

**A Canticle to  
Holy, Blessed  
Solipsism  
A Selection of Poems**

From the "Best Works" series

**CJS Hayward**

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# **A Canticle 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!

# 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 wouldst:  
But when thou shalt be old,  
Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird  
thee,  
And carry thee whither thou wouldst not.  
This is victory:  
Further up and further in!



## 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,  
Faieth us in a disaster.  
"Why this waste?" quote we in error,  
Mistaking the limits of sight for those of faith itself.

Why this waste?

# 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.  
Choolest 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 Wyrms 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 homoousios: 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 todays, 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.

# 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?

# Now

Now.

Eternity is now.

Eternity is now,  
And Paradise is wherever the saints are.  
Forever we are dispersed,  
Our minds' concentration diffused,  
Wishing it were a later time,  
When something we are waiting for arrives,  
A false hope.

Hope abides, with faith and love,  
A hope things eternal to wit,

Earthly hopes do not deliver:

"Earthly things cannot give Heavenly comfort,  
And in the end earthly things cannot give earthly comfort,  
Either:

Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had."

Hoping for change on earth will disappoint:

This is the key to the riddle:

"Two great tragedies in life:

Not to get your heart's desire,

And to get it."

The desire for comfort in earthly hopes,

Is a vortex,

Sucking the energy out of life.

But there is another way.

To a thief crucified in torture,

To any man in circumstances dire,

Hear the word of the Lord:

"This hour you will be with me in Paradise."

And listen to its heart:

Paradise is not when we get some earthly wish;

Paradise is now,

A scattered mind,

Brought home as a dove in peace,

To an earth lifted up to Heaven.

He who wants peace and paradise,

And worries about how to arrange the things of earth,

Is rightly compared,

To a man who wants to swim and clap his hands.

Multitasking is a way to grasp at more,  
And let more slip through your fingers,  
So you end up grasping less,  
And dissipation with it.

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"  
What is the peace achieved by worry?  
What is the contentment achieved by acquiring something?  
If your desire is frustrated,  
Perhaps God wishes to free you to greater goods:  
Treasures on earth give only illusory security,  
But treasures in Heaven feed us today.  
And if you cannot see how God could provide,  
Perhaps God is waiting,  
To give you something bigger,  
To see with the eyes of faith.

Be in your mind,  
"A garden locked,"  
"A fountain sealed,"  
Not dispersed in every direction,  
For when we abandon this NOW that God gives us,  
And wish a handhold on controlling the future,  
Our hearts spill out in every which way,  
Losing living water by grasping for an earthly water supply,  
"Take no thought for tomorrow,"  
And let Living Water enclose Himself,  
In the cistern of your heart.

The time for eternal life is now:  
The time for obedience is now,  
If you procrastinate,



Choosing not to obey now,  
Saying, "I can do it later,"  
When that "later" becomes "now",  
It will be harder to do now,  
Because you have already rejected doing it now.

"Take no thought for tommorow,"  
You will more have eternity now,  
If your heart is not dispersed,  
Dispersed into "What if this?"  
Dispersed into "I want that,"  
Than if you attend today to what God has given today,  
("Each day has enough troubles of its own.")  
You will be better rested from one night's sleep,  
Than trying your hardest to sleep for a week at once,  
You will be better nourished by eating one nourishing meal  
now,  
Than trying to get a head start by eating ten nourishing  
meals at one sitting,  
And leave this now for other imagined moments.

Tomorrow does not come,  
As a worry, or a plan, or other distraction:  
God has not given it yet,  
But when he does give,  
He will give it as now.  
A now where we will remain in the summons,  
To gather ourselves into our heart,  
To dismiss thoughts that disperse us,  
Present to God,  
Present to neighbor,  
Present to surroundings,

And Paradise present to us.  
When the time comes,  
When we will sink or swim,  
We will swim,  
Because swimming is easier than you think,  
When you are only trying to swim,  
And not also clap your hands:  
"My yoke is easy and my burden is light:  
Come to me, all who are weary,  
And I will give you rest."

There is no other time we can obey,  
But:  
Now.

Now.

# **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.

## 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,  
 O ΩN.

What tongue mighteth sing of thee?  
 What noetic heart mighteth know thee,  
 With the knowledge that drinketh,  
 The drinking that knoweth,  
 Of the vouς,  
 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.

# **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,'  
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 Partiarth 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 not 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 physics 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 asceticism, 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 *ἄνθρωπος* (*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 ensauple 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 εὐδαιμονία, *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 on the Christian Life” 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 was a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

*I wept until I realized I was the happiest I had been in my life.*