government is only using it for squeaky-clean apparent uses, and has been hiding its use. Even the Amish now are being monitored; they have decided not to hook up to a grid, such as electricity or landline phones, but cell phones can be used if they find them expedient to their series of conscious decisions about whether to adopt technologies. Amish use the horse and buggy but not the car, not because the horse is older, but because the horse and buggy provide some limited mobility without tearing apart the local community. The car is rejected not because it is newer, but because it frees people from the tightly bound community they have. And because they carry cell phones, the NSA tracks where they go. They might not do anything about it, but almost everything about us is in control of Big Brother. And though I know at least one person who has decided

carrying a cell phone and having an iPass transponder is not worth being tracked, you have to be more Luddite than the Luddites, and know enough of what you are doing that you are already on file, if you are to escape observation.

Big Brother has been introduced step by step, bit by bit. First there were rumors that the NSA was recording all Internet traffic. Then it came out in the open that the NSA was indeed recording all Internet traffic and other electronic communications, and perhaps (as portrayed on one TV program) we should feel sorry for the poor NSA which has to deal with all this data. That's not the end. Now Big Brother is officially mainly about national security, but this is not an outer limit either. Big Brother will probably appear a godsend in dealing with local crime before an open hand manipulating the common citizen appears. But Big Brother is here already, and Big Brother is growing.

Books and ebooks

I was speaking with one friend who said in reference to *Harry Potter* that the *Harry Potter* series got people to read, and anything that gets people to read is good. My response (a tacit response, not a spoken one) is that reading is not in and of itself good. If computers are to be used in an ascetically discriminating fashion, so is the library; if you will recall my earlier writing about slightly inappropriate things at Cambridge and worse at Fordham, every single person I had trouble with was someone who read a lot, and presumably read much more than someone caught up in *Harry Potter* mania.

Orthodoxy is at heart an oral, or oral-like culture, and while it uses books, it was extremely pejorative when one friend said of a Protestant priest in Orthodox clothes, "I know what book he got that [pastoral practice] from." The first degree of priesthood is called a 'Reader', and when one

is tonsured a Reader, the bishop urges the Reader to read the Scriptures. The assumption is not that the laity should be reading but need not read the Scriptures, but that the laity can be doing the job of laity without being literate. Or something like that. Even where there is reading, the transmission of the most important things is oral in character, and the shaping of the laity (and presumably clergy) is through the transmission of oral tradition through oral means. In that sense, I as an author stand as something exceptional among Orthodox, and "exceptional" does not mean "exceptionally good." Most of the Orthodox authors now came to Orthodoxy from the West, and their output may well be appropriate and a fitting offering from what they have. However, the natural, consistent result of formation in Orthodoxy does not usually make a non-author into an author.

As far as books versus ebooks, books (meaning codices) are a technology, albeit a technology that has been around for a long time and will not likely disappear. Ebooks in particular have a long tail effect. The barriers to put an ebook out are much more than to put a traditional book out. It has been said that ebooks are killing Mom and Pop bookstores, and perhaps it is worth taking opportunities to patronize local businesses. But there is another consideration in regards to books versus cheaper Kindle editions. The Kindle may be tiny in comparison to what it holds, and far more convenient than traditional books.

But it is much more capture proof.

"Capture proof"

In military history, the term "capture proof" refers to a weapon that is delicate and exacting in its maintenance needs, so that if it is captured by the enemy, it will rather quickly become useless in enemy soldier's hands.

The principle can be transposed to technology, except that possessing this kind of "capture proof" technology does not mean that it is an advantage that "we" can use against "them." It comes much closer to say that FEMA can shut down its usefulness at the flick of a switch. As time has passed, hot technologies become increasingly delicate and capture proof: a laptop is clunkier than a cool tablet, but the list of things one can do with a tablet without network access is much shorter than the list of things can do with a laptop without network access. Or, to take the example of financial instruments, the movement has been towards more and more abstract derivatives, and these are fragile compared to an investment in an indexed mutual fund, which is in turn fragile compared to old-fashioned money.

"Cool," "fragile," and "capture proof" are intricately woven into each other.

Einstein said, "I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." We might not have to wait until World War IV. Much of World War III may be fought with sticks and stones.

Cars

Perhaps the most striking Luddite horror of cars that I have seen is in C.S. Lewis. He talked about how they were called "space-conquering devices," while they should have been called "space-annihilating devices," because he experienced future shock that cars could make long distances very close. (And someone has said, "The problem with the English is that they think a hundred miles is a long distance, and the problem with the U.S. is that they think a hundred years is a long time.") The "compromise solution" he offered was that it was OK to use cars to go further as a special solution on weekend, but go with other modes of

transport for the bread-and-butter of weekdays. (And this is more or less how Europeans lean.)

Cars are one of many technologies that, when introduced, caused future shock. It's taken as normal by subsequent generations, but there is a real sense of "This new technology is depriving us of something basically human," and that pattern repeats. And perhaps, in a sense, this shock is the pain we experience as we are being lessened by degrees and slowly turning from man to machine-dominated.

CFLs and incandescent bulbs

There is something striking about CFL's. American society has a long history of technology migrations, and a thorough enough "out with the old, in with the new" that working 16mm film projectors, for instance, now fetch a price because we have so thoroughly gotten rid of them in favor of video. And people who use them now aren't using them as the normal way to see video; they may want to see old film canisters and maybe even digitize them (so they can be seen without the use of a film projector).

Compare with other countries such as Lebanon which have no real concept of being obsolete; they have a mix of old and new technologies and they get rid of an old piece of technology, not because it is old, but because it is worn out.

The fact that we are transitioning to CFL's for most purposes is not striking; transitions happen all the time. One could trace "If you have a phone, it's a landline," to "You can have a two pound car phone, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone that fits in your hand, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone, which is much cheaper now," to "You can have a cell phone that does really painful Internet access," to "You can have a cell phone with graceful Internet access." And there have been many

successions like this, all because the adopters thought the new technology was an improvement on the old.

CFL's are striking and disturbing because, while there may be a few people who think that slightly reduced electricity usage (much smaller than a major household appliance) justifies the public handling fragile mercury containers, by and large the adoption is not of a snazzier successor to incandescent bulbs. Not only must they be handled like live grenades, but the light is inferior. The human race grew up on full-spectrum light, such as the sun provides. Edison may not have been aiming for a full-spectrum light, but his light bulb does provide light across the spectrum; that is an effect of an incandescent light that produces light that looks at all near. This is a strange technology migration, and a rather ominous omen.

Given that most bulbs available now are CFL's, there are better and worse choices. Some bulbs have been made with a filter outside the glass so they give off light that looks yellow rather than blue. I wouldn't look for that in and of itself. But some give a full spectrum, even if it is a bluish full spectrum, and that is better. There are also lights sold that are slightly more shatter resistant, which is commendable, and there are some bulbs that are both full spectrum and shatter resistant. I'd buy the last kind if possible, or else a full spectrum CFL, at a hardware store if possible and online if not.

But I would momentarily like to turn attention from the extinction of regular use of incandescent bulbs to their introduction. Candles have been used since time immemorial, but they're not a dimmer version of a light bulb. Even if you have candlesticks and candles lit, the candle is something of a snooze button or a minor concession: societies that used candles still had people active more or less during daylight hours. (Daylight Saving Time was an attempt to enable people to use productive

daylight hours which they were effectively losing.) People who used candles were still effectively tied to the cycle of day and night. Light bulbs caused a shock because they let you operate as early or as late as you wanted. Candles allowed you to wrap up a few loose ends when night had really fallen. *Light bulbs made nighttime optional.* And it caused people future shock.

I have mentioned a couple of different responses to CFL's: the first is to buy full spectrum and preferably shatter resistant (and even then handle the mercury containers like a live grenade), the second is turning to the rhythm of day and light and getting sunlight where you can. Note that inside most buildings, even with windows, sunlight is not nearly as strong as what the human person optimally needs. Let me mention one other possibility.

There is a medical diagnosis called 'SAD' for 'Seasonal Affective Disorder', whose patients have lower mood during the winter months when we see very little light. The diagnosis seems to me a bit like the fad diagnosis of YTD, or Youthful Tendency Disorder, discussed in *The Onion*. If you read about it and are half-asleep it sounds like a description of a frightening syndrome. If you are awake you will recognize a description of perfectly normal human tendencies. And the SAD diagnosis of some degree of depression when one is consistently deprived of bright light sounds rather normal to me. And for that reason I think that some of the best lighting you can get is with something from the same manufacturer of the Sunbox DL SAD Light Box Light Therapy Desk Lamp. That manufacturer is one I trust; I am a little wary of some of their cheaper competitors. There is one cheaper alternative that provides LED light. Which brings me to a problem with LED's. Basically, LEDs emit light of a single color. While you can choose what that color may be, white represents a difficult balancing act. If you've purchased one of those LED

flashlights, it has what is called "lunar white", which is basically a way of cheating at white light. (If you've ever gone to a dark closet and tried to pick out clothing by a lunar white flashlight, this may be why you had trouble telling what color your clothing was.) Expensive as they may be, a Sunbox light box may fit in to your best shot at taking in a healthy level of light.

Children's toys

Charles Baudelaire, in his "la Morale du Joujou" ("the moral of the toy") talks about toys and the fact that the best toys leave something to the imagination. Children at play will imagine that a bar of soap is a car; girls playing with dolls will play the same imagined drama with rag dolls as they will with dolls worth hundreds of dollars. There has been a shift, where Lego sets have shifted from providing raw material to being a specific model, made of specialized pieces, that the child is not supposed to imagine, only to assemble. Lego sets are perhaps the preferred childhood toy of professional engineers everywhere; some of them may have patronized Lego's competitors, but the interesting thing about Legos that are not "you assemble it" models is that you have to supply something to what you're building. Lego the company might make pieces of different sizes and shapes and made them able to stick together without an adhesive; I wouldn't downplay that achievement on the part of the manufacturer, but the child playing with Legos supplies half of the end result. But this is not just in assembly; with older models, the Legos didn't look exactly like what they were supposed to be. There was one time when I saw commercials for a miniature track where some kind of car or truck would transport a payload (a ball bearing, perhaps), until it came to a certain point and the payload fell through the car / track through a chute to a car

below. And when I asked my parents to buy it for me and they refused, I built it out of Legos. Of course it did not look anything like what I was emulating, but I had several tracks on several levels and a boxy square of a vehicle would carry a marble along the track until it dropped its payload onto a car in the level below. With a bit of imagination it was a consolation for my parents not getting the (probably expensive) toy I had asked for, and with a bit of imagination a short broom is a horse you can ride, a taut cord with a sheet hung over it is an outdoor tent, and a shaky box assembled from sofa cushions is a fort. Not, perhaps, that children should be given no toys, or a square peg should be pounded into a round hole by giving everyone old-style Lego kits, but half of a children's toy normally resides in the imagination, and the present fashion in toys is to do all the imagining for the child.

And there is a second issue in what is imagined for children. I have not looked at toys recently, but from what I understand dragons and monsters are offered to them. I have looked rather deeply into what is offered to children for reading. The more innocuous part is bookstores clearing the classics section of the children's area for Disney Princess books. The more serious matter is with *Dealing with Dragons* and other Unman's Tales.

The Cloud

Cloud computing is powerful, and it originated as a power tool in supercomputing, and has now come down to personal use in software like Evernote, a note-taking software system that synchronizes across all computers and devices which have it installed.

Essentially, besides being powerful, *cloud computing, besides being very powerful, is one more step in abstraction in the world of computing.* It means that you

use computers you have never even seen. Not that this is new; it is a rare use case for someone using the Web to own any of the servers for the sites he is visiting. But none the less the older pattern is for people to have their own computers, with programs they have downloaded and/or purchased, and their own documents. The present trend to offload more and more of our work to the cloud is a step in the direction of vulnerability to the damned backswing. The more stuff you have in the cloud, the more of your computer investment can be taken away at the flick of a switch, or collapse because some intervening piece of the puzzle has failed. Not that computers are self-sufficient, but the move to the cloud is a way of being less self-sufficient.

My website is hosted on a cloud virtual private server, with one or two "hot spares" that I have direct physical access to. There are some reasons the physical machine, which has been flaky for far longer than a computer should be allowed to be flaky (and which keeps not getting fixed), is one I keep as a hot spare.

Contraception and Splenda

There was one Catholic-run mailing list where I was getting annoyed at the degree of attention given to one particular topic: I wrote,

Number of posts in this past month about faith: 6

Number of posts in this past month about the Bible: 8

Number of posts in this past month about the Eucharist: 9

Number of posts in this past month extolling the many wonders of Natural Family Planning: 13

The Catholic Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning is not, "Natural Family Planning,

done correctly, is a 97% effective way to simulate contraception." The Catholic Church's teaching on children is that they are the crown and glory of sexual love, and way down on page 509 there is a footnote saying that Natural Family Planning can be permissible under certain circumstances.

And if I had known it, I would have used a quotation from Augustine I cited in *Contraception, Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article*:

Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh? *This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion.* In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit (the Blessed Augustine is referring to I Tim 4:1-3).

Thus spoke the Catholic Church's favorite Church Father on contraception; and to this it may be added that the term 'Natural Family Planning' is deceptive and perhaps treacherous in how it frames things. There is nothing particularly natural about artificially abstaining from sexual intercourse precisely when a woman is capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.

The chief good of the marriage act is that it brings in to being new images of God; "a baby is God's vote that the world should go on." The chief good of eating is that it nourishes the body. Now there are also pleasures, but it is an act of confusion to see them as pleasure delivery systems and an act of greater confusions to frustrate the greater purpose of sex or eating so that one may, as much as possible, use them just as pleasure delivery systems.

There are other strange effects of this approach: for starters, Splenda use correlates to increased weight gain. Perhaps this is not strange: if you teach someone, "You can eat as much candy and drink as many soft drinks as you like," the lesson is "You can consume more without worrying about your waistline," and you will consume more: not only more foods containing Splenda, but more foods not containing Splenda.

There is an interesting history, as far as "Natural" Family Planning goes, about how in ancient times Church Fathers were skeptical at best of the appropriateness of sex during the infertile period, then people came to allow sex during the infertile period despite the fact that it was shooting blanks, and then the West came to a point where priests hearing confessions were to insinuate "Natural" Family Planning to couples who were using more perverse methods to have sex without children, and finally the adulation that can say that Natural Family Planning is the gateway to the culture of life.

Contraception and Splenda are twins, and with Splenda I include not only other artificial sweeteners, but so-called "natural" sweeteners like Agave and Stevia which happen not to be manufactured in a chemical factory, but whose entire use is to do Splenda's job of adding sweetness without calories. What exists in the case of contraception and Splenda alike is neutralizing a greater good in order to have as much of the pleasure associated with that good as possible. It says that the primary purpose of food and sex, important enough to justify neutralizing other effects as a detriment to focusing on the pleasure, is to be a pleasure delivery system.

About pleasure delivery systems, I would refer you to:

The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome,
<https://CJSHayward.com/pleasure/>

The dialectic between pleasure and pain is a recurrent theme among the Fathers and it is something of a philosophical error to pursue pleasure and hope that no pain will come. If you want to see real discontent with one's sexual experiences, look for those who are using Viagra and its kin to try to find the ultimate sexual thrill. What they will find is that sex becomes a disappointment: first sex without drugged enhancement becomes underwhelming, and then Viagra or Cialis fail to deliver the evanescent ultimate sexual thrill.

The damned backswing

There is a phenomenon where something appears to offer great improvements, but it has a damned backswing. For one example in economics, in the 1950's the U.S. had an unprecedentedly high standard of living (meaning more appliances in houses—not really the best measure of living),

and for decades it just seemed like, *It's Getting Better All the Time*. But now the U.S. economy is being destroyed, and even with another regime, we would still have all the debts we incurred making things better all the time.

Another instance of the damned backswing is how medieval belief in the rationality of God gave rise to the heroic labors of science under the belief that a rational God would create a rational and ordered world, which gave way to modernism and positivism which might as well have put science on steroids, which in turn is giving way to a postmodernism and subjectivism that, even as some of it arose from the philosophy of science, is fundamentally toxic to objectivist science.

Email, texting, and IM's

"Email is for old people," one youngster said, and email is largely the wave of the past. Like landlines and desktop computers, it will probably not disappear completely; it will probably remain the communication channel of corporate notifications and organizational official remarks. But social communication via email is the wave of the past: an article in *A List Apart* said that the website had originated as a mailing list, and added, "Kids, go ask your parents."

When texting first caught on it was neither on the iPhone nor the Droid. If you wanted to say, "hello", you would probably have to key in, "4433555555666". But even then texting was a sticky technology, and so far it is the only common technology I know of that is illegal to use when driving. It draws attention in a dangerous way and is treated like alcohol in terms of something that can impair driving. It is a strong technological drug.

The marketing proposition of texting is an intravenous drip of noise. IM's are similar, if not always as mobile as cell phones, and email is a weaker form of the drug that youth

are abandoning for a stronger version. Now, it should also be said that they are useful, and the proper ascetical use is to take advantage of them because they are useful (or not; I have a phone plan without texting and I text rarely enough that the default \$.20 per text makes sense and is probably cheaper than the basic plan.

Fasting and fasting from technologies

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

The healing of this comes in partly by eating, in the Holy Mysteries where we eat from the Tree of Life. But this is no imitation of Eve's sin, or Adam's. They lived in the garden of paradise, and there is no record of them fasting before taking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before we take communion, we answer the question "Where are you?", the question in which God invited Adam and Eve to come clean and expose their wound to the Healer, and we prepare for confession and answer the question Adam and Eve dodged: "Where are you?" We do not live in a garden of delights, but our own surroundings, and we turn away from sensual pleasures. Adam and Eve hid from God; we pray to him and do not stop praying because of our own sordid unworthiness. And, having prepared, we eat from the Tree of Life.

"You shall not surely die." and "Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods," are some of the oldest marketing propositions, but they are remarkably alive in the realm of technology. Witness the triumph of hope over experience in the artificial intelligence

project. Witness a society like the meticulously groomed technology of a Buddha who saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, and wondered whatever on earth they can mean. Mortality may be as total in our generation as any other, but we've done a good job of hiding it. Perhaps doctors might feel inadequate in the face of real suffering, but modern medicine can do a lot. In many areas of the third world, it might be painful, but it is not surprising to play with a child who was doing well two weeks ago and be told that he is dead. Death is not something one expects in homes; it is out of sight and half out of mind in hospitals and hospices. All of this is to say that those of us in the first world have a death-denying society, and if we have not ultimately falsified "You will surely die," we've done a pretty good job of being in denial about it. And "You shall be as gods" is the marketing proposition of luxury cars, computers, smartphones, and ten thousand other propositions. My aunt on discovering Facebook said, "It feels like I am walking on water," and Facebook offers at least a tacit marketing proposition of, "You shall be as gods." Information technology in general, and particularly the more "sexy" forms of information technology, offer the marketing proposition of, "Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods."

There was one time as an undergraduate when I tried to see what it would be like to live as blind for a day, and so I was blindfolded and had a fascinating day which I wrote up for my psychology class. Now I would be careful in saying based on one day's experience would let me understand the life experience of being blind, any more than a few days spent in Ontario entitle me to say that I understand Canadian culture. However, the experience was an interesting challenge, and it had something to do with fasting, even if it was more adventuresome than fasting normally is.

Fasting is first and foremost fasting from food, but there are other things one can fast from. Some Orthodox bid Facebook a temporary farewell for fasting seasons. On fasting days, we are bidden to cut back on sensory pleasures, which can mean cutting back on luxury technologies that give us pleasure.

I'm not sure how much fasting from technologies should form a part of one's rule; it is commonplace to discuss with one's priest or spiritual father how one will keep one's fast, and with what *oikonomia* if such is needed. But one of the rules of fasting is that one attempts a greater and greater challenge. Far from being a spiritual backwater, Lent is the central season of the Christian year. And so I will present twenty-three things you might do to fast from technology. (Or might not.)

1. Sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor. (Monks mention sleeping on the floor as a discipline; the attenuated fast of sleeping on a sleeping bag on the floor may help.)
2. Leave your smartphone at home for a day.
3. Leave all consumer electronics at home for a day.
4. Only check for email, Facebook, etc. once every hour, instead of all the time.
5. Don't check your email; just write letters with a pen or lead pencil.
6. Camp out in your back yard.
7. Read a book outside, using sunscreen if appropriate.

8. Organize some outdoor activity with your friends or family.
9. Don't use your computer or smartphone while you are preparing for the Eucharist.
- 10.*Basic*: If you have games and entertainment apps or application, don't play them when you are fasting.
- 11.*Harder*: If you have games and entertainment applications, delete them.
- 12.*Basic*: Spend an hour outside with a book or an ebook Kindle, doing nothing but read and observe the trees, the wind, and the grass growing. (You are welcome to use my ebooks.)
- 13.*Harder*: Spend an hour outside, but not with a book, just observing the trees, the wind, and the grass growing.
14. Don't use your car for a week. It's OK to get rides, and it may be a pleasure speaking with your friends, but experience being, in part, dependent, and you may be surprised how some of your driving suddenly seems superfluous.
15. Shut off power for an hour. If you keep your fridge and freezer doors shut, you shouldn't lose food, and sometimes power loss has meant adventure.
16. Turn off your computer's network access but still see what you can do with it for a day. (The Luddite's Guide to Technology is written largely on a

computer that doesn't have internet access for the majority of the time it is being used to write this.)

17. Especially if you have a beautiful screensaver, set your computer to just display a blank screen, and have a single color or otherwise dull wallpaper for a time, perhaps for a fasting season.
18. Switch your computer's resolution to 800x600 or the tiniest it can go. That will take away much of its status as a luxury.
19. Make a list of interesting things to do that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
20. Do some of the vibrant things on the list that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
21. Use computers or whatever other technologies, not for what you can get from them, but what you can give through them.
22. Bear a little more pain. If pain is bearable, don't take pain medication. If you can deal with a slightly warmer room in the summer, turn down the air conditioning. If you can deal with a slightly cooler room in the winter, turn down the heat.
23. Visit a monastery.

A monastery is not thought of in terms of being Luddite, but monasteries tend to be lower in level than technology, and a good monastery shows the vibrancy of life not centered about technology. And this suggestion is different.

All the other suggestions say, "I would suggest." The suggestion about the monastery says, "God has given."

Food

There is some ambiguity, or better yet a double meaning, when the New Testament uses the term "breaking bread." On one level, breaking bread means a shared meal around the table. On another, it means celebrating the Eucharist.

You can say that there is one sacrament, or that there are seven, or that there are a million sacraments. A great many things in life have a sacramental dimension, even if the man on the street would not consider these to be religious matters. There is something sacramental about friendship. And there is something sacramental about a meal around a table. Even if the sacramental character of a meal is vanishing.

Proverbs said, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it." Today one may draw forth an implication: "Better is a dinner of really bad fast food than the most exquisite Weston A. Price Foundation meal where there is hatred."

However, there are ways that the sacramental character of meals is falling away. Many foods are not intended to be eaten around a table with family or friends: think of microwave dinners and the 100 calorie snack pack. Read *Nourishing Traditions*, which tells how far our industrial diet has diverged from meals that taste delicious precisely because they are nutritionally solid.

But besides the plastic-like foods of the industrial diet, there is another concern with munching or inhaling. The Holy Eucharist can legitimately be served, in an extreme case, with plastic-like foods. For that matter it is normal for

it to be made with white flour, and white flour is high on the list of foods that should be limited. And it would be a mistake to insist on whole wheat flour because it is overall healthier. But with extreme exceptions such as grave illness, the Holy Mysteries are not to be consumed by oneself off in a corner. They are part of the unhurried unfolding of the Divine Liturgy, which ideally unfolds rather naturally into the unhurried unfolding of a common meal.

Both eating snacks continually to always have the pleasure of the palate, and the solo meal that is inhaled so it can be crammed into an over-busy schedule, fall short of the (broadly) sacramental quality of a common meal around a table.

In Alaska there are many people but not so many priests, and therefore many parishes rarely celebrate the Divine Liturgy. And a bishop, giving advice, gave two pastoral directions to the faithful: first that they should pray together, and second that they should eat together.

Let us try harder to eat with others.

"Forms of life" (Wittgenstein)

I'm not Wittgenstein's biggest fan, and I wince when people speak of "after Wittgenstein." But his concept of "forms of life" is relevant here. A form of life is something that is structural to how people live, and normally tacit; a professor was searching for an example of "forms of life" to give to the class, and after a couple of minutes of silence I said, "You are trying to a difficult thing. You are trying to find something that is basically tacit and not consciously realized, but that people will recognize once it is pointed out. I guess that you have thought of a few possibilities and rejected them because they fall around on one of those criteria." And he searched a bit more, and gave the example

of, "It used to be that procreation was seen as necessary for human flourishing. Now people think that limiting procreation is seen as necessary for human flourishing."

Arguably a *Luddite's Guide to Forms of Life* would be more helpful than *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, but in the discussion of different technologies there is always a concern for what Wittgenstein would call forms of life. It is possible to turn on the television for 10 minutes a day for weather information, and that retains the same form of life as not using television at all. Watching television for hours a day is, and shapes, a distinct form of life. And in some sense the basic question addressed in this work is not, "What technologies are you using?" but "What forms of life do you have given your technology usage?"

Future shock

Some people have said that Americans are in a constant state of "future shock," "future shock" being understood by analogy to "culture shock", which is a profoundly challenging state when you are in a culture that tramples assumptions you didn't know you had. Not all of future shock is in relation to technology, but much of it is.

We think of a "rising standard of living," meaning more unfamiliar possessions in many cases, and even if the economy itself is not a rising standard of living now, we have accepted the train of new technology adoption as progress, but there has been something in us that says, "This is choking something human." And in a sense this has always been right, the older technologies as the new, for movies as much as augmented reality.

One author said, "The future is here. It's just unevenly distributed."

GPS

GPS is in general an example of something that has a double effect. Traditionally advertising in an overall effect helps people to covet what a company has to offer, and the behavior stimulated by the advertising is to advance the company's interest, even though the company never says "We are making this so that we will acquire more money or market share." As in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, the prime actor is attempting to pursue his or her own interests, while it is presented entirely as being to the advantage of the other party on the other party's terms.

Apple didn't just change the game by making the first smartphone done right, in which regard the iPhone is commonly considered more significant than the Macintosh. The company that invented and still sells the Macintosh has established something more important than owning a Macintosh: owning an iPhone or iPad, which unlike the Macintosh generate a steady subscription income stream. The price for my MacBook was 100% up front: now that I've made the one-time purchase, I do not have any further financial obligations that will filter to Apple. My iPhone, on the other hand, has a subscription and contract; part of my hefty baseline phone bill goes to Apple. And if I were to purchase an iPad, I would have two subscriptions. (The main reason I have not seriously moved towards buying an iPad is not what I would pay up front; it is adding another subscription.)

The GPS also has a double effect. It is what science fiction writers called a "tracking device." Now it is a terrifically useful traffic advice; part of the marketing proposition offered for Sila on the iPhone 4 S is that it makes terrifically resourceful use of a GPS. ("I feel like a latte."—and it is the GPS that Sila uses to find nearby locations where one might find a latte.) On a more pedestrian level GPS for driving(or biking, or walking) has become so entrenched that people don't know what they'd

do without it to reach unfamiliar locations. I have never heard someone question the utility of a GPS for this or other purposes, and I've heard of interesting-sounding hobbies like geocaching where you navigate to specified coordinates and then search out and find some hidden attraction in the area indicated by the GPS.

But for all of these things, GPSes, as well as cell phones in general, provide one more means for Big Brother (and possibly more than one Big Brother) to know exactly where you go, when you go there, what the patterns are, and other things where Big Brother will keep closer tabs on your whereabouts and activities than your spouse or parent. IBM published a book on "Why IBM for Big Data?" and made it very clear that *Big Brother* analysis of data isn't just for No Such Agency. It's also for the corporate world. One author told the seemingly attractive story of having made repeated negative posts on his FaceBook wall, slamming an airline after repeated problems, and the airline reached out to him and gave him a service upgrade. This was presented in the most positive light, but it was very clear that business were being invited to use IBM's expertise to do Big Data Big Brother analysis on social networks.

Guns and modern weapons (for fantasy swords, see Teleporters)

Let me give a perhaps controversial preamble before directly talking about weapons.

I have spoken both with NRA types and anti-gun advocates, and there is a telling difference. The anti-gun advocates point to hard-hitting, emotional news stories where a walking arsenal opens fire in a school and kills many people. The NRA types may briefly talk about selective truth-telling and mention an incident where someone walked into a church armed to kill a bear, and an

off-duty security guard who was carrying a gun legally and with the explicit permission of church leadership, "stopped the crime." But that is something of a tit-for-tat sideline to the main NRA argument, which is to appeal to statistical studies that show that legal gun ownership does not increase crime.

I have a strong math background and I am usually wary of statistics. However, I find it very striking that anti-gun advocates have never in my experience appealed to statistics to show that legal gun ownership increases crime, but only give hard-hitting emotional images, while the bread-and-butter of NRA argument is an appeal to research and statistics. I've never personally investigated those statistics, but there is something suspicious and fishy when only one side of a debate seriously appeals to research and statistics.

With that preamble mentioned, learning to really use a gun is a form of discipline and stillness, and I tried to capture it in the telescope scene in "Within the Steel Orb." Hunting can be a way to be close to your food, and I approve of hunting for meat but not hunting for taxidermy. *However*, sacramental shopping for weapons is as bad as any other sacramental shopping. I would tentatively say that if you want skill with a weapon, and will train to the point that it becomes something of a spiritual discipline, then buying a weapon makes sense. If you want to buy a gun because all the cool guys in action-adventure movies have one, or you are not thinking of the work it takes to handle a gun safely and use it accurately, I would question the appropriateness of buying a gun.

(Owning a gun because that is part of your culture is one thing; buying a gun because they are glamorized in movies is another thing entirely.)

And that is without investigating the question of whether it is appropriate to use violence in the first place.

St. George the soldier and the passion-bearers Ss. Boris and Gleb are both honored by the Church; yet the better path is the one set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

Heating and air conditioning

A college roommate commented that middle class Americans had basically as much creature comforts were available. Not that they can buy everything one would want; but there is a certain point beyond which money cannot purchase necessities, only luxuries, and then a certain point after that where money cannot purchase luxuries, only status symbols, and a point beyond that where money cannot purchase any more meaningful status symbols, only power. And middle class Americans may well not be able to purchase every status symbol they want, but really there is not much more creature comfort that would come with ten times one's salary.

Heating and air conditioning are one such area, and monastics wear pretty much the same clothing in summer and winter. One Athonite monk talked about a story about how several Russian sailors made a fire and stood close, and still did not feel warm, while islanders who were barely clad stood some distance off and were wincing because of the heat. We lose some degree of spiritual strength if we insist on having cool buildings in the summer and warm buildings in the winter. Even just cutting back a bit, so that buildings are warm but not hot in the summer and cool but not cold in the winter would constitute a spiritual victory. Usually this sort of thing is argued for environmental reasons; I am not making the argument that the lowered utility usage is good for the environment but that the lowered utility usage is constructive and, in the old phrase, "builds character." Indoor tracks exist, but in the summer I see bicyclists and runners exercising hard in the summer.

These people are not super-heroes, and exercising in the heat really does not seem to be much of a deterrent to getting one's artificially added exercise. The human body and spirit together are capable of a great deal more sturdiness, when instead of always seeking comfort we learn that we can function perfectly well after adjusting to discomfort. (And this is not just with heating and air conditioning; it is true with a lot of things.)

Hospitality

There is an ancient code of hospitality that recently has been influenced by consumer culture. What commercial marketing does, or at least did, to make a gesture of friendship and welcome was by offering a selection of choices carefully fitted to the demographics being targeted. Starbucks not only established that you could market an experience that would command a much higher price than a bottomless cup of coffee at a regular diner; they sold not one coffee but many coffees. You had a broad selection of consumer choices. Starbucks was doubtlessly more successful than some frozen yoghurt places I visited in grad school, which offered something like fifty or more flavors and varieties of yoghurts and had staff who were mystified when customers said, "But I just want some frozen yoghurt!" As a nuance, Starbucks offers guidance and suggestions for the undecided—and a large number of choices for the decided.

And in light of the hospitality industry, hosts offer guests choices and sometimes mystify them by the offering: a guest, according to the older (unwritten) code, did not have the responsibility of choosing what would be offered. Now perhaps I need to clarify, or maybe don't need to clarify, that if you have a severe peanut allergy and your host offers you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, you are

not duty bound to accept it. But even then, social graces come to play. I remembered one time, at a feast although not strictly a host / guest relationship, when I offered a friend a glass of port and he kindly reminded me that he was a recovering alcoholic. I apologized profusely, and he stopped me and said, "I appreciate the offer; I just can't drink it." So then I offered him something he could consume, and he took it and thanked me for it. Social graces apply.

But this is something of a footnote. There is a story of a staretz or monastic spiritual father who was going with one of a monk's disciples, and they visited a monastery that was feasting with bread, and the elder and disciple both shared in that informal communion, and then the two of them resumed their journey. The disciple asked the master if he could drink water, and to his astonishment was told no. The master, in answering his question, said, "That was love's bread. But let us keep the fast." The Fathers are very clear: as one priest said, "Hospitality trumps fasting." And the assumption there is that fasting is important enough. *This piece originated with the title, "Fasting from Technologies."* But hospitality is even more important.

The ancient rule of hospitality, although this is never thought of in these terms with today's understanding of authority, is that the host has a profound authority over the guest which the guest will obey, even to the point of trumping fasting. But this is not what we may think of as despotism: the entire purpose and focus of the host's role in hospitality is to extend the warmest welcome to the guest. I remember one time when a friend visited from Nigeria, and although I set some choices before them, when I said, "We can do A, B, and C; I would recommend B," in keeping with hospitality they seemed to always treat my pick as tacit authority and went along with me. It was a wonderful visit; my friend made a comment about being treated like royalty,

but my thought was not about how well I was treating them. My thought was that this would probably be the last time I saw my friend and her immediate family face to face, and I'd better make it count.

I might comment that this is tied to our inability today to understand a husband's authority over his wife and the wife's submission. The role is somewhat like that of host and guest. A liberal source speaking on the Ephesians Haustafel as it dealt with husbands and wives said that it did not portray marriage in terms of the husband's authority, while a conservative source understood authority at a deeper level: it said that nowhere here (or anywhere else in the Bible) are husbands urged, "Exercise your authority!", but the text that says, Wives, submit "it yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord," also says, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it." If the wife's role is to submit herself to her husband as to the Lord, the husband's role is to give up his life as Christ was crucified for the Church.

And all of this seems dead to us as we have grown dead to it. The role of hospitality, including authority, is infinitely less important than marriage, yet we see a husband's authority as external and domineering, when it is less external than the host's authority. And I am drawn to memories of visiting one very traditional couple where both of them exuded freedom and comfort and dealing with them felt like a foot sliding into a well-fitting shoe. But if we see a husband having authority over a wife as a foreign imposition and nothing like the implicit authority we do not even recognize between host and guest (where the host's authority consists in making every decision to show as much kindness as possible to the guest), this is not a defect in marriage but in our deafened ears.

An intravenous drip of noise

"Silence is the language of the age to come," as others have said. Hesychasm is a discipline of stillness, of silence, of "Be still and know that I am God." Whether spiritual silence is greater than other virtues, I do not wish to treat here; suffice it to say that all virtues are great health, and all vices are serious spiritual diseases, and all are worth attention.

There are a number of technologies whose marketing proposition is as a noise delivery system. The humble radio offers itself as a source of noise. True, there are other uses, such as listening to a news radio station for weather and traffic, but just having a radio on in the background is noise. Other sources of noise include television, iPods, smartphones, the web, and top sites like FaceBook, Google Plus, and the like. Right use of these tends to be going in and out for a task, even if the task lasts five hours, versus having noise as a drone in the background.

In terms of social appropriateness, there is such a thing as politely handling something that is basically rude. For one example, I was visiting a friend's house and wanted to fix his printer, and apologetically said I was going to call my brother and called him to ask his opinion as a computer troubleshooter. I handled the call as something that was basically rude even though the express purpose was to help with something he had asked about and it was a short call. And it was handled politely because I handled it as something that is basically rude. And other people I know with good manners do sometimes make or receive a cell phone call when you otherwise have their attention, but they do so apologetically, which suggests that just ignoring the other person and making a phone call is rude. In other words, they politely handle the interruption by treating it as something that is basically rude, even if (as in the case I

mentioned) the entire intention of the call was to help me help the friend I was visiting.

Something like this applies to our use of technology. There are things that are entirely appropriate if we handle them as something that is basically "rude." Or, perhaps, "noisy." The equivalent of making a long phone call when you are with someone, without offering any apology or otherwise treating it as basically rude, is laying the reins on the horse's neck and allowing technologies to function as a noise delivery system. And what we need is to unplug our intravenous drip of noise.

Silence can be uncomfortable if you are used to the ersatz companionship of noise. If you have been in a building and step outside into the sunlight at noon, you may be dazzled. Most spiritual disciplines stretch us into something that is uncomfortable at first: the point is to be stretched more each time. The *Philokalia* talks about how people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them: to this may be added that after you repent and fear a shining part of you may be lost forever, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell." Silence is like this; we want a noise delivery system as a drone, and once we begin to get used to its absence, there is a deeper joy. It may take time; it takes something like a year for a recovering alcoholic's brain chemistry to reset. But once we have got rid of the drug, once we have repented and sought to bear fruit worthy of repentance, we may find ourselves (to adapt the title of a book) *blindsided by joy*.

Killing time

"You cannot kill time," the saying goes, "without injuring eternity."

At least one breakdown of mobile users has said that they fall into three groups: "Urgent now," people who have

some degree of emergency and need directions, advice, contingency plans, and the like, "Repeat now," people who are monitoring information like whether or how their stocks are doing, and "Bored now," people who are caught and have some time to kill, and look for a diversion.

"Bored now" use of cell phones is simply not constructive spiritually; it offers a virtual escape for the here and now God has given us, and it is the exact opposite of the saying, "Your cell [as a monk] will teach you everything you need to know."

The lead pencil

The lead pencil is a symbol of an alternative to an overly technologized world; one organization of people who have made a conscious decision to avoid the encroachment of technology chose the lead pencil as their emblem and formed the Lead Pencil Club.

But the lead pencil is a work of technology, and one that 99% of humans who ever lived have never seen any more than a cuneiform stylus or any other writing implement. And even such a seemingly humble technology comes about in an impressive fashion; one economist wrote a compelling case that only God knows how pencils are made.

Sitting down and writing letters is a valuable discipline, but the norm that has been lived by 99% of the human race is oral culture; anthropologists have increasingly realized that the opposite of "written" culture is not "illiterate" culture but "oral" culture. And the weapon that slides through the chink in oral culture's armor is the writing implement, such as the lead pencil. It is not the computer, but the lead pencil and its kin, that serve as a disease vector to destroy age-old orality of culture.

This is not to say that you can't try to use computer keyboards less and pens and pencils more. But understand that you're not turning the clock all the way back by writing handwritten letters, however commendable the love in handwritten letters may be. *The lead pencil is a technology and to those societies that embrace it, it is the death knell to an old way.*

The long tail

The long tail can be your best friend, or an insidious enemy.

Let me briefly outline the long tail. A retail bookstore needs to sell one copy of a book in a year's time, or else it is losing them money: shelf space is an expensive commodity. And all of this leads to a form of implicit censorship, not because bookstores want to stamp out certain books, but because if it's not a quick seller or a safe bet it's a liability.

By contrast, Amazon has large volumes of shelf space; their warehouses might comfortably store a city. And it costs them some money to acquire books, but the price of keeping books available is insignificant compared to a brick-and-mortar bookstore. And what that means, and not just on Amazon, that the economic censorship is lifted. People used to wonder who would be able to fill hundreds or more cable channels; now Youtube would be hard pressed to reduce itself down to a thousand channels. And so a much larger portion of Amazon's profits comes from having an enormous inventory of items that occasionally make a sale.

There is specialization implicit in the long tail; if you want to know how to make something, chances are pretty good that some blog explains how. And the proper ascetical use of technology, or Luddite if you prefer, uses things differently than the mainstream. Nobody in a phone store is

going to tell you that an intravenous drip of noise in terms of text messages that go on even when you are trying to sleep does not make you happier than if you use texting when there is a special need. Some of the best resources you will find for ascetical use of technology are to be found in the long tail.

But there is something else that comes with it. The temptation is to be off in our own customized worlds, with everything around our interests. And that is a form of spiritual poverty. Part of an age-old asceticism has been learning how to deal with the people who are around you, localist style, instead of pursuing your own nooks and crannies. The monoculture of retail stores in America was first a problem, not because it had no long tail effects, but because it supplanted at least an implicit localism. Local cultures gave way to plastic commercial culture.

And we can use the long tail to our profit, if we don't lay the reins on the horse's neck. Shopping on the Internet for things that won't be local stores is one thing; shopping on the Internet so you don't have to get out of your pyjamas is another.

The long tail can be a gold mine, but it is subject to the damned backswing.

Marketing proposition

There was one CIA official who said, being interviewed by a journalist, that he would never knowingly hire someone who was attracted by the romance of cloak and dagger work. Now this was quite obviously someone who did want to hire people who would be a good fit, but someone who wants to join a cloak and dagger agency as a gateway to have life feel like a James Bond movie is off on the wrong foot.

I doubt if any major intelligence agency has promoted James Bond movies because they think it's a good way to draw the right recruits, but James Bond movies function as highly effective advertisements. They may not lead people to be able to stick out the daily grind and level of bureaucracy in a three-letter government agency, but they give a strong sense that spying is cool, and cool in a way that probably has only the most accidental resemblance to life in one of those bureaucratic organizations.

Cop shows likewise show police officers pulling their guns out much more than in real life; it is a frequent occurrence on the cop shows I've seen, while the last figure I heard was that real, live, flesh and blood police officers draw a gun on the job (apart from training) once every few years if even that.

Advertisement is produced as a service to the companies whose goods and services are being advertised, but the real message they sell is if anything further from the truth than the "accidental advertisement" of James Bond movies advertising a romantic version of bureaucratic intelligence agencies and cop shows making a dramaticization that effectively ignores the day-to-day work of police officers because it just doesn't make good drama. (What would happen to the ratings of a cop show if they accurately portrayed the proportion of time that police officers spend filling out paperwork?)

Advertising sells claims that are further out. Two examples discussed in a class showed a family that moved, and what was juxtaposed as cementing this bonding time was a vacuum cleaner. In another commercial, racial harmony was achieved by eating a hamburger. The commercials that stuck with me from childhood were in one case kids jumping around with rotating camera angles because they were wearing a particular brand of shoes: When I asked my parents for those shoes, they explained to

me that the commercial was made to make me want them, and I took a marker and colored the patterns on the bottom of the shoes on the add on to my shoes. Another one showed a game of Laser Tag that was end to end acrobatics. Now I have never played Laser Tag, and I get the impression people like it, but I doubt that its gear confers the ability to do theatrically delivered acrobatics.

Marketing is usually more subtle and seductive than I have portrayed it here. The vacuum cleaner did not offer any words connecting the appliance with family connectedness; it's just that this family was going through a major experience and the vacuum cleaner appeared with perfect timing just at the center of that memory. The marketing message that is portrayed is seductive and false, and it is never the right basis to judge the product on. The product may be the right thing to buy and it may well be worth buying, but only after one has rejected the mystique so masterfully built up in the marketing proposition. If it is right for me to study ninjutsu, it will only be right after I have rejected the ninja mystique, something which the nearest dojo does in fact do: they refer to the martial art they teach as "toshindo", nor "ninjutsu", even though they refer to essentially the same thing in Japanese.

I have said earlier, or rather repeated, the words, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." They bear repeating, but is there anything else to add? I would add three things:

1. *Reject* sacramental shopping.
2. Reject the mystique advertising has sold you this product on.
3. Wait until your heart becomes clear about what is the best choice, and then make the best choice.

The best choice, in the third world, may be to buy a Mercedes-Benz instead of a Ford because you cannot afford to replace a Ford in six years.

But take care of the spiritual housecleaning first.

Martial arts

There have been two times in my life that I have studied martial arts, and both of them have been times of exceptional spiritual dryness. I have not felt any particular dryness when learning how to use a bow and arrow—or crossbow or a .22—but there is something different about at least internal Asian martial arts. Practicing them, like Orthodoxy, is walking along a way. And it would seem somewhat confused to try to pursue one of these ways along with the Orthodox way.

I am careful of declaring this in the absolute; the literature is ambivalent but there are soldiers who bear the cross of St. George, and many of them have training in Asian martial arts. That looks to me grey, as outlined in the timeless way of relating.

I am tempted to train in ninjutsu: partly for technique, partly because the whole of the training includes stealth, and partly for practical self-defense. But I am treating that desire as a temptation, on the understanding that God can impress things on my conscience if he wants me to enter training.

MMO's (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, like World of Warcraft)

"Do You Want to Date My Avatar?" was designed and created as a viral video, and something about it really stuck.

There are common threads between many of the things there, and an MMO is a cross between the MUDs I played

in high school, and SecondLife. The MUDs were handled from pure text, leaving imagery in the player's imagination; MMO's provide their own imagery. Another form of escape.

Money and financial instruments

The Fathers commenting on St. Job also illustrate another principle of such wealth as existed then. St. Job is reported as having thousands of herd animals and thousands of beasts of burden, the wealthiest of the men of the East. But there are somewhat pointed remarks that wealthy Job is not reported to possess gold or silver. His wealth was productive wealth, living wealth, not a vault of dead metal coins. In modern terms he did not live off an endowment of stocks and bonds, but owned and ran a productive business.

Endowments are a means of being independently wealthy, and this ultimately means "independent from God." Now the wealthiest are really as dependent on God as the poorest; let us remember the parable of the rich fool, in which a man congratulates himself for amassing everything he would need and that night the angels demanded his soul from him. The ending is much sadder than St. Job's story.

Those of us in the world usually possess some amount of money, but there is something that makes me uncomfortable about the stock market overall, even moreso for the more abstract financial instruments. What one attempts to do is gain the most money from one's existing money as much as possible, given the amount of risk you want and possibly including such outliers as ethical index funds which only index stocks deemed to meet an ethical standard. The question I have is, "What are we producing for what we get out of the stock market?" Working in a job delivers tangible value, or at least can. Investing in the stock market may be connected with helping businesses to

function, but more and more abstract forms of wealth have the foul smell that heralds the coming of the damned backswing.

I would suggest as a right use of wealth acquiring tools that help you work, and being generous even or especially if money is tight. And explicitly depending on God.

Movies

When movies had arrived on the scene and were starting to have a societal effect, at least one Luddite portrayed a character moving from one movie to another in escapism. The premise may seem quaint now, but a little bit of that keeps on happening with new technologies.

One fellow parishioner talked about how in Japan, anime shows aired with a certain animation technique, and all of the sudden emergency rooms were asking why they were being inundated with people having epileptic seizures. And when they saw the connection, Japan stopped cold in its use of that animation technique. He said that that underscored to him the power of television and movies.

I don't quite agree with him, any more than I would agree with using findings that extremely high levels of artificial light—fluorescent *or* incandescent—cause problems, and we should therefore be very wary of lighting. For most sedentary people, even with artificial light (fluorescent *or* incandescent), the level of exposure to light is materially lower than natural exposure to the sun, and people who spend their time indoors tend to see less light (*significantly* less light) than people living outdoors. I didn't accept his conclusion, but he followed with another insight that I can less easily contest.

He asked if I saw movies infrequently (we had not discussed the topic, but he knew me well enough to guess where I might stand), and I told him that I usually don't

watch movies. He asked me if I had ever observed that an hour after seeing a movie, I felt depressed. I had not made any connection of that sort, even if now it seems predictable from the pleasure-pain syndrome. And now I very rarely see movies, precisely because the special effects and other such tweaks are stronger than I am accustomed to seeing; they go like a stiff drink to the head of the teetotaler. And on this score I would rather not be the person who has a stiff drink every so often, and whose body tolerates alcohol better, but the person whose system hasn't had to make such an adjustment, an adjustment that includes losses. The little pleasures of life are lost on someone used to a rising standard of special effects, and the little pleasures of life are more wholesome than special effects.

Multitasking

As I discussed in "Religion And Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design Vs. Evolution," one of the forms of name-dropping in academic theology is to misuse "a term from science": the claim to represent "a term from science" is endemic in academic theology, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've read "a term from science" that was used correctly.

One book said it was going to introduce "a term from computer science," *toggling*, which meant switching rapidly between several applications. The moral of this story was that we should switch rapidly between multiple activities in our daily lives.

What I would have said earlier is, "While that moral might be true, what it is not is a lesson from computer science." What I would say now is, "Never mind if that is a lesson from computer science. The moral is fundamentally flawed."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:22, Christ says, "If your eye be," and then a word that doesn't come across in translation very well. It is rendered "healthy" (NIV), "clear" (NASB), "sound" (RSV), and "good" (NKJV, NLT), Only the King James Version properly renders the primary sense of the Greek *haplous* as "single." This may be a less user-friendly translation but it captures something the other translations miss. The context of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body is about choosing whether to have a single focus in serving God, or try to multitask between serving God and money. *Haplous* does have "healthy", "clear", "sound", and "good" as secondary meanings, but the primary meaning is the less accessible one that I have only found in the Greek and in the King James. If the eye is the lamp of the body, and it is important that the eye be single, then by extension the whole person is to be single, and as one aspect of this single eye, give a whole and single attention to one thing at a time. Now this is not necessarily a central, foreground focus in the Sermon on the Mount, but as its logic unfurls, even as spiritual silence unfurls, a single eye gives its whole and undivided attention to one thing at a time. (And study after study has shown that increased productivity through multitasking is an illusion; divided attention is divided attention and hurts all manner of actions.)

Nutriceuticals

The term "nutriceuticals" is itself an ambiguous and ambivalent term.

On the one hand, 'nutriceuticals' can refer to the diet advanced by the *Nourishing Traditions* school, and while nutrition should not be considered on its own without reference to the big picture of exercise, work, light, almsgiving, fasting, prayer, and the Holy Mysteries, there is

something to the recipes and type of diet advocated in *Nourishing Traditions*.

There are also the different, and differently excellent, nutraceuticals of a company that combines absolutely top-notch supplements with a pushy, multi-lev—I mean, a unique opportunity to become CEO of your own company.

However, it seems that everybody selling certain things wants to be selling "nutraceuticals", and there are people selling "synthetic testosterone" as a "nutraceutical." Friends, I really hope that the offer of "synthetic testosterone" is false advertising, because if it is false advertising they are probably delivering a better product than if it's truth in advertising. Testosterone is a steroid, the chief of the anabolic steroids used to get muscles so big they gross girls out. Now testosterone does have legitimate medical uses, but using steroids to build disgustingly huge muscles can use up to a hundred times what legitimate medical use prescribes, and it does really nasty things to body, mind, and soul.

I get the impression that most things sold as nutraceuticals are shady; to authorities, illegal nutraceuticals are probably like a water balloon, where you step on it one place and it just slides over a bit to the side. It used to be that there were perhaps a dozen major street drugs on the scene; now there is a vast bazaar where some "nutraceuticals" are squeaky-clean, and some "neutraceuticals" are similar in effect to illegal narcotics but not technically illegal, and some of them are selling testosterone without medical supervision or worse.

So buyer beware. There's some good stuff out there (I haven't talked about goji berries), but if you want a healthy diet to go with healthy living, read and cook from *Nourishing Traditions*.

Old Technologies

There is a Foxtrot cartoon where the mother is standing outside with Jason and saying something like, "This is how you throw a frisbee."—"This is how you play catch."—"This is how you play tennis." And Jason answers, "Enough with the historical re-enactments. I want to play some games!" (And there is another time when he and Marcus had been thrown out of the house and were looking at a frisbee and saying, "This is a scratch on the Linux RAID drive.")

Old technologies are usually things that caused changes and moved people away from what might be called more natural forms of life. However, they represent a lower drug dose than newer technologies. The humble lead pencil may be historically be the kind of technology that converted cultures away from being oral; however, a handwritten letter to an old friend is profoundly different from a stream of texts. And in my technological soliloquy above, two out of the three technologies I mentioned represent an old tradition. Being familiar with some of the best of older technologies may be helpful, and in general they do not have the layers on layers of fragile character that have been baked into new technologies. A Swiss Army Knife is still a portable toolchest if something messes up with the Internet. Bicycles are not a replacement for cars—you can't go as fast or as far, or stock up on groceries—but many people prefer bicycles when they are a live option, and a good bicycle has far fewer points of failure than a new car.

I noted when I was growing up that a power failure meant, "Office work stops." Now more recently an internet or network failure means, "Office work stops," and there is someone who said, "Systems integration is when your computer doesn't work because of a problem on a computer you never knew existed." Older technologies are in general

not so fragile, and have more of a buffer zone before you get in to the damned backswing.

Online forums

Online forums are something of a mixed blessing. They can allow discussion of obscure topics, and have many of the benefits of the the long tail. I happily referred someone who was learning Linux to unix.stackexchange.com. But the blessing is mixed, and when I talked with my priest about rough stuff on an Orthodox forum, he said, "People love to talk about Orthodoxy. The real challenge is to do it."

Online forums may be more wisely used to consult for information and knowhow, but maybe not the best place to find friends, or perhaps a good place to find friends, but not a good place to use for friendship.

Planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last

When I made one visit to the Dominican Republic, one thing that surprised me was that a substantial number of the vehicles I saw were Mercedes-Benz or other luxury brands by U.S. standards, while there were no or almost no U.S. cars. The reason I was given to this by my youth pastor is that you can keep a German engineered car up and running for 30 years if you take care of it; with a U.S. car you are doing well to have a car still running after 10 years. German cars, among others, are engineered and built to last; U.S. cars are engineered and built NOT to last. And in the Dominican Republic economy, buying a car that may well run for 30 years is something people can afford; buying a car that may only last 5-7 years is a luxury people cannot afford. An old but well-cared-for Mercedes Benz, Saab,

Volvo, or BMW will probably last longer than a new car which is "imported from Detroit."

One of the features of an industrial economy is that the economy needs to have machines in production and people buying things. If we ask the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth," the decisive answer of industrial economy is, "Man was made for economic wealth." There are artificial measures taken to manipulate culture so as to maximize production and consumption of economic wealth, three of which are planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last.

Planned obsolescence socially enforces repeat purchases by making goods that will have a better version available soon; in computers relatively little exploration is done to make a computer that will last a long time, because *computers usually only need to last until they're obsolete, and that level of quality is "good enough for government work."* I have an iPhone 4 and am glad not to be using my needlessly snail-like AT&T-serviced iPhone 1, but I am bombarded by advertisements telling me that I need an iPhone 4S, implying that my iPhone 4 just doesn't cut it any more. As a matter of fact, my iPhone 4 works quite nicely, and I ignored a link advertising a free port of the iPhone 4's distinctive feature Sila. I'm sure that if I forked out and bought an iPhone 4S, it would not be long before I saw advertisements breeding discontent about my spiffy iPhone 4S, and giving me a next hot feature to covet.

In the Middle Ages, fashion changed in clothing about once per generation. In our culture, we have shifting fashions that create a manufactured social need to purchase new clothing frequently, more like once per year. People do not buy clothing nearly so often because it is worn out and too threadbare to keep using, but because fashion shifted and such-and-such is in. Now people may be spending less on fashion-driven purchases than before, but it is still not a

mainstream practice to throw a garment out because further attempts to mend it will not really help.

And lastly, there is the factor of things being made to break down. There are exceptions; it is possible for things to be built to last. I kept one Swiss Army Knife for twenty years, with few repairs beyond WD-40 and the like—and at the end of those twenty years, I gave it as a fully functional hand-me-down to someone who appreciated it. There is a wide stripe of products where engineers tried to engineer something to last and last, and not just German engineers. However, this is an exception and not the rule in the U.S. economy. I was incredulous when a teacher told me that the engineering positions some of us would occupy would have an assignment to make something that would last for a while and then break down. But it's true. Clothing, for instance, can be built to last. However, if you buy expensive new clothing, it will probably wear out. Goodwill and other second-hand stores sometimes have things that are old enough to be built to last, but I haven't found things to be that much sturdier: your mileage may vary. And culturally speaking, at least before present economic difficulties, when an appliance breaks you do not *really* take it in for repairs. You replace it with a newer model.

All of these things keep purchases coming so the gears of factories will continue. Dorothy Sayers' "The Other Six Deadly Sins" talks about how a craftsman will want to make as good an article as possible, while mechanized industry will want to make whatever will keep the machines' gears turning. And that means goods that are made to break down, even when it is technologically entirely feasible for factories to turn out things that are built to last.

All of these answer the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" with a resounding, "Man was made for economic wealth."

Porn and things connected to porn

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "Air!" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects even in marriage). To quote the Sermon on the Mount (RSV):

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

The Church Fathers are clear enough that this must not be taken literally; canon law forbids self-castration. But if you want to be free from addiction to pornography, if you

want such freedom the way you want air, then you will do whatever it takes to remove the addiction.

What are your options? I'm not going to imitate the Dilbert strip's mentioning, "How to lose weight by eating less food," but there are some real and concrete steps you can take. If you shut off your internet service, and only check email and conduct internet business in public places with libraries, that might be the price for purity. If you are married, you might use one of many internet filters, set up with a password that is only known to your wife. You could join a men's sexual addiction support group: that may be the price of freedom from porn, and it is entirely worth it. The general rule of thumb in confession is not to go into too much detail in confessing sexual sins, but going to confession (perhaps frequently, if your priest or spiritual father allows it) can have a powerful "I don't want to confess this sin" effect. Another way to use the Internet is only go to use it when you have a defined purpose, and avoid free association browsing which often goes downhill. You could ask prayers of the saints, especially St. Mary of Egypt and St. John the Long-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves. You could read and pray "The Canon of Repentance to Our Lord Jesus Christ" in the Jordanville prayer book and St. Nectarios Press's *Prayers for Purity*, if your priest so blesses.

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first it drains wonder and beauty out of everything else, and then it drains wonder and beauty out of itself: the only goal of lust is more lust. It works like a street drug. St. Basil the Great compared lust to a dog licking a saw: the dog keeps licking it because it likes the taste it produces, but it does not know that it is tasting its own woundedness, and the longer it keeps up at this, the deeper the wounds become.

Furthermore, an account of fighting sexual sin is incomplete if we do not discuss gluttony. What is above the

belt is very close to what is below the belt, and the Fathers saw a tight connection between gluttony and lust. Gluttony is the gateway drug to lust. "*Sear your loins with fasting,*" the Fathers in the *Philokalia* tells us; the demon of lust goes out with prayer and fasting.

Sacramental shopping

I remember when I had one great struggle before surrendering, letting go of buying a computer for my studies, and then an instant later feeling compelled to buy it. The only difference was that one was sacramental shopping to get something I really needed, and the other was just getting what I needed with the "sacramental shopping" taken out.

In American culture and perhaps others, the whole advertising industry and the shape of the economy gives a great place to "sacramental shopping", or shopping as an ersatz sacrament that one purchases not because it is useful or any other legitimate concern, but because it delivers a sense of well-being. Like Starbucks, for instance. Some have argued that today's brand economy is doing the job of spiritual disciplines: hence a teacher asks students, "Imagine your future successful self. With what brands do you imagine yourself associating?" and getting no puzzled looks or other body language indicating that students found the question strange. I've mentioned brands I consume both prestigious and otherwise; perhaps this piece would be better if I omitted mention of brands. But even if one rejects the ersatz spirituality of brands, not all brands are created equal; my previous laptop was an IBM Thinkpad I used for years before it stopped working, and the one before that was an Acer that demonstrated "You get what you pay for." Investing in something good—paid for in cash, without incurring further debt—can be appropriate. Buying

for the mystique is spiritual junk food. (And in telling about my iPhone, I didn't mention that I tried migrating to a Droid, before realizing its user interface didn't stack up to the iPhone's.)

"Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need," is a rejection of brand economy as a spiritual discipline. Buy things on their merits and not because of the prestige of the brand. And learn to ignore the mystique that fuels a culture of discontent. Buy new clothes because your older clothing is wearing out, not because it is out of fashion. (It makes sense to buy classic rather than trendy.)

SecondLife

Most of the other technologies mentioned here are technologies I have dealt with myself, most often at some length. SecondLife by contrast is the one and only of the technologies on this list I haven't even installed due to overwhelming bad intuitions when I tried to convince myself it was something I should be doing.

It may be, some time later, that SecondLife is no longer called SecondWife, and it is a routine communication technology, used as an audio/visual successor to (purely audio) phone conversations. The web was once escape, one better than the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and now it can be explored but it is quite often used for common nuts and bolts. *No technology is permanently exotic*: perhaps sometime the world of SecondLife will seem ordinary. But for now at least, it is an escape into building an alternative reality, and almost might as well be occult, as the foundations of modern science, for the degree of creating a new alternate reality it involves.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktop computers

Jakob Nielsen made a distinction between computers that are *movable*, meaning laptops and netbooks which can be moved with far less difficulty and hassle than a desktop system, and *mobile*, meaning that they are the sort of thing a person can easily carry. Netbooks cross an important line compared to full-sized laptops; a regular laptop weighs enough on the shoulder that you are most likely to take a laptop in its carrying case for a reason, not just carry it like one more thing in a pocket. Netbooks, which weigh in at something like two pounds, are much lighter on the shoulder and they lend themselves more readily to keeping in a backpack, large purse, or bag of holding, without stopping to consider, "Do I really want to carry this extra weight?" Not that this is unique to netbooks; tablets are also light enough to just carry with you. Smartphones cross another important line: they are small enough to keep tucked in your pocket (or on your belt).

I was first astonished when I read that one iPhone user had completely displaced her use of the desktop computer. It surprised me for at least three reasons. First, the iPhone's screen is tiny compared to even a small desktop screen; one thing programmers tend to learn is the more screen space they have, the better, and if they have any say in the matter, or if they have savvy management, programmers have two screens or one huge screen. Second, especially when I had an iPhone 1 that came with painfully slow and artificially limited bandwidth, the niche for it that I saw was as an emergency surrogate for a real computer that you use when, say, you're driving to meet someone and something goes wrong. A bandwidth-throttled iPhone 1 may be painfully slow, but it is much better than nothing. And lastly, for someone used to high-speed touch typing on a regular keyboard, the iPhone, as the original Droid commercials stomped on the sore spot, "iDon't have a real keyboard." You don't get better over time at *touch* typing an

iPhone keyboard because the keyboard is one you have to look at; you cannot by *touch* move over two keys to the left to type your next letter. What I did not appreciate then was that you give the iPhone keyboard more focus and attention than touch typing a regular keyboard calls for; the "virtual keyboard" is amazing and it works well when you are looking at it and typing with both thumbs. And once that conceptual jolt is past, it works well.

But what I didn't appreciate when that woman said she had stopped using her computer was that the desktop computer is wherever you have to go to use the desktop computer, while the iPhone is in one's pocket or purse. And there is an incumbency advantage to the iPhone that is in one's pocket or purse. It's not just that you can only use your home computer when you are at home; if you are in one room and the computer is in another, it is less effort to jot a brief email from the phone than go to the other room and use the computer.

Laziness is a factor here; I have used my iPhone over my computer due to laziness. But more broadly a desktop or even laptop computer is in something of a sanctuary, with fewer distractions; the smartphone is wherever you are, and that may be a place with very few distractions, and it may be a place with many distractions.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktops are all computers. The difference between them is how anchored or how portable they work out to be in practice. And the more mobile a computer is, the more effectively it will be as a noise delivery system. The ascetical challenge they represent, and the need to see that we and not the technologies hold the reins, is sharper for the newer and more mobile models.

Social networks

I personally tend not to get sucked in to Facebook; I will go to a social networking site for a very particular reason, and tend not to linger even if I want something to do. There is a reason for this; I had an inoculation. While in high school I served as a student system administrator, on a system whose primary function in actual use was a social network, with messages, chatting, forums, and so on and so forth. I drank my fill of that, so to speak, and while it was nowhere near so user-friendly as Facebook, it was a drug from the same family.

Having been through that, I would say that this is not what friendship is meant to be. It may be that friends who become physically separated will maintain correspondence, and in that case a thoughtful email is not much different from a handwritten letter. As I wrote in "Technomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis:"

- "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
- There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of . This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in

America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.

- "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
- Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and never use it to replace meat.
- We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.

"Teleporters"

I use the term "teleporters" because I do not know of a standard name, besides perhaps the name of one of the eight capital vices, for a class of technologies and other things that are in ways very different from each other but all have the same marketing proposition: *escape*. Not that one needs technologies to do this; metaphysics in the occult sense is another means to the same end. But all of them deliver escape.

A collection of swords is not usually amassed for defense: the owner may be delighted at the chance to learn how to handle a medieval sword, but even if the swords are "battle ready" the point is not self-defense. It's a little bit of something that transports us to another place. Same thing for movies and video games. Same thing for historical re-enactments. Same thing, for that matter, for romances that teach women to covet a relationship with a man that could never happen, and spurn men and possibilities where a genuinely happy marriage can happen. And, for that matter, ten thousand things.

There are many things whose marketing proposition is escape, and they all peter out and leave us coveting more. They are spiritual poison if they are used for escape. There may be other uses and legitimate reasons—iPhones are, besides being "avoid spiritual work" systems, incredibly useful—but the right use of these things is not found in the marketing proposition they offer you.

Television

Television has partly been ousted with Facebook; TV is stickier than ever, but it still can't compete with the web's stickiest sites.

However, a couple of *Far Side* cartoons on television are worth pondering; if they were written today, they might mention more than TV.

In one cartoon, the caption reads, "In the days before television," and a whole family is staring blankly at a blank spot on a wall, curled around it as if it were a television. The irony, of course, is that this is not what things were like before television began sucking the life out of everything. The days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant; Gary Larson's caption, with a cartoon that simply subtracts television from the eighties, is dripping

with ironic clarity about precisely what the days before television were *not*.

In the other cartoon, an aboriginal tribesman stands at the edge of a chasm, a vine bridge having just been cut and fallen into the chasm and making the chasm impassible. On the other side were a group of angry middle-class suburbanites, and the tribesman was holding a television. The caption read, "And so Mbogo stood, the angry suburbanites standing on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse."

Some years back, an advertising executive wrote, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (one friend reacted, "The author could only think of four?"), and though the book is decades old it speaks today. All of the other technologies that have been stealing television's audiences do what television did, only more effectively and with more power.

I said at one point that the television is the most expensive appliance you can own. The reasoning was simple. For a toaster or a vacuum cleaner, if it doesn't break, it costs you the up front purchase price, along with electricity, gas, or any other utilities it uses. And beyond those two, there is no further cost as long as it works. But with television, there was the most powerful propaganda engine yet running, advertising that will leave you keeping up with the Joneses (or, as some have argued after comparing 1950's kitchen appliances with 1990's kitchen appliances, keeping up with the Trumps). In this ongoing stream, the programming is the packaging and the advertising is the real content. And the packaging is designed not to steal the show from the content. Today television rules less vast of a realm, but megasites deliver the same principle: the reason you go to the website is a bit of wrapping, and the product being sold is *you*.

Our economy is in a rough state, but welcome to keeping up with the Trumps version 2.0. The subscription fees for smartphones and tablets are just the beginning.

The timeless way of relating

Christopher Alexander saw that computers were going to be the next building, and he was the champion who introduced computer-aided design to the field of architecture. Then he came to a second realization, that computer-aided design may make some things easier and faster, but it does not automatically make a building better: computer aided design makes it easier to architect good and bad buildings alike, and if you ask computers to make better buildings, you're barking up the wrong fire hydrant.

But this time his work, *A Timeless Way of Building*, fell on deaf ears in the architectural community... only to be picked up by software developers and be considered an important part of object-oriented software design. The overused term MVC ("model-view-controller"), which appears in job descriptions when people need a candidate who solves problems well whether or not that meant using MVC, is part of the outflow of object-oriented programming seeing something deep in patterns, and some programmers have taken a profound lesson from *A Timeless Way of Building* even if good programmers in an interview have to conceal an allergic reaction when MVC is presented as a core competency for almost *any* kind of project.

There really is *A Timeless Way of Building*, and Alexander finds it in some of ancient and recent architecture alike. And in the same vein there is a timeless way of relating. In part we may see it as one more piece of it is dismantled by one more technology migration. But there is a real and live timeless relating, and not just through rejecting technologies.

C.S. Lewis, in a passage in *That Hideous Strength* which has great romantic appeal if nothing else, talks about how everything is coming to a clearer and sharper point. Abraham was not wrong for his polygamy as we would be for polygamy, but there is some sense that he didn't profit from it. Merlin was not something from the sixth century, but the last survival in the sixth century of something much older when the dividing line between matter and spirit was not so sharp as it is today. Things that have been gray, perhaps not beneficial even if they are not forbidden, are more starkly turning to black or white.

This is one of the least convincing passages for Lewis's effort to speak of "mere Christianity." I am inclined to think that something of the exact opposite is true, that things that have been black and white in ages past have more leniency, more grey. Not necessarily that leniency equals confusion; Orthodoxy has two seemingly antithetical but both necessary principles of *akravia* (striving for strict excellence) and *oikonomia* (the principle of mercifully relaxing the letter of the law). We seem to live in a time of *oikonomia* from the custom which has the weight of canon law, where (for instance) the ancient upper class did far less physical exertion than the ancient lower class and slaves, but middle class fitness nuts today exercise less than the ancient upper class. Three hours of aerobic exercise is a lot. While we pride ourselves on abolishing legal slavery, we wear not only clothing from sweatshops made at the expense of preventable human misery, but large wardrobes and appliances and other consumer goods that bear a price tag in human misery. Many Orthodox have rejected the position of the Fathers on contraception from time immemorial, and the Church has been secularized enough for many to get their bearings from one article.

But two things are worth mentioning here. The first is that this is a time that invites prophets. Read the Old

Testament prophets: prophets, named "the called ones" in the Old Testament never come when things are going well to say "Keep it up. Carry on your good work!" They come in darker days. Now is the kind of time propets appear.

Second, while we live in a time where mere gloom is called light and we rely on much more oikonomia than others, oikonomia is real Orthodoxy in proper working order, and in ways Orthodoxy with oikonomia is much greater than rigidly rejecting oikonomia. The people who call themselves "True Orthodox", or now that "True Orthodox" sounds fishy, rename the term "Genuine Orthodox" to avoid the troubles they have created for the name of "True Orthodox." And despite observing the letter of canons more scrupulously than even the most straight-laced of normal Orthodox, these people are people who don't *get* Orthodoxy, and would do well to receive the penance of having to eat a thick steak during a fast.

And despite having so many slices taken out, the timeless way of relating is alive and well. It is present at a meal around table with friends. It is present when a man and wife remain together "til death do us part." It is present when Catholics adore the Eucharist, or Evangelicals don't miss a Sunday's church for years and keep up with their quiet times and Bible studies. "Conversation is like texting for adults," said our deacon, and the timeless way of relating is there when people use texting to arrange a face-to-face visit. *The timeless way of relating is always close at hand.*

Video games

I was introduced to the computer game rogue and while in school wanted to play rogue / UltraRogue for as long as I could. When I decided in grad school that I

wanted to learn to program, I wrote a crufty and difficult-to-understand roguelike game implemented in 60,000 lines of C.

Those many hours I played in that fantasy land were my version of time lost in television. There are things I could have done that I didn't: create something, explore time outside, write letters. And as primitive and humble as *rogue* is, it stems from the same root as *World of Warcraft*. It is one of several technologies I have tasted in an egg: *rogue*, *UltraRogue*, *The Minstrel's Song*, and different MUDs; or a command-line computer doing the work of a social network. And on that score, see Children's toys on Baudelaire's "la Morale du Joujou". The newer games and social network may connect more dots and do some of your imagining for you. The core remains: you sit in front of a computer, transported to a fantasy land, and not exploring the here and now that you have been placed in in all its richness.

The Web

When I was a boy and when I was a youth, it was a sheer delight to go to Honey Rock Camp. I don't want to elaborate on all of my fond memories but I would like to point to one memory in particular: the web.

Resourceful people had taken a World War II surplus piece of netting, attached it to the edges of a simple building, and pulled the center up by a rope. The result was everything a child wants from a waterbed, and I remember, for instance, kids gathering on the far side of the web, my climbing up the rope, and then letting go and dropping five or ten feet into the web, sending little children flying. And as with my other macho ways of connecting with children, if I did this once I was almost certainly asked to do it again.

(The same goes, for some extent, with throwing children into the web.)

I speak of that web in the past tense, because after decades of being a cherished attraction, the web was falling apart and it was no longer a safe attraction. And the people in charge made every effort to replace it, and found to everyone's dismay that they couldn't. Nobody makes those nets; and apparently nobody has one of those nets available, or at least not for sale. And in that regard the web is a characteristic example of how technologies are handled in the U.S. ("Out with the old, in with the new!") Old things are discarded, so the easily available technologies are just the newer one.

Software is fragile; most technological advances in both software and hardware are more fragile than what they replace. Someone said, "If builders built buildings the way programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization." The web is a tremendous resource, but it will not last forever, and there are many pieces of technology stack that could limit or shut off the web. Don't assume that because the web is available today it will equally well be available indefinitely.

Conclusion

This work has involved, perhaps, too much opinion and too much of the word "I"; true Orthodox theology rarely speaks of me, "myself, and I," and in the rare case when it is really expedient to speak of oneself, the author usually refers to himself in the third person.

The reason I have referred to myself is that I am trying to make a map that many of us are trying to make sense of. In one sense there is a very simple answer given in monasticism, where renunciation of property includes technology even if obediences may include working with it, and the words "Do not store up treasures on earth" offer another simple answer, and those of us

who live in the world are bound not to be attached to possessions even if they own them. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* offers a paragraph addressed to married people and a book addressed to monastics, but it has been read with great profit by all manner of people, married as well as monastic.

Somewhere amidst these great landmarks I have tried to situate my writing. I do not say that it is one of these landmarks; it may be that the greatest gift is a work that will spur a much greater Orthodox to do a much better job.

My godfather offered me many valuable corrections when I entered the Orthodox Church, but there is one and only one I would take issue with. He spoke of the oddity of writing something like "the theology of the hammer"; and my own interest in different sources stemmed from reading technological determinist authors like Neil Postman, and even if a stopped clock is right twice a day, their Marxism is a toxic brew.

However, I write less from the seductive effects of those books, my writing is not because they have written XYZ but because I have experienced certain things in mystical experience. I have a combined experience of decades helping run a Unix box that served as a social network, and playing MUDs, and sampling their newer counterparts. My experience in Orthodoxy has found great mystical truth and depth in the words, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit". Part of that pruning has been the involuntary removal of my skills as a mathematics student; much of it has been in relation to technology. The Bible has enough to say about wealth and property as it existed millenia ago; it would be strange to say that "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth" speaks to livestock and owning precious metals but has nothing to do with iPads.

One saint said that the end will come when one person no longer makes a path to visit another. *Even with social media, we now have the technology to do that.*

Let our technology be used ascetically, or not at all.

***Veni, Vidi, Vomui:* A Look at "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?"**

Awake, O north wind; and come, O south; and blow through my "garden," and let my aromatics flow out. Let my kinsman come down into his garden, and "eat" the fruit of his choice berries. I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride: I have gathered my myrrh with my aromatics; I have "eaten" my bread with my honey; I have "drunk" my wine and my milk: "eat", O friends; "drink," yea, "drink" abundantly, O beloved.

The Song of Songs 4:16-5:1, *Classic Orthodox Bible*

A Socratic dialogue triggered by “The Labyrinth”

Trimmed slightly, but "minimally processed" from an email conversation following “The Labyrinth:”

Author: P.S. My brother showed me the following video as cool. He didn't see why I found it a bit of a horror: "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?"

Visitor: Oh gosh, that's just layers and layers of sad. It's all about the experience, but the message is kept just this side of tolerable ("nerds are the new sexy" - the reversal of a supposed stigmatization) so it can function as an excuse for the experience. At least that's my analysis.

Author: Thanks. I just hotlinked a line of Labyrinth to Avatar...

...and added a tooltip of, "Veni, vidi, vom!".

Visitor: (Laughs) You have me completely mystified on this one, sorry.

However, you are welcome. And I'm glad to see that you're cracking jokes. (I think.)

No seriously, laughing out loud. Even though I don't exactly know why.

Is 'vomi' a made-up word? Men... when it comes right down to it you all have the same basic sense of humor. (I think.)

Author: *Veni, vidi, vici*: I came, I saw, I conquered.

Veni, vidi, vomii: I came, I saw, I puked.

Visitor: Yep... the basic masculine sense of humor, cloaked in Latin. I'm ever so honored you let me in on this. If the world were completely fair, someone would be there right now to punch your shoulder for me... this is my favorite form of discipline for my brother in law when he gets out of line.

But what's Avatar... and hotlink and tooltip?

Author: The link to "Do you want to date my Avatar?" Hotlink is a synonym for link; tooltip, what displays if you leave your mouse hovering over it.

Visitor: Oh dear, I really didn't understand what you were telling me; I was just in good spirits.

OK, I find that funny - and appropriate.

Author: Which do you think works better (i.e. "The Labyrinth" with or without images):

Visitor: I have some doubts about the video showing up in the text.

Author: Ok; I'll leave it out. Thanks.

Visitor: Welcome.

I did like the Christ image where you had it. It encouraged a sober pause at the right place in the meditation.

Author: Thank you; I've put it in slightly differently.

Visitor: I like that.

Author: Thank you.

I've also put the video (link) in a slightly different place than originally. I think it also works better there.

Visitor: Taking a risk of butting in... Would this be a more apropos place?

The true raison d'etre was known to desert
monks,
Ancient and today,
And by these fathers is called,
Temptation, passion, demon,
Of escaping the world.

Unless I've misunderstood some things and that's always possible. (laughs) I never did ask you your analysis of what, in particular, horrified you about the video. But it seems like a perfect illustration not of pornography simple but of the underlying identity between the particular kind of lust expressed in pornography (not the same as wanting a person) and escapism, and that's the place in the poem where you are talking about that identification.

Author: Thank you. I've moved it.

In *That Hideous Strength*, towards the end, Lewis writes:

"Who is called Sulva? What road does she walk? Why is the womb barren on one side? Where are the cold marriages?"

Ransom replied, "Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. Her other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields on her further side. On this side, the womb is barren and the marriages cold. There dwell an accursed people, full of pride and lust. There when a young man takes a maiden in marriage, they do not lie together, but each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other, made to move and to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty (*delicati*) in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.

Pp. 270/271 are in fantasy imagery what has become quite literally true decades later.

Visitor: Yes, that would be what I was missing... that fantasy banquet at the end of the video feels particularly creepy now.

However the girl I was telling you about had among other things watched a show where a "doctor" talked about giving seminars where women learn to experience the full physical effects of intercourse, using their minds only. (Gets into feminism, no?)

That's why I was trying to tell her that "richter scale" measurements aren't everything...

In this hatred of the body, in putting unhealthy barriers between genders, and in seeing the body as basically a tool for sexual experience, fundamentalist Christianity

and cutting edge worldliness are really alike. (I had a pastor once who forbade the girls in the church school to wear sandals because they might tempt the boys with their "toe cleavage.")

Author: I would be wary of discounting monastic experience; I as a single man, prudish by American standards, probably have more interaction with women than most married men in the patristic era.

But in the image... "eating" is not just eating. In the initial still image in the embedded version of "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?", I made a connection. The sword is meant as a phallic symbol, and not just as half of a large category of items are a phallic symbol in some very elastic sense. It's very direct. Queer sex and orgy are implied, even though everything directly portrayed seems "straight", or at least straight as defined against the gender rainbow (as opposed, perhaps, to a "technology rainbow").

Visitor: Yes, I see what you are saying. I suppose the opening shots in the video would also imply self-abuse. I was seeing those images and the ones you mention as just icky in themselves without thinking about them implying something else.

Author: P.S. My brother who introduced it to me, as something cool, explained to me that this is part of the main performer's effort to work her way into mainstream television. She demonstrates, in terms of a prospect for work in television, that she can look beautiful, act, sing, dance, and be enticing while in a video that is demure in its surface effect as far as music videos go. (And she has carefully chosen a viral video to prove herself as talent.)

Not sure if that makes it even more disturbing; I didn't mention it with any conscious intent to be as disturbing as I could, just wanted to give you a concrete snapshot of the culture and context for why I put what I put in *The Labyrinth*.

Visitor: It's making a lot more sense now.

I'm not remembering the significance of the technology rainbow.

Author: As far as "technology rainbow":

In contrast to "hetero-centrism" is advocated a gender rainbow where one live person may have any kind of arrangement with other live people, as long as everyone's of age, and a binary "male and female" is replaced by a rainbow of variety that is beyond shades of gray.

I was speaking by analogy: a "technology rainbow", in contrast to "face-to-face-centrism", would seek as normative any creative possibility, again excluding child pornography, where face-to-face relationships are only one part of a "technology rainbow".

It might also help make the point that internet-enabled expressions of sexuality, for most of the men, aren't exactly straight. They do not involve same-sex attraction, nor animals or anything like that, but they depart from being straight in a slightly different trajectory from face-to-face relationships where heterosexuality is only one option.

[Neither member of this conversation had anything more to say.]

Fire in the Hole

In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments which he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The Symbolic Theology*. The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument this downward path from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-

increasing number of ideas which multiplied what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.

Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involves assertions, we begin now from the lowest category involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to truth to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air or stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought?

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can be neither seen nor touched. It is neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of this can either be identified with it nor attributed.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by

understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or any other being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name or knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial.

Prof. Sarovsky slowly and reverently closed the book.

“St. Dionysius says elsewhere that God is known by every name and no name, and that everything that is is a name of God. And in fact in discussing symbols which have some truth but are necessarily inadequate to reality, crude symbols are to be preferred to those which appear elevated, since even their ‘crassness’ is a ‘goad’ spurring us to reach higher.”

“So now I’d like to have an exercise. Could somebody please name something at random, and I can tell how it tells the glory of God?”

A young man from the back called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “Ha ha, hysterical. Could I have another suggestion?”

Another young man called out, "Porn."

Prof. Sarovsky said, "I'm serious. Porn, when you start using it, seems to be a unique spice. But the more you use it, the more it actually *drains* spice from everything else, and eventually drains itself, and when pornography can only go so far, you find yourself not only jailed but charged with *rape*. Lustfulness is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. And much as I disagree with feminists on important points, I agree with a feminist dictionary: 'Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.' Could I have a *serious* suggestion?"

A couple of cellphones started playing, "Internet is for porn."

Prof. Sarovsky called on the class's most vocal feminist.

"Delilah! Would you pick a topic?"

Delilah grinned wickedly and said, "I'm with the boys on this one. *Porn*."

Prof. Sarovsky paused briefly and says, "Very well, then, porn it is. The famous essay 'I, Pencil' takes the humble pencil up and just starts to dig and dig at the economic family tree of just what resources and endeavors make up the humble lead pencil. So it talks about logging, and all the work in transporting the wood, and the mining involved in the graphite, and the exquisite resources that go just to make the blue strip on the metal band, and so on and so forth, and the 'rubber' eraser and whatnot. The conclusion is that millions of dollars' resources (he does not calculate a figure) went into making a humble wooden pencil, and he pushes further: only God knows how to make a pencil. And if only God knows how to make a pencil, *a fortiori* only God knows how to make a porn site...

"And, I suppose, a pencil must be a phallic symbol."

Then he paused, and said, "*Just kidding!*"

The room was silent.

Prof. Sarovsky bowed deeply and grinned: "I'll see you and raise you."

And this is what he said.

I, Porn, want to tell you about myself. There are options that eclipse me, but I can make my point more strongly if I speak for myself, Porn, who represent myriads of wonders.

It is not my point in particular that only God knows how to make a Porn site. The point has been well enough made that only God knows how to make a pencil, and is a less interesting adjustment to acknowledge that only God knows how to make a Porn site.

Nor do I suggest that the straight-laced print off a Porn image and frame and hang it on the wall. Though if they understood my lineage, the question would then become whether they were worthy to do so.

I have a magnificent and vaster lineage than “I, Pencil” begins to draw out. A brilliance in economics, the author simply underscores a great interdependent web of economic resources in the humble pencil’s family tree. Equipment, mining, logging, transportation: the economic underpinnings of a humble pencil amount to millions of dollars, and the details mentioned only scratch the surface even of the economics involved.

I have a vaster lineage, including such things as war in Heaven. Now the war in Heaven is over, and was over when the Archangel Michael only said his name, which in the Hebrew tongue says, “Who is like God?” and with that, the devils were cast down, sore losers afflicting the Royal Race one and all. And even then, it was only angelic spirits that could come anywhere close to their war against God. Even then, they are limited. They are on a leash. Perhaps someday I will tell you of why you are summoned to a holy and blinding arrogance towards that whole camp.

What is the Royal Race? I get ahead of myself.

I, Porn, don’t merely share a universe with the divine virtues. In my production there is the cutting off of self-will, long suffering, and as little lust as might be found in a monastery.

Dostoevsky offers the image of the chaste harlot; I can add only that if Christ were walking today, Porn models would be among the first he would associate with.

The core impulse I, Porn, draw on, is good. It is a testament to the human spirit that nine months after a natural disaster, there is a wave of babies born. The core impulse is the impulse for the preservation of the species, the possibility by which a community of mortals has itself no automatic end.

It is closer to my point to say that God is not just good and divine; he has created a world that in every way reflects his grandeur. There are no small parts: only actors who are not really small. Every superstring vibration in the cosmos is grander and vaster than all the pagan gods of all worlds put together.

Or as G.K. Chesterton said, "Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past."

It is still closer to my majesty to observe Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag that Hitler sent observers for inspiration for Nazi concentration camps, "Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either — but right through every heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unrooted small corner of evil."

The Heavens declare the glory of God—*and so do I, Porn.*

Perhaps the most beautiful doctrine in Origen that Orthodox must condemn is the final and ultimate salvation of all Creation: that the Devil himself will be a last prodigal son returning to home in Heaven. But the Orthodox teaching is more beautiful: a teaching that every spiritual being, every man, every fallen or unfallen angel, is given an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell and not one of these will God rape, however much he desires their salvation. To quote *The Dark Tower*: "A man can't be taken

to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.” God has made a rock he could not move, and that rock is man and angel.

The rising crescendo that practically seals C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” is:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Which brings us to the messy circumstances of your lives.

George Bernard Shaw said, “There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get it.” We can see it, perhaps in a fantasy setting, in a passage from C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, has Lucy tiptoe to a room with a spellbook and see a singular spell:

Then she came to a page which was such a blaze of pictures that one hardly noticed the writing. Hardly—but she *did* notice the first words. They were, *An infallible spell to make beautiful she that uttereth it beyond the lot of*

mortals. Lucy peered at the pictures with her face close to the page, and though they had seemed crowded and muddlesome before, she found she could now see them quite clearly. The first was a picture of a girl standing at a reading-desk reading in a huge book. And the girl was dressed up exactly like Lucy. In the next picture Lucy (for the girl in her picture was Lucy herself) was standing up with her mouth open and a rather terrible expression on her face, chanting or reciting something. In the third picture the beauty beyond the lot of mortals had come to her. It was strange, considering how small the pictures had looked at first, that the Lucy in the picture now seemed quite as big as the real Lucy; and they looked into each other's eyes and the real Lucy was dazzled by the beauty of the other Lucy; though she could still see a sort of likeness to herself in that beautiful face. And now the pictures came crowding on her thick and fast. She saw herself throned on high at a great tournament in Calormen and all the Kings of the world fought because of her beauty. After that it turned from tournaments to real wars, and all Narnia and Archenland, Telmar and Calormen, Galma and Terebithinia, were laid waste with the fury of the kings and dukes and great lords who fought for her favor. Then it changed and Lucy, still beautiful beyond the lot of mortals, was back in England. And Susan (who had always been the beauty of the family) came home from America. The Susan in the picture looked exactly like the real Susan only plainer and with a nasty expression. And Susan was jealous of the dazzling beauty of Lucy, but that didn't matter a bit because no one cared anything about Susan now.

The temptation, patterned after real temptation of the real world, is to want a horror. It is because Lucy is bewitched that she even wants what the spell promises. The destruction of kingdoms when lords vie for her beauty? Women may want to feel like the

most beautiful woman in the world, but the count in stacking dead bodies like cordwood is no true metric for beauty. As a faithfully portrayed temptation by C.S. Lewis, what is being desired is not something Heavenly. *It is a vision of Hell, pure and simple.* While in the grips of temptation, she could not be happy without casting that spell until she let go of it from a strong warning from Aslan. But even if she succeeded, she would be even more unhappy. Her success would rival world wars or nuclear wars in its destruction of beautiful worlds, and if it didn't bring her death, she would live on in a wrecked world, knowing for the rest of her life that it was her petty self-absorption that obliterated the majesty of worlds.

Even if we scale from back from undisguised fantasy, we can look at what is a practical possibility for some people in the real world. Cameron Russell's "Looks Aren't Everything. Believe me, I'm a model." The TED talk eloquently explains that being a supermodel is not all sunshine and not the solution to all life's problems. For that matter it isn't even the solution to *body image* problems, and the final point she shares is that as a model she has to be *more*, not less, insecure about her body, no matter how lovely she may appear to others. It turns out that supermodels are intimidated by... other supermodels. Being a model is not a way to be exempt from body image struggles.

And this is in no way a solely a phenomenon about body image. There is one man where professional opinion is that he is smarter than most geniuses, and that the average Harvard PhD has never met someone so talented. And his work history, given that he's tried to give his best? Here's something really odd. One job assistant said, "You don't want your boss figuring out you're smarter than him." When he hands in his first piece of work, only some bosses respond kindly to work that is beyond the boss's wildest dreams. Most of them find themselves in unfamiliar social territory, and strike out or retaliate. He's been terminated a dozen times and is now retired on disability, the best financial arrangement he has had yet. It may be true, up to a point, that

there's something likable about being smart. That doesn't mean in any sense that the smarter you get, the more people like you, or that your life is easy.

There is a portal that far excels entering another world, entering Narnia, Hogwarts, or Middle Earth. And this portal is much harder to see or look for than Narnia. It is entering the here and now you have been placing.

Spiritual masters have said to want what you have, not what you don't have, and want things to be for you just the way they are. Now there is such a thing as legitimately seeking to solve, lessen, or improve a problem, and wishing you had a better-paying job, a car, or a nicer house. Wishing never runs out, and if you get the Apple Watch you want, wishing will just wish for newer or different things. Buy something you don't need but will make you enchanted for a month. *I dare you.*

Oh, and by the way, I, Porn, know all about wishing. I know *everything* about it, and I know everything it *can't* do.

When you let go of escape, soon you may let go of relating the here and now as the sort of thing one should flee, and some thick, sticky grey film will slowly melt away from your eyes and they will open on beauty all around you, and you will have crossed a threshold no fantasy portal even comes close. And you will have every treasure that you have. And perhaps, in and through ancient religion or postmodern positive psychology, cultivate a deep and abiding gratefulness for all the blessings you have.

In the Way of Things, there are two basic options one can pursue. One is the Sexual Way, and the other is the Hyper-Sexual Way. Let me explain.

Study after study has been launched to investigate which group of mavericks has the best sex, and they have been repeatedly been dismayed to find that the overlooked Sexual Way has the most pleasure. The overlooked Sexual Way is that of a contest of love, for life, between one lord and one wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, grateful for children, and

knowing that the best sex *ever* is when you are trying to make a baby. After the first year or two some outward signs get quiet and subdued, but the marriage succeeds because the honeymoon has failed. It deepens year after year and decade after a decade, and a widowed senior can say, “You don’t know what love is when you’re a kid.” And here, like no other place, *beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder*. Here, unlike fashion magazines, sweaty fitness regimens, and dieting, and weighing, and accursed “bodysculpting,” a woman can and should be made to feel like she is the most beautiful woman in the world, to a husband to whom she really is the most beautiful woman in the world, as naturally as the Church on Sunday. As Homer and Marge humbly and quietly sing to each other, “You are so *beautiful* to me!”

If the sexual impulse is spent wisely in the Sexual Way, it is invested at exorbitant interest on the Hyper-Sexual Way. Wonder what all that curious monastic modesty about? It compounds an essential sexual condition, by which a monastic, man or woman, becomes a transgendered god and his sexual desire is entirely fixed on God. Does this seem strange? Let us listen to St. Herman of Alaska:

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, ‘We were lost for an answer before him.’”

“Father Herman gave them all one general question: ‘Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each

of you wish for your happiness?’ Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. ‘It is not true,’ Father Herman said to them concerning this, ‘that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?’ They all answered, ‘Yes, that is so!’ He then continued, ‘Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?’

“All said, ‘Why, yes! That’s self-evident!’ Then the Elder asked, ‘But do you love God?’ They all answered, ‘Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?’ ‘And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,’ Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. ‘If we love someone,’ he said, ‘we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?’ They had to admit that they had not! ‘For our own good, and for our own fortune,’ concluded the Elder, ‘let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!’ Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.’

Fr. Herman had something better than pixels on a screen.
Much better.

Perhaps the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy is by Anselm of Canterbury, who said, "If God exists, nothing greater than him could exist. Now God either exists in reality and also in our minds, or only as a concept in our minds. But to exist in reality as well as our minds is greater than to exist only in our minds. Therefore, God must have the higher excellence of existing in reality as well as our minds."

I am not specifically interested in bringing agreement or disagreement to this argument. First, most people first meeting this argument feel that something has been slipped past them, but they can't put a finger on where the error is. However, I did not exactly include this argument to discuss what it *asserts*, but what it *assumes*: if God is greater than anything else that can be thought, then we have something that pierces deeply into the Christian God.

The joke is told that four rabbis would get together to discuss Torah, and one specific rabbi was the odd man out, every single time. And they said, "Three against one." Finally, the exasperated odd rabbi out knelt down, prayed, "Gd, I've worked very hard, and they never listen. Please send them a sign that I'm right." It was a warm day out, but a sudden chilly wind blew by, and some clouds appeared in the sky. The other three rabbis said, "That's odd, but it's still three against one." Then the rabbi knelt down, prayed, "Please make a clearer sign," and the wind grew more bitter and it began sleeting. The rabbi said, "Well?" The other rabbis said, "This is quite a coincidence, but it's still three against one." Then before the rabbi could begin to pray, bolts of lightning splintered a nearby tree, there was an earthquake, the earth opened, and a deep voice thundered, "*HE'S RIGHT!*" The rabbi said, "Well?" Quick as a flash, another rabbi said, "Well? It's still three against two!"

The humor element in this element extends beyond, “If God has spoken, the discussion is over.” The humor element hinges on the fact that counting does not go from “one, two, three, four” to “one, two, three, four, **Five**”: there is infinite confusion in adding one God to four men. As written in “Doxology:”

Thou who art One,
 Eternally beyond time,
 So wholly One,
 That thou mayest be called infinite,
 Timeless beyond time thou art,
 The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 The Three who are One,
 No more bound by numbers than by word,
 And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
 The Word,
 Divine ordering Reason,
 Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
 Way pre-eminent of all things,
 Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
 Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
 The Creator entered into his Creation,
 Sharing with us humble glory,
 Lowered by love,
 Raised to the highest,
 The Suffering Servant known,
 The King of Glory,
 Ο ΩΝ....

Wert thou a lesser god,
 Numerically one as a creature is one,
 Only one by an accident,
 Naught more,

Then thou couldst not deify thine own creation,
Whilst remaining the only one god.

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not more,
Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be
another beside thee.
Thus thou spakest to Moses,
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Which is to say,
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

And there can be no other god beside thee,
So deep and full is this truth,
That thy Trinity mighteth take naught from thine Oneness,
Nor could it be another alongside thy divine Oneness,
If this God became man,
That man become god.

The Trinity does not represent a weaker or less consistent monotheism than Islam. The Trinity represents a stronger and more consistent monotheism than Islam, and that is why it can afford things that are unthinkable to a Muslim.

A Hindu once asked a Christian, “I can accept the truth of the incarnation, but why only one?” And in that conversation, where the Christian defended only one incarnation, both were wrong. Or rather, the Christian was *wrong*; the Hindu was merely *mistaken*.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to BECOME him forever.

One theology professor tried to explain to a Muslim that the Trinity is how Christians get to the absolute Oneness of God. The men who first articulated the doctrine looked with some horror on the concept of using the word “Trinity” as a handle for the doctrine.

Regarding the Hindu mentioned, I would say that there have been many, many true incarnations of God, and they still continue. Now the Hindu concept of an Avatar can be what Christianity rejected as docetistic, with Christ not recognized to have real flesh. However, what I would rather have been said is this: No one besides Christ enters the world with part or all of God as part of them. However, the reason for the coming of the Son of God is to destroy the devil’s work. An ancient hymn states, “Trying to be god, Adam failed to be God. Christ became man, to make Adam god.” And the vast company of Saints that God keeps on giving are in fact the gift of a company of Avatars; we just have a different understanding of how one reaches a very similar goal.

The Philokalia says, “Blessed is the monk who regards each man as God after God.”

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Scripture: “We beheld,” he says, “His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father.”

Having declared that we were made “sons of God,” and having shown in what manner namely, by the “Word” having been “made Flesh,” he again mentions another advantage which we gain from this same circumstance. What is it? “We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”; which we could not have beheld, had it not been shown to us, by means of a body like to our own. For if the men of old time could not even bear to look upon the glorified countenance of Moses, who partook of the same nature with us, if that just man needed a veil which might shade over the purity⁷ of his glory, and show to them have face of their prophet mild and gentle; how could we creatures of clay and earth have endured the unveiled Godhead, which is unapproachable even by the powers above? Wherefore He tabernacled among us, that we might be able with much fearlessness to approach Him, speak to, and converse with Him.

But what means “the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”? Since many of the Prophets too were glorified, as this Moses himself, Elijah, and Elisha, the one encircled by the fiery chariot (2 Kings vi. 17), the other taken up by it; and after them, Daniel and the Three Children, and the many others who showed forth wonders; and angels who have appeared among men, and partly disclosed to beholders the flashing light of their proper nature; and since not angels only, but even the Cherubim were seen by the Prophet in great glory, and the Seraphim also: the Evangelist leading us away from all these, and removing our thoughts from created things, and from the brightness of our fellow-servants, sets us at the very summit of good. For, “not of prophet,” says he, “nor angel, nor archangel, nor of the higher power, nor of any other created nature,” if other there be, but of the Master Himself, the King Himself, the true Only-Begotten Son Himself, of the Very Lord of all, did we “behold the glory.”

For the expression “as,” does not in this place belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition; as though he said, “We beheld glory, such as it was becoming, and likely that He should possess, who is the Only-Begotten and true Son of God, the King of all.” The habit (of so speaking) is general, for I shall not refuse to strengthen my argument even from common custom, since it is not now my object to speak with any reference to beauty of words, or elegance of composition, but only for your advantage; and therefore there is nothing to prevent my establishing my argument by the instance of a common practice. What then is the habit of most persons? Often when any have seen a king richly decked, and glittering on all sides with precious stones, and are afterwards describing to others the beauty, the ornaments, the splendor, they enumerate as much as they can, the glowing tint of the purple robe, the size of the jewels, the whiteness of the mules, the gold about the yoke, the soft and shining couch. But when after enumerating these things, and other things besides these, they cannot, say what they will, give a full idea of the splendor, they immediately bring in: “But why say much about it; once for all, he was like a king;” not desiring by the expression “like,” to show that he, of whom they say this, resembles a king, but that he is a real king. Just so now the Evangelist has put the word As, desiring to represent the transcendent nature and incomparable excellence of His glory.

Elsewhere we are asked to consider what things would be like if a King were to take up residence in one of the houses of a city. Would not the entire city, and each house in it, be forever honored? And the Son of God is now one of our homeboys. He ascended into Heaven and brought us with him, enthroned in Heaven with him.

We are the Royal Race. We are made in the image of God, and made to reach unimaginable glory.

And there may be named three laws that are the Constitution of the Royal Race, three laws which are one and the same.

The first law is the Law of the Canoe, as C.S. Lewis summarized his friend Charles Williams:

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

The second law is the Law of the Long Spoon. As one telling goes from a liberal enough source:

One day a man said to God, “God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like.”

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man’s mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, “You have seen Hell.”

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man’s mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, “I don’t understand.”

God smiled. “It is simple,” he said, “These people share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves...”

The last law is the Law of Narcissus’s Mirror. It states that the Royal Race are absolutely *forbidden* to stand and gaze at themselves in Narcissus’s Mirror, entranced at their own beauty, and *commanded* to gaze at other members of the Royal Race, entranced at *their* beauty.

These three laws are one and the same. One joke, about “communio” theologians who hold the Trinity to mean that God himself is a community, ran:

Q: How many communio theologians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but he thinks he is a community.

But we are *not* communities. We are *part* of a community, and the full grandeur of being a member of the Royal Race is that you are no *island*, but a connected and beautiful part of a *continent*.

And furthermore, God has ordered Heaven and Earth for the benefit of us as the Royal Race.

Though this may be more subtle in the Sexual Way than in the Hyper-Sexual Way, but the behavior enjoined on the Hyper-Sexual Way is that of a spiritual miser, who constantly thinks his Heavenly wealth is too little and he must spare no effort to get more, and no matter how much treasure in Heaven he acquires, he never rests on his laurels, but keeps on storing up more and more and more.

Men each have one interest, one *real* interest, and only *one* interest: a good answer before the Dread Judgment-Throne of Christ. This life is inestimably precious, and in treasures such as repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, we can only store up these treasures before this fleeting life is over. Now the Church Triumphant is no terrible place to be, but there are profound goods that are only open to us, the living, for as long as we live. And the various strange prescriptions of the Philokalia and the Orthodox Way, about believing oneself to be the worst of sinners, about giving oneself no credit for any good actions, about believing "All the world will be saved and I will be damned," about repenting as if one will die tomorrow but treating your body as if it will last for many years, are in fact braces to support being one hoarding spiritual miser for the rest of one's life, and crossing the finish line, in triumph, and with treasure after treasure after treasure in your hoard. It is explained that God conceals from us the day of our death, because if we knew we would not die for some decades, we would put off repentance and be incorrigible. Not that God is absolutely unwilling to reveal to people the day of their death: it is in fact considered a mark of

holiness to know that, because a person is in a good enough state for the secret not to need to be hidden. But the Philokalia's discussion, perhaps here most clearly of all, explains that things are ordered this way because God has stacked the deck, in *our* favor. And as regards the Sexual Way, the path is said not to be an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for parents to grow up.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, fields an objection which was apparently on people's minds but I have not heard brought up live in my lifetime. However, the answer says everything to a world in disintegrating economy, COVID, Jihad, and more:

I'd like to deal with a difficulty some people find about the whole idea of prayer. Somebody put it to me by saying: "I can believe in God alright, but what I can't swallow is this idea of Him listening to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment." And I find quite a lot of people feel that difficulty. Well, the first thing to notice is that the whole sting of it comes in the words "at the same moment." Most of us can imagine a God attending to any number of claimants if only they come one by one and He has an endless time to do it in. So what's really at the back of the difficulty is this idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time. Well that, of course, is what happens to us. Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what Time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series — this arrangement of past, present and future — isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that. I think it was the Theologians who first started the idea that some things

are not in Time at all. Later, the Philosophers took it over. And now some of the scientists are doing the same. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call "ten-thirty." Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames. That's difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I'm writing a novel. I write "Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door." For Mary, who's got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour's walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary. I know that's not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention, infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to take us in the line. You're as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He'd ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you'd been the only man in the world.

And God's Providence is not just Providence in great things. It is Providence in the small. It is not just Providence in a career, or entering the Sexual Way. It is also Providence when you are stuck in traffic and the light seems never to be turning green and that still, small voice urges you to grow just a little as a person so you can be as happy in your car as in a lounge chair at home. And it is the mighty arm of Providence all the more powerfully

revealed when we are persecuted, or lose money, or any number of other things. And it is a Providence that gives you the here and now, a here and now chosen for you from all eternity, and will, if you cooperate, help you appreciate the gift.

And if you are one of the many who believe that I, Porn, am the only interesting spice in a fatally dull world, I, Porn, can only say this:

Watch me when I am Transfigured.

To quote your own age's little reflection of *The Divine Comedy*:

I saw coming towards us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. Like all the Ghosts, he was unsubstantial, but they differed from one another as smokes differ. Some had been whitish; this one was dark and oily. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of him he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. 'Shut up, I tell you!' he said. It wagged its tail and continued to whisper to him. He ceased snarling, and presently began to smile. Then he turned and started to limp westward, away from the mountains.

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my body too (for there was heat coming from him as well as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

'Yes. I'm off,' said the Ghost. 'Thanks for all your hospitality. But it's no good, you see. I told this little chap' (here he indicated the Lizard) that he'd have to be quiet if he came—which he insisted on doing. Of course his stuff

won't do here: I realise that. But he won't stop. I shall just have to go home.'

'Would you like me to make him quiet?' said the flaming Spirit—an angel, as I now understood.

'Of course I would,' said the Ghost.

'Then I will kill him,' said the Angel, taking a step forward.

'Oh—ah—look out! You're burning me. Keep away,' said the Ghost, retreating.

'Don't you *want* him killed?'

'You didn't say anything about *killing* at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.'

'It's the only way,' said the Angel, whose burning hands were now very close to the Lizard. 'Shall I kill it?'

'Well, that's a further question. I'm quite open to consider it, but it's a new point, isn't? I mean, for the moment I was only thinking about silencing it because up here—well, it's so damned embarrassing.'

'May I kill it?'

'Well, there's time to discuss that later.'

'There is no time. May I kill it?'

'Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance. Please—really—don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now. Thanks ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

'Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.'

'The gradual process is of no use at all.'

'Don't you think so? Well, I'll think over what you've said very carefully. I honestly will. In fact I'd let you kill it now, but as a matter of fact I'm not feeling frightfully well today. It would be most silly to do it *now*. I'd need to be in good health for the operation. Some other day, perhaps.'

‘There is no other day. All days are present now.’

‘Get back! You’re burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You’d kill *me* if you did.’

‘It is not so.’

‘Why, you’re hurting me now.’

‘I never said it wouldn’t hurt you. I said it wouldn’t kill you.’

‘Oh, I know. You think I’m a coward. But isn’t that. Really it isn’t. I say! Let me run back by to-night’s bus and get an opinion from my own doctor. I’ll come again the first moment I can.’

‘This moment contains all moments.’

‘Why are you torturing me? You are jeering at me. How *can* I let you tear me in pieces? If you wanted to help me, why didn’t you kill the damned thing without asking me—before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had.’

‘I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?’

The Angel’s hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

‘Be careful,’ it said. ‘He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he *will!* Then you’ll be without me for ever and ever. How could you live? You’d be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn’t understand. He’s only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn’t for us. Yes, yess. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren’t they better than nothing? And I’ll be so good. I admit I’ve sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won’t do it again. I’ll give you nothing but really nice dreams—all sweet and fresh and almost innocent. You might say, quite innocent . . .’

‘Have your permission?’ said the Angel to the Ghost.

‘I know it will kill me.’

'It won't. But supposing it did?'

'You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.'

'Then I may?'

'Damn and blast you! Go on, can't you? Get it over. Do what you like,' bellowed the Ghost; but ended, whimpering, 'God help me. God help me.'

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

'Ow! That's done for me,' gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solidier, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that the something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinneying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse's neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master

breathed into each other's nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his seats he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steeps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

An Orthodox would realize in the Burning Angel a clearest reference to the fiery Seraphim, the highest of the nine angel choirs, and the one for whom St. Seraphim of Sarov came, the most beloved Orthodox saint in centuries, the St. Seraphim whose extraordinary conversation with the pilgrim Motovilov reveals the purpose of human life.

We live in interesting times. There is a singularity, or rather has been but keeps growing exponentially, and this singularity may turn in to the end of the world: a strange Ragnarok where the forces of Good resound with apocalyptic triumph. And I, Porn, am part of the singularity, an important part.

Did you know that I, Porn, am not the only thing in life?

Remember: "Every man who visits a Porn site is looking for God."

Delilah friend turned back. “Yep, dear, he does that sort of thing in practically every class.”

Refutatio Omnium Haeresium

Michael? (Who Is Like God?)

Singularity

Herodotus: And what say thee of these people? Why callest thou them the Singularity, Merlin?

John: Mine illuminèd name is John, and John shall ye call me each and every one.

Herodotus: But the Singularity is such as only a Merlin could have unravelled.

John: Perchance: but the world is one of which only an illuminèd one may speak aright. Call thou me as one illuminèd, if thou wouldst hear me speak.

Herodotus: Of illumination speakest thou. Thou sawest with the eye of the hawk: now seest thou with the eye of the eagle.

John: If that be, speak thou me as an eagle?

Herodotus: A point well taken, excellent John, excellent John. What speakest thou of the Singularity?

John: A realm untold, to speak is hard. But of an icon will I speak: inscribed were words:

'Waitress, is this coffee or tea?'

'What does it taste like?'

'IT TASTES LIKE DIESEL FUEL.'

'That's the coffee. The tea tastes like transmission fluid.'

Herodotus: Upon what manner of veneration were this icon worshipped?

John: That were a matter right subtle, too far to tell.

Herodotus: And of the inscription? That too be subtle to grasp.

John: Like as a plant hath sap, so a subtle engine by their philosophy wrought which needeth diesel fuel and transmission fluid.

Herodotus: [*laughs*] Then 'twere a joke, a jape! 'Tis well enough told!

John: You perceive it yet?

Herodotus: A joke, a jape indeed, of a fool who could not tell, two different plants were he not to taste of their sap! Well spoke! Well spoke!

John: Thou hast grasped it afault, my fair lord. For the subtle engine hath many different saps, no two alike.

Herodotus: And what ambrosia be in their saps?

John: Heaven save us! The saps be a right unnatural fare; their substance from rotted carcasses of monsters from aeons past, then by the wisdom of their philosophy transmogrified, of the subtle engine.

Herodotus: Then they are masters of Alchemy?

John: Masters of an offscouring of all Alchemy, of the lowest toe of that depravèd ascetical enterprise, chopped off, severed from even the limb, made hollow, and then grown beyond all reason, into the head of reason.

Herodotus: Let us leave off this and speak of the icon. The icon were for veneration of such subtle philosophy?

John: No wonder, no awe, greeteth he who regardeth this icon and receive it as is wont.

Herodotus: As is wont?

John: As is wanton. For veneration and icons are forcèd secrets; so there is an antithesis of the *sacra pagina*, and upon its light pages the greatest pages come upon the most filled with lightness, the icons of a world that knoweth icons not.

Let me make another essay.

The phrase 'harmony with nature' is of popular use, yet a deep slice of the Singularity, or what those inside the Singularity can see of it, might be called, 'harmony with technology'.

Herodotus: These be mystics of technology.

John: They live in an artificial jungle of technology, or rather an artificial not-jungle of technology, an artificial anti-jungle of technology. For one example, what do you call the natural use of wood?

Herodotus: A bundle of wood is of course for burning.

John: And they know of using wood for burning, but it is an exotic, rare case to them; say 'wood' and precious few will think of gathering wood to burn.

Herodotus: Then what on earth *do* they use wood for? Do they eat it when food is scarce or something like that?

John: Say 'wood' and not exotic 'firewood', and they will think of building a house.

Herodotus: So then they are right dexterous, if they can build out of a bundle of gathered sticks instead of burning it.

John: They do not gather sticks such as you imagine. They fell great trees, and cut the heartwood into rectangular box shapes, which they fit together in geometrical fashion. And when it is done, they make a box, or many boxes, and take rectangles hotly fused sand to fill a window. And they add other philosophy on top of that, so that if the house is well-built, the air inside will be pleasant and still, unless they take a philosophical machine to push air, and whatever temperature the people please, and it will remain dry though the heavens be opened in rain. And most of their time is spent in houses, or other 'buildings' like a house in this respect.

Herodotus: What a fantastical enterprise! When do they enter such buildings?

John: When do they rather go out of them? They consider it normal to spend less than an hour a day outside of such shelters; the subtle machine mentioned earlier moves but it is like a house built out of metal in that it is an environment entirely contrived by philosophy and artifice to, in this case, convey people from one place to another.

Herodotus: How large is this machine? It would seem to have to be very big to convey all their people.

John: But this is a point where their 'technology' departs from the art that is implicit in τέχνη: it is in fact not a lovingly crafted work of art, shaped out of the spirit of that position ye call 'inventor' or 'artist', but poured out by the thousands by giganatical machines yet more subtle, and in the wealth of the Singularity, well nigh unto each hath his own machine.

Herodotus: And how many can each machine can convey? Perchance a thousand?

John: Five, or six, or two peradventure, but the question is what they would call 'academical': the most common use is to convey *one*.

Herodotus: They must be grateful for such property and such philosophy!

John: A few are very grateful, but the prayer, 'Let us remember those less fortunate than ourselves' breathes an odor that sounds truly archaical. It sounds old, old enough to perhaps make half the span of a man's life. And such basic technology, though they should be very much upset to lose them, never presents itself to their mind's eye when they

hear the word 'technology'. And indeed, why should it present itself to the mind his eye?

Herodotus: I strain to grasp thy thread.

John: To be thought of under the heading of 'technology', two things must hold. First, it must be possessed of an artificial unlife, not unlike the unlife of their folklore's ghouls and vampires and zombies. And second, it must be of recent vintage, something not to be had until a time that is barely past. Most of the technologies they imagine provide artificially processed moving images, some of which are extremely old—again, by something like half the span of a man's life—while some are new. Each newer version seemeth yet more potent. To those not satisfied with the artificial environment of an up-to-date building, regarded by them as something from time immemorial, there are unlife images of a completely imaginary artificial world where their saying 'when pigs can fly' meaning never is in fact one of innumerable things that happen in the imaginary world portrayed by the technology. 'SecondLife' offers a second alternative to human life, or so it would seem, until 'something better comes along.'

Herodotus: My mind, it reeleth.

John: Well it reeleth. But this be but a sliver.

For life to them is keeping one's balance on shifting sand; they have great museums of different products, as many as the herbs of the field. But herein lies a difference: we know the herbs of the field, which have virtues, and what the right use is. They know as many items produced by philosophy, but they are scarce worse for the deal when they encounter an item they have never met before. For

while the herbs of the field be steady across generations and generations, the items belched forth by their subtle philosophy change not only within the span of a man's life; they change year to year; perchance moon to moon.

Herodotus: Thou sayest that they can navigate a field they wit not?

John: Aye, and more. The goal at which their catechism aims is to 'learn how to learn'; the appearance and disappearance of kinds of items is a commonplace to them. And indeed this is not only for the items we use as the elements of our habitat: catechists attempt to prepare people for roles that exist not yet even as the students are being taught.

Though this be sinking sand they live in, they keep balance, of a sort, and do not find this strange. And they adapt to the changes they are given.

Herodotus: It beseemeth me that thou speakest as of a race of Gods.

John: A race of Gods? Forsooth! Thou knowest not half of the whole if thou speakest thus.

Herodotus: What remaineth?

John: They no longer think of making love as an action that in particular must needeth include an other.

Herodotus: I am stunned.

John: And the same is true writ large or writ small. A storyteller of a faintly smaller degree, living to them in ages past, placed me in an icon:

The Stranger mused for a few seconds, then, speaking in a slightly singsong voice, as though he repeated an old lesson, he asked, in two Latin hexameters, the following question:

'Who is called Sulva? What road does she walk?
Why is the womb barren on one side? Where are
the cold marriages?'

Ransom replied, 'Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. Her other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields on her further side. On this side, the womb is barren and the marriages cold. There dwell an accursed people, full of pride and lust. There when a young man takes a maiden in marriage, they do not lie together, but each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other, made to move and to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.'

The storyteller saw and saw not his future. 'Tis rare in the Singularity to fabricate children 'by vile arts in a secret place'. But the storyteller plays us false when he assumes their interest would be in a 'cunningly fashioned image of the other'. Truer it would be to say that the men, by the fruits of philosophy, jump from one libidinous dream to another whilest awake.

Herodotus: *Forsooth!*

John: A prophet told them, the end will come when no man maketh a road to his neighbors. And what has happened to marriage has happened, by different means but by the same spirit, to friendship. Your most distant acquaintanceship to a fellow member is more permanent than their marriage; it is routine before the breakable God-created covenant of marriage to make unbreakable man-made covenants about what to do if, as planned for, the marriage ends in divorce. And if that is to be said of divorce, still less is the bond of friendship. Their own people have talked about how 'permanent relationships', including marriage and friendship, being replaced by 'disposable relationships' which can be dissolved for any and every reason, and by 'disposable relationships' to 'transactional relationships', which indeed have not even the pretension of being something that can be kept beyond a short transaction for any and every reason.

And the visits have been eviscerated, from a conversation where voice is delivered and vision is stripped out, to a conversation where words alone are transmitted without even hand writing; from a conversation where mental presence is normative to a conversation where split attention is expected. 'Tis yet rarely worth the bother to make a physical trail, though they yet visit. And their philosophy, as it groweth yet more subtle, groweth yet more delicate. 'Twould scarcely require much to 'unplug' it. And then, perhaps, the end will come?

Herodotus: Then there be a tragic beauty to these people.

John: A tragic beauty indeed.

Herodotus: What else hast thou to tell of them?

John: Let me give a little vignette:

Several men and women are in a room; all are fulfilling the same role, and they are swathed with clothing that covers much of their skin. And the differences between what the men wear, and what most of the women wear, are subtle enough that most of them do not perceive a difference.

Herodotus: Can they not perceive the difference between a man and a woman?

John: The sensitivity is dulled in some, but it is something they try to overlook. But I have not gotten to the core of this vignette:

One of them indicateth that had they be living several thousand years ago they would not have had need of clothing, not for modesty at least, and there are nods of agreement to her. And they all imagine such tribal times to be times of freedom, and their own to be of artificial restriction.

And they fail to see, by quite some measure, that prolonged time in mixed company is much more significant than being without clothing; or that their buildings deaden all of a million sources of natural awareness: the breeze blowing and the herbs waving in the wind; scents and odours as they appear; song of crickets' kin chirping and song of bird, the sun as it shines through cloud; animals as they move about, and the subtleties and differences in the forest as one passes through it. They deaden all of these sensitivities and variations, until there is only one form of life that provides stimulation: the others who are working in one's office. Small wonder, then, that to a man one woman demurely covered in an office has an effect that a dozen

women wearing vines in a jungle would never have. But the libertines see themselves as repressed, and those they compare themselves to as, persay, emancipated.

Herodotus: At least they have the option of dressing modestly. What else hast thou?

John: There is infinitely more, and there is nothing more. Marriage is not thought of as open to children; it can be dissolved in divorce; it need not be intrinsically exclusive; a further installment in the package, played something like a pawn in a game of theirs, is that marriage need not be between a man and a woman. And if it is going to be dismantled to the previous portion, why not? They try to have a world without marriage, by their changes to marriage. The Singularity is a disintegration; it grows more and more, and what is said for marriage could be said for each of the eight devils: intertwined with this is pride, and it is only a peripheral point that those who further undefine marriage speak of 'gay pride'. A generation before, not mavericks but the baseline of people were told they needed a 'high self-esteem', and religious leaders who warned about pride as a sin, perhaps as the sin by which the Devil fell from Heaven, raised no hue and cry that children were being raised to embrace pride as a necessary ascesis. And religion itself is officially permitted some role, but a private role: not that which fulfills the definition of *religare* in binding a society together. It is in some measure like saying, 'You can speak any language you want, as long as you utter not a word in public discourse': the true religion of the Singularity is such ersatz religion as the Singularity provides. Real religion is expected to wither in private.

The Singularity sings a song of progress, and it was giving new and different kinds of property; even now it continues. But its heart of ice showeth yet. For the march of new technologies continues, and with them poverty: cracks begin to appear, and the writing on the wall be harder to ignore. What is given with one hand is not-so-subtly taken away with the other. The Singularity is as needful to its dwellers as forest or plain to its dwellers, and if it crumbles, precious few will become new tribal clans taking all necessities from the land.

Herodotus: Then it beseemeth the tragedy outweigheth the beauty, or rather there is a shell of beauty under a heart of ice.

John: *But there are weeds.*

Herodotus: What is a weed?

John: It is a plant.

Herodotus: What kind of plant is a weed? Are the plants around us weeds?

John: They are not.

Herodotus: Then what kinds of plants are weeds?

John: In the Singularity, there is a distinction between 'rural', 'suburban', and 'urban': the 'rural' has deliberately set plants covering great tracts of land, the 'suburban' has fewer plants, if still perhaps green all around, and the 'urban' has but the scattered ensconced tree. But in all of them are weeds, in an urban area plants growing where the artificial stone

has cracked. And among the natural philosophers there are some who study the life that cannot be extinguished even in an urban city; their specialty is called 'urban ecology'. The definition of a weed is simply, 'A plant I do not want.' We do not have weeds because we do not seek an artificial environment with plants only present when we have put them there. But when people seek to conform the environment to wishes and plans, even in the tight discipline of planned urban areas, weeds are remarkably persistent.

And in that regard, weeds are a tiny sliver of something magnificent.

Herodotus: What would that be?

John: The durability of Life that is writ small in a weed here in the urban, there in the suburban is but a shadow of the durability of Life that lives on in the sons of men. Mothers still sing lullabies to their dear little children; friendships form and believers pray at church far more than happened in the age where my story was told, a story dwarfed by what was called the 'age of faith'. The intensity of the attacks on the Church in a cruel social witness are compelled to bear unwilling witness to the vitality of the Church whose death has been greatly exaggerated: and indeed that Church is surging with vitality after surviving the attacks. The story told seems to tell of Life being, in their idiom, 'dealt a card off every side of the deck'—and answering, 'Checkmate, I win.' I have told of the differences, but there are excellent similarities, and excellent differences. For a knight whoso commandeth a wild

and unbridled horse receiveth greater
commendation than a knight whoso commandeth a
well-bred and gentle steed.

Herodotus: The wind bloweth where it listeth. The shall
live by his faith. Your cell, *though it be wholly
artificial*, will teach you everything you need to
know.

John: Thou hast eagerly grasped it; beyond beauty,
tragedy, and beyond tragedy, beauty. Thou hast
grasped it true.

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, 'Good God!
*That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.*'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, '*God and the Son of God,*

*Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,*⁴
By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,
Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
The Luddite's Guide to Technology,
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **X**, and **A**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, “I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?”

The master said, “Inside your heart.”

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?

“Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my “Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?” How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial ascesis of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from ascesis, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by

her children," of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.'

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:

'What then? How is this man,
A second rich young ruler become?
He who bore not a watch on principle,
Even before he'd scarce more than
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Weareth a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
And is displeased to accept,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
But that when it happened, he were sad.
For the rich young ruler lied,
When said he that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?

Would that he would recall,
 The heights from which he hath fallen,
 Even from outside the Orthodox Church.'

II.

Then the great Saint said, 'But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?

'Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God's own armour which he weareth to war.

'Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.'

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

'We suffer more in imagination than reality,'
Said Seneca the Younger,
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
That full and ancient philosophy,
Can speak, act, and help today,
Among athletes and business men,
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,
An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models

which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?’

Ere he answered me, ‘Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.’

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, ‘Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the *Philokalia*:

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being through them, as well as all the marvellous works of God mentioned in the

divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.

- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

All these things, even if they are opposed to each other, are nevertheless good when used correctly; but when misused, they are not good, but are harmful for both soul and body.

‘And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God’s will. ‘My son,’ says Scripture, ‘if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure’ (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: ‘Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.’ Thus the soul that wishes to do God’s will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: ‘God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a

way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

“Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores *of* math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not

the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the ascesis of a mathematician or a member of the Ultranet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

“The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

Have you ever thought that everything that concerns you, concerns Me, also? You are precious in my eyes and I love you; for his reason, it is a special joy for Me to train you. When temptations and the opponent [the Evil One] come upon you like a river, I want you to know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that your weakness has need of My strength, and your safety lies in allowing Me to protect you. I want you to know that when you are in difficult conditions, among people who do not understand you, and cast you away, This was from Me.

I am your God, the circumstances of your life are in My hands; you did not end up in your position by chance; this is precisely the position I have appointed for you. Weren't you asking Me to teach you humility? And there – I placed you precisely in the “school” where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

I want you to know that I dispose of your money, so take refuge in Me and depend upon Me. I want you to know that My storehouses are inexhaustible, and I am faithful in My promises. Let it never happen that they tell you in your need, “Do not believe in your Lord and God.” Have you ever

spent the night in suffering? Are you separated from your relatives, from those you love? I allowed this that you would turn to Me, and in Me find consolation and comfort. Did your friend or someone to whom you opened your heart, deceive you? This was from Me.

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you would learn that your best friend is the Lord. I want you to bring everything to Me and tell Me everything. Did someone slander you? Leave it to Me; be attached to Me so that you can hide from the “contradiction of the nations.” I will make your righteousness shine like light and your life like midday noon. Your plans were destroyed? Your soul yielded and you are exhausted? This was from Me.

You made plans and have your own goals; you brought them to Me to bless them. But I want you to leave it all to Me, to direct and guide the circumstances of your life by My hand, because you are the orphan, not the protagonist. Unexpected failures found you and despair overcame your heart, but know That this was from Me.

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

Because I want you to know Me more deeply, through physical ailment, do not murmur against this trial I have sent you. And do not try to understand My plans for the salvation of people’s souls, but uncomplainingly and humbly bow your head before My goodness. You were dreaming about doing something special for Me and, instead of doing it, you fell into a bed of pain. This was from Me.

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn’t have been able to draw your thoughts

to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, That whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as you learn In all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul.

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath

granted thee. Thou hast written “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret,” and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods, and it is a more profound truth, a more vibrant truth, a truth that goes much deeper into the heart of root of all things to say that we may not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we live under the care of the best of all possible Gods.

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the *Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow,

called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the *Philokalia*: the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and

making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an

observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the *Philokalia* is *The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*. If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the *Philokalia* hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the

Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

‘Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could

possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one's own poor, miserable demographic.

'But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled "Love Without Boundaries," and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it—on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in ascesis, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father's love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

'And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*:
psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-
scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

'It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named "psychology", the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-

anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of *ανθρωπος* (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university

department door now heralded and announced, "DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION."

'And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage's lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

'Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism's Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton's observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology's claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

'And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, "The Trouble with TED," for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence

arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember

thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the

practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?
 Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?
 For I have written much,
 And spent much care,
 In *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*,
 And looked all the whilst,
 Down the wrong end,
 Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
 I have written of man and creation defiled,
 Yet for all my concerns,
 Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’
 Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’
 Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
 Of our embodied state,
 Where better to seek healing,
 For an occult-free simulation,
 Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
 Than in the perfect creaturely response,
 ‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to thy word.’
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
‘Behold thy Mother!’
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:
But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading
humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminèd teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a

combination of activities and practices, an America's Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

'It were several years ago that thou tookest a Fluxx deck to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

'When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen's lower ceiling without striking his head.

'Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

'That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed the game of Fluxx, though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

'In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

'First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy's father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son's head against the ceiling. The boy's mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

'Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment

or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for the royal race of men. Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home, and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

'The word translated, "blessed," μακαριος (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: "blessed," and "happy." Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as "happy," including *Young's Literal Translation*:

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness' sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens,

for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the *Amplified Bible* naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was *ευδαιμονια*, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer,

to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

“Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
 Of a child starkly scant of mind,
 Who received a glittering package, a gift,
 And kept the glittering package,
 Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
 And after long time,
 When the disposable wrapping paper,
 Were well battered and now dingy,
 An adult asked,
 'Aren't you going to open the package?'
 The child exclaimed with joy,
 Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
 And squealed with joy, saying,
 "Oh, there's *another* present!"
 My Lord and my God!
 Perhaps I will never open,
 The Sermon on the Mount.

VI.

I said myself then, 'O John! O glorious Saint John! Canst thou lead me on a path into the The Sermon on the Mount? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the

heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the Sermon on the Mount, poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of

enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor

in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.'

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
 I programmed an Apple][,
 In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
 Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
 My father a computer scientist,
 Who shared with me his joy,
 And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
 My family got, and still hath the carcass,
 Of one original 'fat Mac',
 So named because it had an available maximum 512k of RAM.
 My calculator in high school,
 On which I programmed computer-generated art,
 And a simple video game, had as much.
 Ere my salad days were dwindled,
 I remained a Unix programmer,
 And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
 Later I had iPhones,
 And for the first time in my life,
 Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
 Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
 My desire increased as I read about it,
 And vanished when I learned it were,
 Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
 I gave it to my brother,
 Who later gave it back before it broke.

I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without frequent
\$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of Unix.
When I asked about one cardinaly important open source
project,
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.
I sing a song to my late iPhone,
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,

Offerings for Apple computers:

A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.

Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices with
children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the *Philokalia*,
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.
St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,
But we may not yet be in the clear.
And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under surveillance,"
Where No Such Agency has received every email,
It is now clear and open knowledge,
To those that will reflect,
That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that
 it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave
 your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear
 your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now
pornography seeks *you*?

It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,
 Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,
 And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee of Fr.
 Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.

7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.

23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.

40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely,
under God's
mercy.

54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.

55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
‘There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, “Michael,”
Which is, being interpreted,
“Who is like God?”
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,

As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
 But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil himself:
 “Blow, and spit on him.”

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the *Philokalia* describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.’

The Saint told me, ‘Thou hast read part of *Prayers by the Lake*, in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

‘Rememberest thou also that in the *Philokalia* we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediates to some degree.’

I said, ‘May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?’

He said, ‘Speak on.’

I said, ‘I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.’

He said, ‘Hast thou not been astonished at God’s perfect Providence of years betimes?’

I said, ‘Yes.’

He said, ‘What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.’

I asked, ‘Will I reach monasticism?’

He smiled at me, and said, ‘Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.’

He said, ‘Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

‘With death cometh a realization of, “I shall not pass this wise again.”

‘Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God’s champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely

hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church's fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where paten and chalice glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I had been in my life.

Paradise

O Lord,
Have I not seen,
How thou hast placed me in Paradise?

And how have I said,
That a first monastic command,
Is, "Go home and spend another year with your family?"
While I have spent a few?
The obedience is not limited,
By a count of years,
But by obedience,
This being a first *obedience*.

Gifts I have fought as chance left me,
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?
It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.

I stand, or sit,
Not scholar, nor user experience professional,
Making use of a life of leisure,
Learning leisure well, to lord it over leisure,

Once I made a vow before a wonder-working icon in Brooklyn,
 That I might receive a doctorate,
 Earned or honorary,
 And since then have prayed that my vow not be granted,
 An honorary doctorate not to receive,
 Because I do not want it enough to even travel,
 To give the icon a kiss of veneration!

An Invitation to the Game is an icon,
 Of children in a proletariat of excessive leisure,
 Excessive leisure being a training ground,
 Before a new life in a new world begins.

God the Spiritual Father looks after,
 Each person he has made,
 As a spiritual father looks after each disciple,
 God looketh after each,
 In the situations he placed each:

“Life’s Tapestry”

Behind those golden clouds up there
 the Great One sews a priceless embroidery
 and since down below we walk
 we see, my child, the reverse view.
 And consequently it is natural for the mind to see
 mistakes
 there where one must give thanks and glorify.

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
 where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
 and you shall see the embroidery of God
 from the good side
 and then... everything will seem to you to be a system
 and order.

What have I to add,
To words such as these?
This time is a time of purification and training,
And as in times past,
In an instant, I may be taken to a monastery,
As I was taken to study theology,
Six months' work to obtain student loans,
Falling into place one business day before leaving.
Thou teachest me,
And I know thou art willing to save:
Whether or not my plans are the best.
Whether I ever reach monasticism,
Thou art potent to save.
I might need to seek monasticism:
God can save me with or without.

So I learn patience,
Fly through FluentU and learn Russian,
And here I sit,
In a place thou hast opened my eyes to see as Paradise,
And with lovely food pantries,
And visits to pets at a lovely cat shelter,
And thou ever ministerest to me.

Though thousands around me be addicted to television,
And ten thousands can't stop checking their cell phones,
Thou hast delivered me,
And taught me to lord it over technologies,
Perchance a prophet in the way,
To the technology user who still suffers,
To those who remain entangled in the Web.
Thou hast delivered me from mortal danger:
Perhaps thou givest me more time to repent.
Or perhaps thou givest merely,

More time to repent.
 Glory to God for all things!

Thou givest me simple pleasures,
 Who knew tidying up a besmudged keyboard could be fun?
 Whither I go, thou art with me;
 Thou preparest a table before family and friends.

“World” refers not to God’s creation,
 But to our collections of passions,
 Seeing through a glass, darkly,
 What bathes in the light of Heaven:
 Hell is a state of mind,
 But Heaven is reality itself.

I am perhaps not worthy of praise,
 To say such things in middle-class comfort.
 I seek monasticism, to be a novice,
 Which is meant to be exile,
 Yet an abbot’s work,
 Is to help me reach freedom from my passions,
 And what true joy I have in luxury,
 Only know further in monastic exile.
 Years I have waited:
 Now I am willing to wait years more.
 Only if I may pursue repentance,
 On such terms as it is offered me.
 Glory to God who has allowed me such luxury!
 Glory to God who has allowed me such honors!
 Glory to God who has shown me that these avail nothing,
 And seek the true fame,
 Fame before God himself!

Be thou glorified, O God, in me,
 Though I know nothing,

Though I am nothing,
Be none the less glorified in me.
The Infinite can do the Infinite in the finite:
Be thou therefore glorified and praised in me,
Though I am nothing before thee,
Yet thou grantest me breath and life,
Joy,
And ever offerest me salvation.

Glory be to God on high!
Glory be to God for Paradise!
Which Paradise is in all things!
Glory to God for all things!

Amen.

Epilogue

Glory to God for all things!

Christ is risen, His joy!