

**The Orthodox
Martial Art is
Living the
Sermon on the
Mount**

CJS Hayward

CJS Hayward Publications, Spotsylvania

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Questions and contact information:

cjshayward.com/contact

The reader is invited to visit cjshayward.com and amazon.com/author/cjshayward.

To St. Demetrios of Thessaloniki,
Saint, warrior, and passion-bearer who did not raise a
hand to defend himself,

It is a tremendous privilege to be at your monastery!

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Introduction

General Omar Bradley famously said,

We have men of science, too few men of God. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.

I grew up in the Anabaptist tradition and was a committed pacifist, a point on which I engaged many at Wheaton College and Wheaton's Reserve Officer Training Corps. I also worked hard to understand just war and the soldier's life; when I asked a Marine

about where to get the best training for emergencies, he recommended the Marine Corps's Officer Candidate School, which I seriously considered, although I am sure I would have failed on a couple of grounds had I attempted it.

I have also closely read e.g. *The Art of War*, although I am not impressed with its cultural place in the West as a sort of ultimate wisdom literature for the world of business. Or rather, as the only work that does the job of wisdom literature.

I regarded the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7 in the Bible, as the most important sermon ever, and I believe so still. I am no longer a pacifist, but not on grounds of "I used to be *young* and *idealistic*, but now I am *mature* and *practical*." I remain idealistic, if not exactly young, and in relation to my conversion to Eastern Orthodoxy I came to decide that I did not have veto power over warrior-saints whom God has been pleased with. *The entire reason I stopped holding to strict pacifism was idealistic.* And no one in Orthodoxy tried to argue me out of being then a pacifist.

I still believe in the Sermon on the Mount, now more than ever, and am presently reading the high-ranking bishop HILARION's book on the Sermon on the Mount,¹ which is the best treatment of the topic that I have ever seen.

I have also engaged in martial arts, though I don't think that was necessarily something I should engage. My spirituality when studying martial arts became consistently distant, arid, dead. But one

1 Available from cjshayward.com/sermon-on-the-mount/.

reader talked about "martial arts mastery" in relation to one of the works in *The Orthodox Martial Art* is *Living the Sermon on the Mount*, and my studies may be more important than I realized.

And lastly, I have a bone to pick about language at this monastery and the associated parish. The parish, near the Quantico marine base, has military personnel well-represented, and is not very different in spirit from the monastery.

There was one Sunday where a retired military chaplain gave a doxology that eulogized as its leitmotif how members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Space Force (all represented in the parish) "lay down their lives for their neighbor." He never suggested that warriors *fight*, and I wanted to say to him in sarcasm, "That's a nice pacifist homily that you gave."

It has been a bit more than a year that I have been at the monastery and never really separate from the parish, and I have heard the phrase "lay down your life for your neighbor" frequently. The beginning, middle, and end of "lay down your life for your neighbor" as I have heard it is associated with violence. I have never yet heard the leitmotif phrase "lay down your life for your neighbor" to mean anything besides fighting, and after some time racking my brains I can only remember one situation where fighting was referred to by anything else than "laying down your life for your neighbor," and that exception was being in safety, and killing via drones.

For carefully considered reasons, I hate slippery rhetoric; see my first of two minor

dissertations in theology.² I find that besides being hateful, it usually betrays how something is seriously wrong. If you believe that Christians may fight, say "fight;" if you believe in righteous killing, say "righteous killing." The singular use of "lay down your life for your neighbor" to begin and end with violence, and for violence to begin and end at "laying down your life for your neighbor," almost suggests that you are uncomfortable at the thought of Christians *fighting* and *killing*.

(And I might briefly suggest that some military operations do not really involve laying your life down for your neighbor. Warriors in the first Iraq war were on average safer than civilians in the U.S. at the same time, and the Afghanistan war was designed to achieve objectives without putting American warriors in harm's way.)

The Orthodox Church indisputably has warrior-saints, including the patron of our monastery, but the Greek Fathers have precious little of a concept of "just war." The only Church Father I am aware of speaking in favor of Just War was Blessed Augustine, and I have said in other contexts that if St. Augustine is your only friend among the Fathers, you are on shaky ground. I do not see what theological warrant buttresses the assertion that Orthodox Christians believe in just war.

I know that the military uses opaque euphemisms like "neutralize" instead of directly transparent terms like "kill" most of the time. Such practice does not belong in Orthodoxy, or at least not

in the language of Churches that worship Truth
incarnate.

But let's begin.

"The Orthodox Martial Art Is Living the Sermon on the Mount:"

Orthodoxy, "Our Social Program is the Trinity," and "Our Juvenile Correctional System Is Parents Who Stay Married and Love Each Other and Their Children"

A look at India in relation to my own roots and formation

My life story up until now would be immeasurably impoverished if the various ways in which India had entered my life would simply be *subtracted*. I appreciate

Indian food, even if I eat it in a non-Indian (Paleo) fashion. And that is not trivial, but there are deeper ways I've been enriched by that great nation. One of these relates to pacifism, where one of India's giants, one certain Gandhi, is perhaps the best-known person in history as I know it for the strength of pacifism. Gandhi might have said with perfect sincerity, "Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills," but there is a certain motherlode as old as the hills that Gandhi may have mined that motherlode better than anyone else in history.

My own earliest roots, the brand of Christianity I received as mother's milk, were in the Anabaptist tradition, and more specifically the Mennonite Church. I have never been a member of the Amish tradition, but I would contrast Amish as they are known today from Anabaptists in the time of the Reformation. Today Amish are seen as quiet, peaceful, and daft in being picky about which technologies they accept in their community.

(Amish are conservative, perhaps seen as a bit daft, and as Weird Al offensively jabs them, says, "Tonight we're going to party like it's 1699, not seeing what on earth could be good about partying like it's 1699.)

But Amish and other Anabaptists were originally the anarchist wing of the Reformation, the Radical Reformers who were radical even in the eyes of fellow Protestants, the Reformation's Left Coast. That they would have been parodied in the future as "quaint"ly conservative and "please don't point and stare" would have perhaps astonished Zwingli and his radical wing of the Reformation, and all their opponents, alike.

Before and during college, I went on a bit of a journey and a quest to bolster and advocate for pacifism. I

studied the Sermon in the Mount; I read Gandhi write things that I thought only a Christian would write. Gandhi did not only say that his three heroes were Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates; he said that Christ offered himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world, a perfect act. And it was only years later that I learned why Gandhi did not become a Christian, something not given a single stinging word in a single quote I ever saw attributed to Mr. Gandhi.

I was filled with shame when I learned that Gandhi wanted to become a Christian, attended a Christian evangelist's meeting, and was turned away from being accepted into the Christian faith, *because of the color of his skin*. And he gave advice to Christians on how to present Christianity to Hindus, including displaying the hard parts very clearly, but he was not willing, after that, to consider becoming a Christian.

I would not have felt shame if I heard that Gandhi simply didn't ever consider becoming a Christian, or that he found the Hindu mystical tradition deep enough that he would content himself with Hindu roots, or that he would not have considered adopting the religion of the colonial occupiers of India, or other reasons like Hinduism as perhaps the most cosmopolitan of all world religions, or if we may permit an anachronism, Hinduism as the deep tradition that would years later establish India as a software superpower. *These are all bearable*. But not becoming Christian because a Christian evangelist turned him away—that is not bearable, but shameful.

In my own journey and life practices, the very oldest of the major works on my website, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength*, was from my own search for pacifism. I don't deny that the nonviolent

power that Gandhi described in terms of "satyagraha" or hold onto Truth (from the Sanskrit), nor that satyagraha became incarnate with Indian flesh. "I am a man, so nothing that is human is alien to me," as an ancient Roman said. The Church Fathers who quickly saw a path that meets its fruition in Christianity in philosophy or Plato is able to read of the practice of satyagraha and nonviolence, and the Indian cardinal virtue of ahimsa that recognizes you are tied to the other person and cannot harm the other without harming yourself, can be coherently interpreted without recognizing what Gandhi took, without compromise, from Christianity and the Sermon on the Mount. If Plato or Platonism can be purified, and perhaps Taoism can be purified, then perhaps something can be purified from Gandhi and the one nation on earth that established itself as sovereign and independent without shedding a drop of enemy blood.

I would like to briefly stop at C.S. Lewis and what is apparently an attack on satyagraha. The architect of "mere Christianity" as it is established in the West makes the only external addition to what is called "mere Christianity" that is in fact not part of Christianity as it was known then. He describes and condemns a guilt manipulation that one holds oneself hostage to make pity a weapon. And he is the only Protestant writer I have read who, in papers like "Why I am not a Pacifist," says not only that Christians may wage war but in fact that conscientious exemption is not acceptable in any sense, and pacifists as much as anyone else should be compelled to try their best to kill men in military service. And on that point I really give Lewis an F. Ruling out even alternative service for people who believe it

is always wrong to kill is FAIL, at least for someone pushing a comprehensive plan of "mere Christianity."

A second look at my roots

The self-identification may or may not be what is most important to others. Probably the strongest critique that Orthodox might make of the Radical Reformation, shocking to both sides of the comparison, might be that an early Anabaptist might say, "We are starting with a clean slate. God is NOT incarnate in bread and wine, is NOT incarnate in any fixed form of worship, is NOT incarnate in any icon or art, NOT incarnate in any priesthood where priests are anything more or less than laity, NOT incarnate in the saints, NOT—" and *a Muslim might answer*, "You're off to a good start, but you left off the most important one: *God is NOT incarnate in Christ!*"

However, for now I would like to focus on the three self-chosen identifiers that I was taught growing up were the Anabaptist distinctives.

I mentioned Anabaptism or Mennonites earlier as my earliest roots, and I have revisited them, not as a matter of regression but pushing a divide further. And there are some points of contact. The Anabaptist movement has three self-identified points of distinction:

1. A "believer's baptism", meaning baptism only on adult profession of faith,
2. A refusal to take oaths under any circumstance.

3. Pacifism.

On the first point there is a disagreement between Orthodoxy and the Anabaptist tradition; what Anabaptists sought to dismantle in saying "Infant baptism is of the Devil," is one of many continuities with Orthodoxy that some in the West has opted out of.

On the second point, there is strong agreement. Now in pastoral terms there is an issue of people's comfort with a teaching, and it is not pastorally helpful to take a teaching someone is not ready to recognize, and ram it down that person's throat rather than allowing that person to grow to accept the teaching. But as far as oaths go, there was one Athonite monk who refused to take a required oath before testifying in a court of law, and endured without complaint the four months of prison that he was punished with before refusing to take an oath. St. John Chrysostom, called "the moral theologian among the Fathers par excellence," throughout every work that I have read, keeps on returning to certain moral topics regardless of perception. He keeps on hitting on the necessity of sharing with the poor, and of the theatre "in which the shared nature of women is insulted" (think Internet porn, as it existed in the fourth century; to be an actress included being a member of a much older profession), and he more than once drops the hammer on the practice of taking oaths at all.

I should wish to clarify that I am, as an Orthodox Christian, in communion with saints including alike the Martyrs and Passion-bearers Boris and Gleb, who were rulers in authority who chose to be murdered rather than take the sword, and warrior-saints like the Greatmartyr, Victory-bearer and Wonderworker George. Both are

treasures of the Orthodox Church, and while a soldier who has gone on active duty cannot become clergy, he can become a saint.

I might also comment that in years back, when I was exploring and searching, Christians who believed in a just war, without exception, met my forceful arguing only with gentleness and kindness. *If you are one of those people, this piece is dedicated to you.*

But as regards the question of pacifism, I regard my own “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength”¹ as an interesting early step, particularly as there weren't too many other pieces playing in the same space that I was able to find. I asked a number of other people for feedback, and I regret my own sophomoric side of dealings with mature Christians who believe in a just war and who in every sense embodied what I advocate for here. (Wheaton College president Dr. J. Richard Chase asked for a copy for his personal files; part of this was undoubtedly kindness, but the kind gesture was against a backdrop where he probably had not seen too many works like it at all, even if he searched for them.) I've come back to review it, and there are things I wouldn't say now in this the very oldest and earliest of my works. But my coming back to it after all these years is not so much a matter of recognizing I was *young* and *idealistic* and thinking I am *practical* and *realistic* now, but looking again and saying that *I did not go nearly far enough. In being idealistic.*

(Coming back years later deepened in the Orthodox spiritual tradition, or at least slightly less immature, my

1 Online at cjschayward.com/peace/. I have moved on, but this has the distinction of being an articulate defense of Christian pacifism, in an environment where it is easy to find an articulation of just war and not nearly so easy to find an articulation of pacifism.

further knowledge has unlocked things in my earlier position that I could not understand in my early career as a convinced pacifist.)

But let us not demand perfection from everyone, and give one concession, at least, for lawful gun ownership.

A cue from the military that might matter to gun owners

One Orthodox faithful explained gun ownership and challenged people who regarded gun ownership as simply nothing but a passion of anger. And he explained how, as a loving and careful father, he hopes to never fire his gun "live", but as a loving and responsible husband and father, he knows what he would do if someone broke into his house with intent to do harm. He would bring such killing to confession, but he had his priorities straight.

(Note that this is reasoning about what *would* happen in an imagined scenario, not what *was* happening, a distinction which is important in Orthodox mystical theology.)

I have heard gun control advocates talk about how tragic it was when someone heavily armed opened fire on children; I haven't yet heard a rebuttal after a card-carrying NRA member answered, "Yes, it was tragic not only that that started, but that there was no one lawfully possessing firearms available to stop the crime. Did you hear about one of those many incidents that never appears on television, where for instance a man armed to kill a bear entered a church sanctuary with intent to do ill, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a firearm legally and with

explicit permission of her church shot and stopped a crime?"

And this may be just my observation, but the primary approach to persuasion taken by gun control advocates is to show hard-hitting images of traumatized people after an active shooter met no armed speed bump at all, to persuasion taken by the gun lobby is to mount a logical argument appealing to research and statistics. Now as a mathematician I understand Mark Twain's point that there are three types of lies ("Lies, _____ lies, and *statistics!*"), and I don't put my weight onto statistics I haven't seen investigated, but the question between gun control and gun lobby isn't a matter of deciding which side has cooked their books. Perhaps the gun lobby *has* cooked their books: but it is a little sad when only one side of a discussion argues from research, evidence, and statistics.

I may be hypocritical or a freeloading parasite when I say this, but I do not personally own a gun; I never have and probably never will. I have some skill with firearms,² but that is beside the point. But I feel safer now that my state has legalized carrying concealed firearms, with a few asterisks about how to opt out on your property. I would rather be in a situation where there are two guns in a room, owned by a criminal and meant for a crime, and one by a law-abiding citizen intending to stop crime in the most drastic circumstances, than only the gun carried by a criminal. I feel safer knowing that gun-using criminals do not know where there is a lawfully carried firearm, and criminals simply do not know if I am carrying a .45 with hollow-nosed rounds.

2 See cjshayward.com/tv/.

But if you're keeping a firearm by your bed for self-defense, may I ask if you are also, for instance, investing in good night vision? Have you taken the time to install a respectable home security system? This may be slightly less "sexy" than having a powerful gun at hand, but have you established the powerful and immediate deterrent of flooding your home with light (a thief's worst enemy) if someone approaches?

And have you considered that it may be easier, after training, to hit someone while shooting out a solid stream of pepper spray—*especially* in poor lighting, where at least without night vision you can't really aim—than the few rounds in a gun's magazine? And that the effects on your house are much easier to clean up from a vile liquid than a few bullet holes after a powerful gun has shot through an intruder's body and hit the wall behind. Killing someone, however justified it may be, is a traumatic experience; even for trained law enforcement professionals, for instance, killing in the line of duty is trauma and good police chiefs can mandate that an officer who has killed in the line of duty get a year's counseling. Training as a law enforcement professional or soldier does not change the fact that it is traumatic to kill another person. If I had a choice between stopping a dozen innocent men with pepper spray and stopping one guilty man with a shot through the heart, I know which one I would rather remember when I look in the mirror each day.

For a first cue from the military, snipers, who know well enough how to fire a rifle at a paper target, are given one round and only one round to keep with them, carry, hold, and move around, and then after a couple of days are given one shot to take a "hostage situation" (balloon full of

oatmeal or whatever) shot. Most fail the first time. With a bit more training and preparation, it *gets* to one shot, one kill. But it takes some training to get there. I wouldn't myself trust that with one shot, cold and in a panic, to hit home.

But with all that preface stated, may I ask people who look for safety via firearms to at least take a cue from the military?

Sun Tzu's classic *The Art of War* c. 500 BC, adapted for the business world in sometimes flaky ways, is arguably the greatest classic in military strategy and usually considered to be less dated than the best of the best from 100 years ago.

If one were to condense the multi-faceted classic into a single sentence, it should probably be one gem taken from the text, "All warfare amounts to deception." To put it starkly, war is not achieved by killing people, with psychological considerations in any sense being a side issue. War is about *deceiving* people; killing people has more of a supporting role than anything else. The terms "strategy" and "strategem" are forms of the same basic word; they amount to how to trick the opponent. You don't win well by killing each other's soldiers and seeing who has some left over at the end; military forces at any rate fall apart at a third (maybe less) casualties, and rank and file U.S. troops have guns and ammunition intended to seriously wound in the average case, but not kill. (Part of this is love for enemies; part of it is a tactical consideration that if you instantly kill an enemy soldier, you take one man out of action; if you seriously wound a soldier with a wound that may be treatable, you take three men out of action.)

One ancient account talks about how a military leader stripped a force of thousand down to a few hundred, and gave them torches and the shofars that one would use at the head of a host. Then they crept around the host, surrounded it, and blasted the horn. The entire enemy warhost, "like the sand at a seashore for multitude", fell into deep panic and was routed, falling to each other's swords (original text).

World War II might have been won under even more dire circumstances, but at least it was not the armies of second-born sons whose blood was poured out like water who won D-Day without strategem. Also contributing to that scenario was an enormous effort to build up rubber balloon versions of tanks at the like, massing to look from the air like the Allies were intending to invade from the point where the English Channel was narrowest, but sent a double agent to keep Hitler believing the D-Day invasion was just a diversion and keeping his main forces to where the channel was nearest and therefore out of the way when the breach was made on Normandy breach.

What does this have to do with home security? *Everything*. You're not firing on all pistons if you stop with a gun, and I do *not* mean that you need more firepower, or really even more gadgets.

Jack MacLean's *Secrets of a Superthief* says, on the cover:

"They said I was the best, the one the police called the 'Superthief.' Before I went straight I picked every lock, turned off every alarm, found every hiding place. I know how burglars get inside—and gets them out. If

you're smart, you'll pay attention to what I have to say..."

Possibly the most valuable observation in the text is that *home security should be 60% psychological and 40% physical*, and it is seriously confused to think that you can win a physical arms race with a thief who wants to get in and isn't afraid of you. If you change your doors for heavier doors and less glass then a determined intruder will just change an already big crowbar for an even bigger crowbar. Then what other options are there? the book has some options; drawn from it:

Situation: There is an intruder accidentally making sounds in your house, or at least you think it is an intruder.

You say, crossly, with irritation and as much frosty, icy condescension as you can muster, "Yes, Sweetie, I *know* what the *machine gun* will do to the *walls*. I don't *care*. I'm going to give 60 more seconds for the SWAT team to get here, and then I'm taking care of it *MY* way."

Situation: A thief is casing your back door for possible entrance.

Have a clearly scribbled note on your back door, *fresh-looking* note that says, "Honey, will you please talk to Billy? He's let that stupid pet rattlesnake escape his cage again, and right now, I can't even find that idiotic scorpion! Can

you explain to him that this is
UNACCEPTABLE?"

Or a particular kind of yellow and black sign. In the natural world, yellow and black “warning coloration” on wasps, hornet, the Gila monster, and some vipers says, “I have venom and I can sting,” and the color scheme offers a nice unsubtle social cue. The text of the sign? “**WARNING: THIS HOME PROTECTED BY SMITH & WESSON. POLICY #45.**”³

Women have sometimes taken to putting a pair of size 17 men's boots outside the door each evening.

All of these can give a prowler, who almost certainly prefers to get an easy kill, that maybe the best place to look for an easy kill is someplace **else**.

Does it work? Perhaps you may not sound entirely believable, but nerves roughened by intruding in unknown situations where you don't know how people are armed and you could legally be killed tell a different story. (The "Superthief" tells of not being able to count how many terrifying times he heard a barking dog answered by "Shaddap, Max!")

The most implausible note he described, more humorous than believable, was a notice when he wanted people to leave him alone, was a note saying that he had a severe case of crabs, and the crabs were strong enough to break people's fingers with their claws.

3 Available to print from
<https://cjsheyward.com/pdf/sign.pdf>.

However, it was enough to motivate other convicted felons in prison to simply leave him alone.

There's a lot that can be accomplished by violence in certain very unhappy circumstances, and Gandhi respected those who use force nobly. Seriously, he did:

The people of a village near Bettiah told me that they had run away whilst the police were looting their houses and molesting their womenfolk. When they said that they had run away because I had told them to be nonviolent, I hung my head in shame. I assured them that such was not the meaning of my nonviolence. I expected them to intercept the mightiest power that might be in the act of harming those who were under their protection, and draw without retaliation all harm upon their own heads even to the point of death, but never to run away from the storm centre. It was manly enough to defend one's property, honour or religion at the point of the sword. It was manlier and nobler to defend them without seeking to injure the wrongdoer. But it was unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and, in order to save one's skin, to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrongdoer. I could see my way of delivering the message of ahimsa to those who knew how to die, not to those who were afraid of death.

- Gandhiji in Indian Villages by Mahadev Desai

But there is more...

...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

"Our social program is the Trinity"

Of all the brief sayings that most mystifies people, "Our social program is the Trinity" may be the most confusing. A social program includes a blueprint for some more or less vaguely Utopian social order, and how by ~~civil war~~ politics it is possible to influence, manipulate, coerce, intimidate, bamboozle a plan to concretely build things on earth. And given such a bulleted list of key features to a social program, it seems an extremely strained reading of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But may I ask: What about devout Christian family communities saying, "Our juvenile correctional system is parents who love each other, stay married to each other, and love and discipline their children?" That's wordier, but the key point lies in a similar vein. If you go to a staunch Evangelical community, you may not see terribly many large and full prisons, courthouses, correctional officers, and so on and so forth, but the purpose of a staunch Evangelical community is not that it has abundant "department of corrections" responses to a 10-year-old arrested for pushing hard drugs or a 12-year-old arrested for rape; however much there may be support for repentance, an ounce of prevention is worth a much more than a ton of cure, and an ounce of bored children in a less-than-ideal Bible study is worth years of expensive state programs to care for children who have been incarcerated.

And in that sense, prayerful life, or the entire struggle in spiritual discipline, is the Orthodox martial art. Certain threads more than others, but the disciplined Orthodox life offers more than a martial art as wholesome homes offers something better than a state Department of Corrections or a doctrine of the Trinity that effectively answers social planners: "There are more things in Heaven and earth, visible and spiritual, than are even *dreamed* of in your ideologies."

Orthodox have various statements of how monasticism and the laity are compared, if they should be; I am of the opinion that it is beneficial to monastics to regard laity as fully equal, and laity to regard monastics as immeasurably above them. But some things in monasticism are falsely criticized as "just because it's monasticism:" taking passages of the Bible at face value is not, or at least *should not*, be a particularly distinctive feature of monasticism. And some people have said that Lent is just how Orthodoxy should be year round, and it makes sense to say that the bulk of monasticism is just how all Orthodox Christians should be.

Monasticism is privilege.

Monasticism is privilege, easily on par with a full ride scholarship at a top-notch university. But doesn't it entail poverty, obedience, and chastity? Well, of course. Aren't they difficult? Yes. But the vow of poverty, of never providing for your future self, is a vow of accepting the Providence who knows and loves you (past, present, and future) more than you could possibly ask. It is one of three medications that carves out a niche for abundant health. Perhaps most laity should observe chastity through

faithfulness, but it is the same virtue that powers one practice and the other.

We are to be as the birds of the air, highlighted in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-7:1, Classic Orthodox Bible⁴):

Trusting God wholly

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Trusting God for basic needs

“Therefore I say unto you, Do not worry about your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall

4 Available from <https://classicorthodoxbible.com>.

drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body than garments? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot taller!

“And why do you worry for garments? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or, ‘Wherewithal shall we be clothed?’ (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Do not worry about the morrow: for the morrow has enough worries of its own. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

There is something very powerful here, a something that is missed in business as usual in the U.S. Business as usual means heaping up treasures on earth, saying "God helps those who help themselves" (a quotation from Benjamin Franklin not found anywhere in the Bible), to be your own Providence. The idea that we are to do God's job as our Providence is at times treated harshly by Christ (Luke 12:15):

And [Jesus] said unto them, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?' And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said unto him, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?' So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

I wrote about the husband who owned a gun as a means of being responsible towards his family: but my inward wincing was less that firing a gun is not turning the other cheek, than that he responded out of a spiritual illusion. This side of the Fall, we cannot ever arrange things right, and we do not do well to oust God so that we can get back to steering the helm of our lives *ourselves*.

It may or may not be appropriate for Orthodox laity to arm themselves, but whatever other reasons there may be for arming yourself, shutting off risk is not one of them. It is non-negotiable that no matter what hedge we surround ourselves with, the sand we grasp will slip through our fingers, and this is actually good news: we have another option, living the Sermon on the Mount, not harmed because we do not have control, and free because we know we do not need to have control, open to a larger world than the constricted world we keep on making for ourselves.

There was a Linux fortune that said, on eloquent terms that I cannot fully reproduce, that there were a bunch of starfish clinging to rocks on the bottom of a rapidly flowing river, holding the rocks tightly and terrified they would lose their grip. Then one of them suddenly let go, was battered against a few rocks, and then finding a place in the flow. And, perhaps in a dig at Christianity, the other starfish who didn't get it called the one starfish a Messiah and worshiped him while continuing to cling, and remaining terrified of losing their grip on the rock.

(But we are called to do *both* worship the Man, *and* imitate him.)

The Sermon on the Mount would almost speak more strongly about violence being unworthy of Christians if it *didn't* address violence. The direct mention shadows the

overarching theme, where silence speaks more powerfully than words.

But there are in fact words (Matthew 5:38-6:1, Classic Orthodox Bible):

Beyond the “Deep Magic” of Violence

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:*’⁵ but I say unto you, Resist not ye evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘*Thou shalt love thy neighbour,*’⁶ and hate thine enemy.’ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; Ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them

5 Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21.

6 Leviticus 19:18.

which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

St. Paul's emphatic plea to Christians to not demean themselves and the Church by secular lawsuits against fellow Christians (Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?) is cut from the same cloth.

But there is *more*.

How does the Orthodox Christian martial art really work?

Returning the theme of monasticism as privilege, one aspect of the depth of monasticism is that monks are not to defend themselves by force. When they are accused, they are not to defend themselves in words, as Christ Himself remained silent before Pilate (Note: *...and terrorized Pilate more than any threat could have done*). And this is not exactly a mainstream approach in the West. It's a bit of an oblong concept: something that is a common assumption between the various permutations of pacifism and just war is that, once you've decided what are the appropriate means for self-defense, you can and should use the most effective appropriate means to end the danger with minimal harm to yourself and others. *It just goes without saying that* whatever limits may be, *obviously* defending yourself with speech is appropriate. But the monastic interpretation of "Ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy

right cheek, turn to him the other also." is quite simply that we are not to defend ourselves. We are not to defend ourself by means of lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves by means of less lethal force; we are not to defend ourselves even by words; we are not to defend ourselves even in thoughts. Not a single angry thought is permitted to us, and there are two kinds of power that we wield after renouncing power.

The first kind of power, the (relatively) obvious one, is highlighted in a story from *A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul*:

In the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less, a 10-year old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him. "How much is an ice cream sundae?" "Fifty cents," replied the waitress. The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied a number of coins in it. "How much is a dish of plain ice cream?" he inquired. Some people were now waiting for a table and the waitress was a bit impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she said brusquely. The little boy again counted the coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table, and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier and departed. When the waitress came back, she began wiping down the table and then swallowed hard at what she saw. There, placed

neatly beside the empty dish, were two nickels and five pennies - her tip.

C.S. Lewis's article "Why I Am Not a Pacifist" which would be more accurately be titled, for what it says, "Why No Christian Should Be a Pacifist Nor Have Either Their Church Teachings or Their Conscience Respected As a Conscientious Objector," dismissed what appeared to be Gandhi's toolchest as a dog lying in a manger (as in "Aesop's Fables:" which not only does not eat but also prevents other animals from eating). And it is not clear to me that all of the tools Gandhi used are appropriate: I'm not sure there is ever reason to seek out suffering, and after the Church's decision to both canonize St. Ignatius (who brought martyrdom down on himself), and forbid future Orthodox Christians from trying to provoke martyrdom, apart from strained readings of the Sermon on the Mount, I can't remember seeing any subsequent interpretations of hunger strike as appropriate. In other words, the Sermon on the Mount may give us tools, including a *Do not resist evil* that is never separate from the more foundational Truth in *Do not worry*, does not justify other tactics such as civil disobedience without *direct* provocation, or hunger strikes.

There's plenty of reason for fasting, of course, but fasting is not a tool for straightening out God and his Providence: fasting is a tool to let God straighten *you* out. And in fact the Sermon on the Mount tells us that fasting, like prayer, should be as secret as manageable. Then it can reach its full power. However, Lewis himself may have furnished the most touching portrayal of Gandhi's toolbox in Christian literature of all that I have read, in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*:

"Hail, Aslan!" came his shrill voice. I have the honor—" But then he suddenly stopped.

The fact was that he still had no tail—whether that Lucy had forgotten it or that her cordial, though it could heal wounds, could not make things grow again. Reepicheep became aware of his loss as he made his bow; perhaps it altered something in his balance. He looked over his right shoulder. Failing to see his tail, he strained his neck further till he had to turn his shoulders and his whole body followed. But by that time his hind-quarters had turned too and were out of sight. Then he strained his neck looking his shoulder again, with the same result. Only after he had turned completely round three times did he realize the dreadful truth.

"I am confounded," said Reepicheep to Aslan. "I am completely out of countenance. I must crave your indulgence for appearing in this unseemly fashion."

"It becomes you very well, Small One," said Aslan.

"All the same," replied Reepicheep, "if anything could be done . . . Perhaps her Majesty?" and here he bowed to Lucy.

"But what do you want with a tail?" asked Aslan.

"Sir," said the Mouse, "I can eat and sleep and die for my King without one. But a tail is the honor and glory of a Mouse."

I have sometimes wondered, friend," said Aslan, "whether you do not think too much about your honor."

"Highest of all High Kings," said Reepicheep, "permit me to remind you that a very small size has been bestowed on us Mice, and if we did not guard our dignity, some (who weigh worth by inches) would allow themselves very unsuitable pleasantries at our expense. That is why I have been at some pains to make it known that no one who does not wish to feel this sword as near his heart as I can reach shall talk in my presence about Traps or Toasted Cheese or Candles: no, Sir—not the tallest fool in Narnia!" Here he glared very fiercely up at Wimbleweather, but the Giant, who was always at a stage behind everyone else, had not yet discovered what was being talked about down at his feet, and so missed the point.

"Why have your followers all drawn *their* swords, may I ask?" said Aslan.

"May it please your High Majesty," said the second Mouse, whose name was Peepiceek, "we are all waiting to cut off our own tails if our Chief must go without his. We will not bear the shame of wearing an honor which is denied to the High Mouse."

"Ah!" roared Aslan. "You have conquered me. You have great hearts. Not for the sake of your dignity, Reepicheep, but for the sake of the love that is between you and your people, and still more for the kindness your people showed me long ago when you ate away the cords that bound me on the Stone Table (and it was then, though you have long forgotten it, that you began to be *Talking Mice*), you shall have your tail again."

On an immediate level, this is what nonviolent resistance may seem to have. But the "big picture" realization was one that I realized in discussion with one friend about "What will you do in situation X [which had not, and has not, happened]?" and I told a joke:

A young man who was a prospective captain of a ship was being quizzed about how he would handle difficulties.

The person quizzing him said, "What would you do if a storm came?"

"I'd drop an anchor."

"OK; suppose that the anchor gets stuck and won't come up, and later on another storm came up again. What would you do?"

"I'd drop another anchor."

"Ok, and if that gets stuck and won't come up, and later on you see another storm, what would you do?"

"Where on earth are you getting all these anchors from?"

"From the same place you're getting all these storms from!"

Fr. Thomas Hopko's "55 Maxims for the Christian Life" says, "Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out," and connects with "What would you do in situation X?" and the point I tried to make in "Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of 'Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth.'" We are not to store up treasures on earth only in things external to our bodies; we are not to store up internal treasures on earth, things that exist in our minds.

One of these kinds of false treasure exists in terms of our perceived need to map everything we do out in advance. One teacher talked about how some scholar claimed to map out what St. Irenaeos would have said in various circumstances that hadn't happened: "What would St. Irenaeos have said if Adam and Eve, with their immediate children, had not sinned, but their grandchild did?" And regardless of the content of such scholarship, it is imposing

on St. Irenaeos something utterly foreign to his mindset. As I have seen the academic community today, it is natural both to ask, "What *is* ...?" and "What *would* ...?" when trying to understand something. In patristic writers, only one of the two basic kinds of questions is valid for understanding something: "What *is* ...?" And no real saint that I am aware of announces that we must have a plan that anticipates every possibility before we act. Part of the point in the Sermon on the Mount is that there is no need for planning. It is as if this dialogue plays out:

God: Will you trust me on this?

Us: I don't know. I'm trying to trust you, but I really don't understand what you are trying to do with me here.

God: I *know* you don't know. That's my *point*. As your Spiritual Father, I am not asking you to do my thinking for for me. *I am asking you to trust me*. Do you trust me?

Us: I'm trying to fit things together, really I am, and maybe can work together if I am able to work out a plan. Could you work with me on this?

God: *I am very interested in working with you. Do you trust me?*

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to try to tell fellow Orthodox what saints' footsteps they may follow. There are warrior-saints, and then there is St. Acacius, mentioned in St. John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, who obediently served an abusive elder for nine years until he died, and when asked at his grave, "Brother Acacius, are you dead?" called out from beyond the grave, "No, Father, how is it possible for an obedient man to die?" And there are many others of various stripes, *a kaleidoscope to the glory of God.*

It is not my point—and probably not my position—to tell other Orthodox Christians whether they should join the military, or under what (if any) conditions firearm ownership is appropriate, or other questions regarding violence. I have a hunch that a good set of bright lights that turn on instantly whenever someone approaches your house may, at least by itself, provide a more effective deterrent than a gun for when an intruder is *already* in your house. And it may be a mistake to assume that the real "I'm taking it seriously" way to address threats is something that *starts* with weapons. However, at least for the sake of argument, I do not wish to give a prescription for how others may relate to violence. *But it is my direct wish to challenge the main assumption that keeps popping up when Christians regard violence as the real practical power.*

One point regarding the Sermon on the Mount is that this side of Heaven, control that you plan out is simply impossible. The task is not to God's thinking for him; it is to accept his Providence as intended to bless you entirely, and

trust him with the complete trust that the Sermon on the Mount cries out. This may mean being with the birds of the field and the lilies of the field, and being so *with* (in some cases) or *without* openness to using violence. And, though this is a lesser point, I'm a little wary of a second assumption that lurks under the covers: "Pacifism is idealistic and appropriate for an ideal world, while sometimes using force is what works in the non-ideal world that we have." But there is confusion for people stressed and worried to give that line to "Each day has enough trouble of its own." I've had times with more stress in my life, and times with less, and it may more be true that in an ideal world, we wouldn't need "Each day has enough trouble of its own, but in the rough circumstances in which we live, we need to take things one day at a time, and we need it much more than we would if we were in Paradise.

One ex-military person I spoke with talked about how top brass would keep on waking everyone up at very late night / early morning, sound the alarm, say the USSR was invading *NOW*, and everybody had to get up and go out to the tanks. And so soldiers would grudgingly walk out, dragging their rifles by the muzzle, and get into the tanks, and the live question in everyone's eyes was whether the officers would call off the exercise before they got the tanks out and into mud. The live concern here is whether the soldiers would have to clean the mud off the tanks for moving into the field the next morning. And he talked about *idealistically* believing that *if only* he and his colleagues trained hard enough, no one would attack anyone else.

I remember hearing a missionary's kid who grew up somewhere on the African continent saying, "You can't defeat people who have nothing to lose!" and thinking that

that sounded awfully *idealistic*, something I really wanted to believe but couldn't, but that was over a decade ago, and since then the U.S. has been involved in multiple wars against third world nations and perhaps won *none* of them. World War I proudly paraded a mechanized army down to California for a sort of extended field training exercise where the entire mechanized army failed to apprehend the one single Mexican bandit that they were searching for. In Vietnam, the U.S. strategy was, "Our cool gadgets will win this war for us," the Viet Cong's strategy was to maximize the war's unpopularity back home ("ballbuster": a non-lethal anti-personnel mine used by the Viet Cong, just powerful enough to destroy testicles), and the present strategy in the present conflict of shooting at ISIL from the air and arming jihadists to fight ISIL jihadists is really less of a *military strategy*, properly speaking, than an all-American *marketing strategy*.

Having control this side of Heaven is not possible, and believing that firearms can be a way to opt-out of the conditions Sermon on the Mount addresses in its prescriptions. In that sense gun ownership is dangerous, because even if you accept 100% of what NRA advocates say, you have effectively closed your eyes to some of the bedrock of what the Sermon on the Mount says. In another matter, that of finances, the Fathers are quite clear: "That robe, hanging in your closet, belongs to the poor;" "Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead." If your firearm costs you the ability to live the Sermon on the Mount, drop it off at the police department; it is better for you to enter eternal life as killed where a firearm would have let you stop a crime, than to have your whole body (and your gun with it) cast into Hell.

I might briefly comment that I have brief experience with martial arts, and I have consistently noticed that they had become the driest portions of my spiritual life. Firearms and martial arts, if they are to be useful, depend on constant practice and preparation. As the banner for every school but one of Kuk Sool Won, "We need more practice!" At the grandmaster's school, the banner says, "*You* need more practice!" The common concensus is that with martial arts, you fight noticeably better within months, but real mastery takes *years*, and *years*, and *years*. And even then you don't have a money-back guarantee; any martial arts instructor worth anything will make it clear before you reach black belt level (arguably before you reach anything above white belt) that martial arts instructors will make it abundantly clear that martial arts are no silver bullet; you may be safer in a conflict but not safe against every threat; someone testing for black belt can, if arrogant enough, wind up with a hole in the head. There have been attempts to make something simply easier to learn and remember—Goshin Jitsu is meant to be simple and effective—but keeping up on a martial art just because it might be useful in a fight is a bit like spending a few hours a week practicing a spare profession so that if you happen to lose your job you have a spare profession ready and waiting for you. It's a lot of work, and it's no more of a guarantee at that.

And there is a spiritual toll for practicing violence *over* and *over* and *over*. You sink in a lot of time that might be better spent sharpening your skills in your own profession. Aiki Ninjutsu talks about becoming a passionate protector of others, and talks about building great compassion to offset the incredible destructiveness of the techniques. With all due respect, I need to give all the

compassion to others that I can give, without preventably siphoning it off to offset other considerations. Perhaps you can numb or ignore what it feels like to practice violence on others and have others practice violence on itself; and martial arts have an occult ambiance; the concept of ki / qi / chi is a Buddhist practice, not really Christian, and there is a good case to be made that it's magical, even without taking a common sense look at the philosophies Eastern martial arts draw on, which are almost invariably laden with an occult dimension.

...and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Thoughts Which Determine Our Lives

Much of what I wrote in "*Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret and the Law of Attraction* relates here. After Providence, here is perhaps the core payload for what is the Orthodox martial art.

The English word "practice" has two senses. One is, as a musician says, "I'm practicing," meaning, "I am taking time to make dry runs at this skill and sharpen it as much as possible." Or one speaks of a doctor "practicing medicine," meaning "I am exercising and doing the proper live activity in my profession." I will use the terms *musician-style-practice* and *doctor-style-practice* to distinguish the two meanings

With both firearms and martial arts, you need to practice to keep an edge, practice in the sense of the musician-style-practice. Competence requires an ongoing time sink. But live doctor-style-practice, comes very, very rarely.

One communication textbook talked about what your odds were for being assaulted on your way home: 1 in 10, 1 in 100, 1 in 1000, or 1 in 10,000. The point was that the more TV you watch, the more you overestimate the chances of suffering a violent response. The heaviest TV viewers expected a 1 in 10 chance of assault. The actual figure was the 1 in 10,000 per night figure. Notwithstanding shows glamorizing a highly romanticized view of law enforcement—when did a police show ever depict an officer filling out an hour of paperwork, or spending a day doing a daily grind of dull responsibilities—police officers draw their weapons (excluding training) perhaps once every few years.

In the musician-style-practice, you only practice very, very rarely, even including officers. No matter how much preparation it takes to keep a sharp edge, live doctor-style-practice is, and should be, very rare.

The discipline of *nepsis* or spiritual watchfulness over thoughts, has more than one relevance, but a *nepsis* that watches for and cuts off warring thoughts at the first is invaluable. Though this is a different meaning than when I last saw it, "They say that if you must resort to violence, you have already lost." Read my article "Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives:" then read Elder Thaddeus's original *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* and learn to appreciate your warring thoughts in deeper ways.

It may seem almost "sexist" that the blame, or at least attention and corrections, should be placed entirely on one side, *yours*; but this dark cloud hides an astonishing silver lining. If the correction is only put on one side, *so is the power to change and make the situation better*.

Perhaps **most** (not all) conflicts include a feedback loop of escalating anger (and one that most or all truly good martial

artists know how to shut down, by for instance meekly saying, "You're the tough guy"—and this was a third-degree black belt who meekly and submissively opted out of having to be the tough guy). There is a classic enlightenment exercise where a group of sailors stand in a ring, with instructions to touch the shoulder of the soldier exactly as yours was pressed. And someone touches one of the sailors lightly, with one light finger press. The "equal to what happened to me" results in a heavy finger press, and before too long at all the light touch has become a meaty, and nasty, punch. It is very hard at times, but love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who despitefully use you: but you have the power, many times, to shut down the escalating unmerry merry-go-round that others will not step off of. Not that this is only for pacifists; I have seen soldiers beautifully live out of this power, and people who weren't specifically soldiers but believed in a just war (a western concept that never really took in Orthodoxy even though Orthodoxy never really places an expectation of becoming a pacifist). If Elder Thaddeus's sage advice could be summed up in a single maxim, it might be Proverbs 15:1: "Anger slays even wise men; yet a submissive answer turns away wrath: but a grievous word stirs up anger."

Gandhi said, "*An eye for an eye* only ends by making the whole world blind." each day and practicing our nonviolent thoughts (doctor-style-practice) a watchfulness in thoughts that is alert to snuff out smoulders when it is small rather than heroically deluging a burning house, is harder up front, but *far* easier down the road.

It sounds small, but the results down the road are anything but small.

Holy and blinding arrogance

Elsewhere in *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu writes:

It is said that if you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles; if you do not know your enemies but do know yourself, you will win one and lose one; if you do not know your enemies nor yourself, you will be imperiled in every single battle.

And this is far from what the Orthodox Church has to offer. Do we need to know the demons? *No*. The *Philokalia* may say as much about demons as any Orthodox writing may have, but we are allowed arrogance such as Sun Tzu would have considered a fatal weakness. As regards the demons, we are to be really, properly, truly, and *blindingly* arrogant, like the Orthodox elder who was speaking with a novice about strange noises in a courtyard and told the novice, "It is only the demons. Pay it no mind." This is cut from the same cloth as the liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." *The mind takes the shape of whatever it contemplates*, hence St. Paul's words, "*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*" We should look at Light, not darkness; live the Sermon on the Mount, and then, and not before, will we understand that the Light knows Himself and the darkness; the darkness knows

neither itself nor the Light. If the spiritual eye receives things that make an impression on it, it matters what items it receives impressions from. *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light:* "single" in this context is cut from the same cloth as the Beatitudes that Orthodox chant in Liturgy, confessing in abbreviated form the entire Sermon on the Mount.

It has been said, "You can choose your options, but you cannot choose the consequences of your actions." You can choose whether to look at Light or darkness: in so doing you may choose, by gazing on the Light, to be filled with peace, or to gaze deeply into darkness (and have darkness gaze into you) by training your eyes on the whirlpool of circumstances all of us face. The option is not presented to try to do God's thinking for him, and analyze and work out how we will handle the future, and instead of darkness have all of the joys of peace that beholds the Light of God.

O that we could reach far enough into overreaching arrogance that we could, like saints old and new, look upon good and bad people and only see the beauty of the image of God in each!

Conclusion

A lot has been covered here; the past few paragraphs narrate what, in a very specific sense, can be done as the Orthodox martial art. Broadly and in a deeper sense, holiness *matters*.

We live in turbulent times, as did Elder Thaddeus, who wrote, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*, a gift given to me by a friend who gave a very modest recommendation:

"It's not terribly deep, but I find it helpful.". After reading it and writing, "*Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives: Beyond The Secret and the Law of Attraction*," I came up to him and told him he'd undersold it. It wasn't long before he agreed.

We live in turbulent times, and probably more turbulent and rougher as time goes on. But there is an alternative to being whipped out in the vortex of our times and surroundings. (Elder Thaddeus had many sufferings and was repeatedly taken prisoner by Nazis.) We have a choice about whether we will be sucked into it. It might not seem like it, but we do. Psychologists advising addicts say that you have more power than you think. If we are attentive and refuse to consent to thoughts, perhaps praying to God to save us from this temptation, and if we are in anger, praying for God's every blessing. This is not a quick overall process: it may be something that is a minute to start, and a lifetime to master. But though it may take *years* and *years* and *years* to master, but improvement may start much faster than months.

In "Treasures in Heaven: The Inner Meaning of 'Do Not Store Up Treasures on Earth'," I try to unpack a small mystical slice of "Blessed are the poor in spirit." There is bodily poverty, and monastics are blessed when they let go of physical possessions. But we have many false treasures in terms of ideas in our heads, and the letting-go of these false interior treasures is in step with why my previous parish priest said, "When we are praying, we should not have very good thoughts; we should have *no* thoughts." And this has a poverty that is hard to come by. But once you have tasted it, earthly treasures taste suddenly flat. *You've drunk something purer.*

Beyond the Deep Magic of violence

When aggression and violence are met only with meekness and love, what results can be truly powerful. Evil is not always stopped from harming and killing no matter where you fall: witness Satan's defeat in the martyrs, who are not in any sense killed because they are not good enough as Christians. Martyrdom is implemented by the Devil's work, but the victor in martyrdom is always and ever in the Lord and in the triumphant martyr entering Heaven in glory as a son of God. What happens in martyrdom, but quite a few other places as well, happens when the Deep Magic of violence runs its course, but when it has run its course, the Devil's work is transfigured into something immeasurably far beyond anything that the practical nature of violence can hope for. And its primary application is not reserved to the most extraordinary moments in a well-lived life, but the warp and woof of the daily living of those who practice it, be it on ever so small a scale!

Seeing as are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses,
And such and heavenly treasures are set within our reach,
Let us ever reach,
Further Up and Further In!

Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist

Saying farewell to heroes

C.S. Lewis was one of my youth heroes, and after much quoting of him I have said farewell to him, in *A Pilgrimage from Narnia*.

The oldest written work on my site, “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength,”⁷ is one that I owe to Gandhi. It is an apology for the Christian pacifist position, and I as a Christian held tight to the Sermon on the Mount and nonviolence as best I could. And I was positive Mohondas K. Gandhi had openly pulled from Christianity in his nonviolence, and part of my debt to him is expressed in that in “Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Real Peace Through Real Strength” I took as my model a chapter called “Ahimsa or the Way of Nonviolence” in *All Men Are Brothers: Life and Thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi as Told In His Own Words*. And in fact Gandhi did borrow from

7 cjsheyward.com/peace/

Christianity; he says that the three men he holds as his heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom held their lives as nothing next to their souls. Elsewhere he said that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world, a perfect act. Gandhi in fact wanted to become a Christian, and was soured to Christianity when a missionary turned him away because of the color of his skin. *Absolutely disgusting.*

Yet I am taking leave of Gandhi as the same Orthodox who took leave of C.S. Lewis. I take leave of Gandhi even as it unravels the style of nonviolence I found as a best interpretation of the The Sermon on the Mount. I find in the end not that I was too fixated on the The Sermon on the Mount and took too much from it, but that I took too little. The Indian style of nonviolence has much to commend it, and I am impressed that Indian nationalism identifies with nonviolence instead of glorified violence that affects nationalism in so many other places. India and others have not let Gandhi be the last of a particular nonviolent alternative to violence. But there is a little bit of a burr under my saddle here. The Sermon on the Mount does not, in the main, offer an alternative answer to the questions addressed by just war and violence, not even the alternative answer of voluntary suffering that brought India's freedom. It answers another question altogether.

How else could it be?

The rather obvious question to be raised, by just war Christian and by pacifist as well, is "How else could it be?" How does a Sermon on the Mount that says, "Do not resist evil" not call for nonviolent resistance if it is not taken as a

hyperbolic statement that for more ordinary mortals means something like, "Be restrained when you must resist evil, and grieve when you must do so."? And on this point I would place my own earlier position, and "Blessed are the Peacemakers," in the same category as just war theory. It is an answer to what is the most effective legitimate means to address certain dark situations.

And the answer I would give is that the The Sermon on the Mount does not amount to, simply, "Do not resist evil." Or at least it does not stop there. It says in full (Matthew 5:3-7:27, *Classic Orthodox Bible*⁸),

The beatitudes: The blessings of true discipleship

"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:

8 Available from classicorthodoxbible.com.

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 disciples in the world

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have
lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It
is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast
out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

“Ye are the Light of the world. A city that is set
on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light
a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a
candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are
in the house. Let your Light so shine before
men, that they may see your good works, and
glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

Righteousness: The Law fulfilled

“Think not that I am come to destroy the Law,
or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but

to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, 'Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.' Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. For I say unto you, Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Righteousness illustrated

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, *'Thou shalt not murder;*'⁹ and whosoever shall murder shall be in danger of the judgment: but I say unto you, Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, 'Thou fool,' shall be in danger of Hell fire.' Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the Altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the Altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, ‘Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.’

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, ‘*Thou shalt not commit adultery*:’¹⁰ but I say unto you, Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into Hell.

“It hath been said, ‘Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:’ but I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by

them of old time, ‘Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:’ but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by Heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, ‘Yea, yea;’ or ‘Nay, nay:’ for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Beyond the “Deep Magic” of Violence

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘*An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth:*’¹¹ but I say unto you, Resist not ye evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, ‘*Thou shalt love thy neighbour,*’¹² and hate thine enemy.’ But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to

11 Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, Deuteronomy 19:21.

12 Leviticus 19:18.

them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; Ye may be the children of your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

How to give alms

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father Which is in Heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

How to pray

“And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray

standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father Which is in secret; and thy Father Which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.

“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.

“After this manner therefore pray ye:

‘Our Father Which art in Heaven,
 Hallowed be Thy Name.
 Thy Kingdom come.
 Thy will be done in earth,
 As it is in Heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts,
 As we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation,
 But deliver us from the Evil One:
 For thine is the kingdom, and the
 power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.’

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your

heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

How to fast

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad face: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father Which is in secret: and thy Father, Which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Trusting God wholly

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one,

and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

Trusting God for basic needs

“Therefore I say unto you, Do not worry about your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body than garments? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry yourself into being a foot taller!

“And why do you worry for garments? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or, ‘What shall we drink?’ or,

‘Wherewithal shall we be clothed?’ (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Do not worry about the morrow: for the morrow has enough worries of its own. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

On judging others

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, ‘Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?’ Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye.

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Persevering in prayer

“Keep on asking, and it shall be given you;

keep on seeking, and ye shall find; keep on knocking, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in Heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the prophets.

The narrow gate

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto Life, and few there be that find it.

Beware of false prophets

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth

evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

“Not every one that saith unto Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he that doeth the will of My Father Which is in Heaven. Many will say to me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? And in Thy Name have cast out devils? And in Thy Name done many wonderful works?’ And then will I profess unto them, ‘I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.’

Hearing and doing Jesus’ teachings

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

What is at the heart of this is a Life, a life like the birds of the air and the grass of the field, the Divine life, that is as naked as Adam. One of the greatest idols and transgressions against the The Sermon on the Mount. One particularly illuminating footnote in *The Orthodox Study Bible* reads (Luke 12:16-21):

Then [Jesus] spoke a parable to them, saying, "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many good things laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry." ' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night [angels shall require] your soul of you; then whose things be which you have provided?'¹

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God."

The comment reads:

"Whose will those things be by which you have provided?" is the key to understanding the saving up of material goods. St. John Chrysostom writes that the only barns we need we already have: "the stomachs of the poor."

St. Basil the Great taught that the bread in our cupboard belongs to the hungry man; the coat hanging unused belongs to the one who needs it; the shoes rotting in our closet belong to the one who has no shoes, and money we hoard belongs to the poor. St. Ambrose teaches, "The things which we cannot take with us are not ours. Only virtue will be our companion when we die." Even when Joseph stored up grain in Egypt (Gn 41), it was for the benefit of the whole nation.

Sandwiched between "Do not store up treasure on earth" and "No man can serve two masters" is the strange-sounding, sandwiched "The eye is the lamp of the body." But this is of a piece with the text that surrounds it. Is our eye fixed on providing for ourselves through earthly means, or looking up to God in the trust that he will provide and the realization that he knows our needs better than we do and loves us better than we know how to love? If we are confused here then our eye is not "single", but poisoned. Those of us who are not monastics are permitted some possessions, but better not to create an endowment that provides the illusion that we are not at the hands of the severe mercy of a providing God. And when we begin to loosen our grip on money, God's providence is written in stronger, starker strokes.

And the point of this is not to fetter us, but to free us from what seems necessary and recognize the shackles we were bound to. On this point I am talking about money; but I might as well speak of a gun and self-defense lessons. The Sermon on the Mount's motto is not a Boy Scout's *Be*

prepared, but a carefree, Don't be prepared. Be as naked as Adam.

The Divine Liturgy and its associated readings speak of "He who of old stripped you both naked," meaning "The Devil who of old stripped you, Adam and Eve, both naked." It wasn't just that their flesh in its pure form raised no question of lust. Neither fire nor water nor the elements could touch Adam or Eve until they abdicated, and there are stories of a saint who threw down the gauntlet to a sorcerer, walked into a fire and said "I'm unharmed," and when the sorcerer was thrown into the flame with him and was burned, healed him and sent him out unharmed. On a more mortal level, monks and nuns can dress almost or exactly the same in terms of layers of clothing between summer and winter, and that includes an American Midwest summer and winter. Paradise is where the saints are; the door may have been closed to Adam and Eve but it is open to the saints.

And all of this is an invitation to freedom, free and absolute, unencumbered and unchained freedom. It is not legalism that bids us, "If someone conscript you to go with him one mile, go with him two;" it is utter freedom even from selfishly stopping with what was asked. Christ the Lily of the Valley is the flower that leaves a fragrant scent on the heel that crushes it: but what we may find is that those things we expect to crush us, are just the removal of a shackle. And at the end saintly peacemakers are of a piece with the merciful, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake: there is a unity of the beatitudes and they are rightly sung as a shorthand for the entire Sermon on the Mount in every Orthodox Liturgy. There is freedom

to trust in the Lord's providence, freedom to every kind of generosity, freedom from lust, freedom from anger, every freedom that counts.

Q: So what's the difference?

A: The Saint and the Activist.

Some readers may wonder where really I have departed from Gandhi. If he were alive, quite possibly he could say he agreed with most or all of it, not out of diplomatically seeking common ground, but out of a direct candor. But I assert there is a difference.

Military action and nonviolent resistance are two answers to the same question. Between the two, military action has much to commend it, and in fact Gandhi had great respect for soldiers: in *Blessed Are the Peacemakers*, I wrote:

Once the men of a village came, running, and told Gandhi that they had run away while the police were raping and pillaging. When they told him that this was because of his instruction to be nonviolent, he hung his head in shame. He would not have been angry with them if they had defended their families by the power of a sword. He would have approved had they stood in harm's way, calling all injury to themselves without seeking to strike or to harm, to the point of death. But to run away like that and passively leave those who could not run was an act of great and terrible

cowardice, the darkest possible answer to the problem.

Passivity seems to be assumed of *pacifism*, and VI HILARION's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount treats the nonviolent responses and Christ's subsequent example as simple passivity.

This interpretation might have mystified Gandhi, who drew heavily from the Sermon on the Mount and said,

My creed of nonviolence is an extremely active force. It has no room for cowardice or even weakness. There is hope for a violent man to be some day non-violent, but there is none for a coward. I have, therefore, said more than once...that, if we do not know how to defend ourselves, our women and our places of worship by the force of suffering, i.e., nonviolence, we must, if we are men, be at least able to defend all these by fighting. (YI, 16-6-1927, p196)

and elsewhere,

No matter how weak a person is in body, if it is a shame to flee, he will stand his ground and die at his post. This would be nonviolence and bravery. No matter how weak he is, he will use what strength he has in inflicting injury on his opponent, and die in the attempt. This is bravery, but not nonviolence. If, when his duty is to face danger, he flees, it is cowardice. In

the first case, the man will have love or charity in him. In the second and third cases, there would be a dislike or distrust and fear. (H, 17-8-1935, p211)¹³

Now I do not ask the reader to believe Gandhi was *right* in what he said; but I do ask the reader who interprets Gandhi's words as passivity in the face of evil to recognize that they are interpreting Gandhi very, very differently from how Gandhi understood himself.

Also, I would quote a page about C.S. Lewis's "Why I am not a Pacifist:"¹⁴

Hold on. Jesus says a person should turn the other cheek, right? Lewis presents three ways of interpreting Jesus. First, the pacifists way of imposing a "duty of nonresistance on all men in all circumstances." Second, some minimize the command to hyperbole. The third is taking the text at face value with the exception toward exceptions. Christians, Lewis says, cannot retaliate against a neighbor who does them harm, but the homicidal manic, "attempting to murder a third party, tried to knock me out of the way, [so] I must stand aside and let him get his victim?" asks Lewis, who answers his own question with a resounding, "No."

13 These, and other quotes, may be perused at <https://www.mkgandhi.org/momgandhi/chap28.htm>.

14 <https://www.cslewis.com/why-im-not-a-pacifist/>

C.S. Lewis formed me as a writer, but what he has established here is not that the homicidal maniac must be resisted. **What he has established is that he doesn't know how to read**, or at least set that ability aside if he ever read Gandhi (and India was important to him; there was an India in his childhood fantasy of Boxen).

The distinction between stepping *out of* harm's way and stepping *into* harm's way is one of the most cardinal importance here. An equally bad pacifist response might be to say: "*If there is a homicidal maniac attempting to murder a third party, and I have a gun, am I going to engage in violence and use the gun to kill myself,*" and then feel the need to answer your own question with a resounding "No." The misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the opposing camp's perspective is *capital*.

From speaking with and listening to soldiers, I recognize military training and life as the cross of St. George, an ascetical framework that is much more disciplined than most life outside the military. Hard work and dedication are good things, and there is much to be praised about the cross of St. George. Nonviolent activism such as Gandhi offered, the practice of satyagraha which I refer to as 'peacemaking', perhaps questionably, has more to commend it. It is also disciplined, and it does not resist force with force. None the same, it is an alternative in the same orbit as military action. It does not stain its hands with others' blood, but it is a tool you can use to achieve the same kind of end as military resources. India's independence was won with nonviolent resistance. But it is the sort of goal that could have been achieved by warfare, and in fact it stands in stark contrast to other nations as

"achieving without bearing the sword what elsewhere has not been gained except by bearing the sword." And this falls infinitely short of resting in the hands of providence, naked as Adam.

I have written elsewhere of the Saint and the Activist: in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, in "The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount," and principally in "An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism." If I may put it in a table:

| Question | The Activist | The Saint |
|--|--|--|
| <i>What is the chief end of mankind?</i> | To change the world. | To glorify God and enjoy him forever. |
| <i>What is that in a word?</i> | Change. | Contemplation. |
| <i>By what means do you pursue that end?</i> | By means an atheist and a religious person could equally recognize as effective. | Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. This means that you work sometimes in ways an atheist would see as foolish. |
| <i>What is the place of nonviolence?</i> | It is a tool for political influence. | It is a flower of spiritual growth. |
| <i>What is the place of</i> | If you are disciplined, you | Protestants have said, "Mission exists because |

| Question | The Activist | The Saint |
|------------------------------------|---|--|
| <i>discipline?</i> | are more effective at getting things done. | worship does not:" no one, without exception, exists for the sake of missions. All mankind, without exception, exists for the sake of worshipping God. Some people, however, are deprived of the purpose for which they are created, and therefore some people are missionaries so that more people may enjoy the purpose for which they are made. In like fashion, spiritual discipline exists because contemplation does not. It is a corrective when we have lost touch with the life of contemplation. |
| <i>What do you live to become?</i> | A catalyst for a better world. | To become by grace what Christ is by nature. |
| <i>What is the Bible for?</i> | To push moral authority behind the causes we further. | Part of God's work to shape us to grow in faith. |
| <i>What is justice?</i> | Equitable redistribution of resources, as | One of the four cardinal virtues of classical antiquity, that is at times |

Question

The Activist

The Saint

conceived by assuming that political reforms included in this goal will do nothing to hinder the economy's ability to do all that is asked of it.

interchangeable with spiritual righteousness.

What is the government's role?

The more important a task is, the more essential it is that it is channeled through the government. Success usually includes bringing about governmental reforms.

Government has a place, but that place is not the place of a messiah. Success is not usually connected to governmental reforms.

Can human nature be improved on?

Yes; we can bring it about in others through political programs.

Yes; if we let God work with us we will be improved in the work.

| Question | The Activist | The Saint |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| <i>What attitude brings real success?</i> | Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me. | Be it unto me according to thy word. |
| <i>What is wrong with the world?</i> | A number of issues, most importantly the issues I am fighting and giving the most advocacy for. | <i>Me.</i> |

Where does Gandhi stand in all of this?

There was one document forwarded that listed a bunch of statements like, "If you disapprove of sport utility vehicles and private jets and own a sport utility vehicle and private jet, you might be a liberal." And on that count, Gandhi cannot be called an unadorned Activist. He didn't just say, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's wants;" his gaunt frame attests to the fact that he was attending to the beam in his own eye rather than the speck in his brother's eye. His writing is devout; "God" is not, as with many of today's Activists, a word not to be used in polite company. Gandhi cannot be completely understood except with reference to Saints, and what I would call the centerpiece of his Activism is drawn out of from Saint terrain. Gandhi's particular genius is to take nonviolent resistance as one of many particular eddies in the flow of holiness in the plane of the Saint, and transform

it to be a keystone in the plane of the Activist. That places Gandhi away from being at least a pure saint to being substantially an Activist. It makes him, in fact, more of an Activist than if he had merely used existing Activist tools; he was Activist enough to profoundly contribute to the bedrock of Activism.

Furthermore, I am concerned about the wake that he has left. Not that this is a unique concern about Mr. Gandhi; I have raised concerns about the wake left by Fr. Seraphim (Rose). I have seen one Gandhi quote in the wild that alludes to the Sermon on the Mount, "An eye for an eye only ends by making the whole world blind." But this is an Activist argument; an atheist Activist and a Saint could equally agree that the basic argument is sound or unsound. And that's it for religious quotes. In *All Men Are Brothers*, Gandhi unashamedly, frequently, and freely refers to God. But I have never seen a Gandhi quote in the wild that uses the G-word. And when Gandhi's style of nonviolent resistance is imitated today, it is used in a way that is completely detached from the Saint's freedom, that is more removed from the Saint than not protesting.

Rivers of living water

By contrast, I would tell the story of St. Photini, the Woman at the Well, or part of it. It was shameful for the Woman at the Well to come alone to draw water; women would come together to draw water in groups. No other woman would be caught dead with a woman of her reputation, and when she evasively answered Jesus's "Go and call your husband," she was dodging her shame. Earlier she had sought to enlist Christ's help in running from her

shame; her words, "Give me this water," were not so that she could dodge the manual labor of drawing water, but so that she could run from the shame of having to draw water alone. And Christ did not give her what she wanted; instead, in answering her evasive "I have no husband" with, "You have truly said, 'I have no husband', for you have had five husbands and the one you have now is not your husband," pulled her through her shame and opened her eyes to higher things. The story builds up to her running, free from shame, telling people, "Come and see a man who told me every thing I ever did!" She sought Christ's help in covering up her shame; *instead he made her unashamed as Adam*. And it is in this unashamed woman that the story unfolded of a Great Martyr and Equal to the Apostles.

This is what it means to be naked as Adam. It is not a license for indecency; when she gave Christ an evasive answer, he called a spade a spade. But she did become like the Adam whom fire and water could not harm. The point of this is not that her story goes on to her being tortured and her whole company drinking poison and being unharmed by it, but that everything at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount was alive in her. In her later story much is told of miracles, but perhaps we should make less of the fact that she went to tortures and was miraculously delivered, and more of the fact that she went to tortures and was faithful. She did, in the spirit of giving more than was asked, when Nero decided to bring her to trial, she went ahead and tried to convert him. She didn't succeed at *that*, but she did seem to convert practically everyone else she came in contact with. But what is significant is not just the results that she brought about. What is significant is that she was faithful, with the overflowing freedom that soars as the birds of the

air. Perhaps we are not Saints on the level of St. Photini; perhaps it is not within our reach to be called Equal to the Apostles. But what is in our reach is to be a little more a Saint, a little less of an Activist.

Now, a word on being naked as Adam. St. Photini wore clothes and so should we. It is true that there are some saints who labored without clothing: the pre-eminent example is St. Mary of Egypt, and there have been male Desert Fathers who were naked. But we should wear normal clothes even as St. Photini did. *What is forbidden to those who would be naked as Adam is not literal clothing but metaphorical armor.* What is forbidden is not trusting in God's Providence but trying, in addition to the Lord's Providence, or instead of it (if these are really two different things) to straighten things out for ourselves. The opposite of this is someone like St. Photini who, instead of waiting to be captured, went on her own initiative to Caesar Nero. She trusted in God's Providence in a way that could be seen as blackmailing God. But there is something very like Gandhi's nonviolent resistance, not in how the Saint deals with evil in the world, but how the Saint works with God. If a Saint were told, "You are making no provision to take yourself but it's like you're blackmailing God by your actions," one Saint might respond, giving more than was asked, "Yes, I'm emotionally blackmailing God, and you should emotionally blackmail him too!"

Deep in our bones

Activism runs deep in our bones today; I surprised one professor who discussed disability and an "autism and advocacy" conference, that the natural way to seek the best

interests of the autistic community is by political advocacy. And I tried, perhaps in vain, to show her that of the two assigned articles she gave on dealing with autism and disability, one offered a clear activist agenda for autism and disability, and the other was not political, at least not in an overly narrow understanding of politics, but was the father of an autistic child speaking of limitless love. My professor couldn't see what would benefit the autistic besides rolling out one more theme in political activism.

And so, with activism deep in our bones, if we look for a saint, the kind of figure that so naturally comes to mind is Gandhi, or Martin Luther King if we insist on a Christian. Both admired and sought to imitate Christ; both led nonviolent resistance against laws that were legislated evil. Both sought a response to evils out of the Sermon on the Mount. And both contributed to the Activist outlook that is now non-negotiable in the academy. Not necessarily that Gandhi's style of nonviolence is non-negotiable; Gandhi respected his enemies, while it is perfectly socially acceptable in some queer circles to break in to Catholic churches and vandalize them, and spray paint swastikas to identify Romans with Hitler. But the question in so much of the academy is not, "Are you a Saint or an Activist," but, "On to the real question. What *kind* of Activist are you?" (If they have enough distance to recognize that that is the only *real* question in their eyes.)

Conclusion: Saints forever!

The Activism we see in the Academy may be the damned backwing of Gandhi's nonviolent Activist precedent. That much will not be investigated here. What I

will say is much the same thing I would say to C.S. Lewis, that I in fact did imply to him in “A Pilgrimage from Narnia:”

You helped me reach where I am now, and I would be much poorer had our conversation been deleted from my past. I have sat at your feet. But now even what I have taken from you summons me to bid you farewell. *If your right eye or your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.* Holding on to your ecumenism, Mr. Lewis, or—it is a deeper cut—your nonviolence, Mr. Gandhi, is to lose everything you sought for. The journey in faith involves many times when we cut off a right hand or take out a right eye. Perhaps we lose nothing, or only a piece of Hell, when we do so. But God created man to glorify him and become him forever, and I cannot be an Activist: I can only strive to be a Saint.

Thus I bid farewell to heroes of my youth.

Can You Smoke Without Inhaling?

Martial Arts and the Orthodox Christian

I have met the below kind of slippery words in Orthodoxy, and I did not like it then either. I remember one subdeacon proudly explaining that he had dealt with Evangelicals, gently defusing doubt about venerating the Mother of God by saying, "*You wouldn't be disrespectful to your mother, would you?*"

The late medieval veneration of the Mother of God was called 'idolatry' by the Reformers not only because the Reformers unwittingly took up the late Western medieval obsessive fixation on idolatry, but also because the Mother of God occupies a position that most of Protestant Christianity doesn't have a conceptual cubbyhole for except for as a rival to God. If Protestants speak of Mariolatry, the

assessment might be flawed, but the real flaw is often unconscious and unwitting. There is room in Orthodoxy for a Mother of God who does not take away from the incomparable Oneness of God, but there is not such a place among the more traditional Protestants: the only cubbyhole she may be put in is as a rival to God.

I do not like it when objections are made to vanish in a puff of sophistry, even when the party performing the disappearing act is on my side.

A provoking article about yoga in Georgia

There was an article which discussed the Orthodox Church and yoga in Georgia. It made no mention of martial arts, but it left me thinking about how its substance would meet martial arts.

Probably the most striking part of the discussion of the Orthodox Church in Georgia giving a cautious, skeptical eye to yoga, and one of yoga's advocates said, "With time, as practitioners realized that "[b]y chanting one 'Om,' they're not going to change their religion," the objections vanished." This answer reminds me of how Charles Babbage was asked by members of the Parliament if his analytical engine could arrive at the correct answer even if it were given incorrect data to work with. He said, "I cannot rightly apprehend what confusion of ideas would lead to such a question." And I cannot rightly apprehend what confusion of ideas would lead an Orthodox to accept that reply.

The term 'yoga' is from the Sanskrit and means a spiritual path, and in that sense with unadorned simplicity an Orthodox Christian may claim to be a devotee of the

Christian yoga, much as for that matter an Orthodox Christian speaking with a follower of the Budo (Warrior's Way) may with unadorned simplicity claim to be following Christian Do. Something close to this insight is at the heart of *Christ the Eternal Tao*. The question of whether chanting one 'Om,' or rather, 'Aum,' as the "Sacred Syllable" is more properly called, will change your religion is neither here nor there. Saying the Jesus Prayer once *not* make one an Orthodox hesychast, but this exact point is neither here nor there. Meditation in yoga does not stop with one 'Om' any more than Orthodox hesychasm stops with saying the Jesus Prayer once. On this point I would bring in that the Jesus Prayer is so important in Orthodoxy that in nineteenth century Russia there was genuine, heartfelt resistance to teaching the Jesus Prayer to laity on the concern that access to something so great without the protecting buttress of monastic living would lead them into pride to the point of spiritual illusion. At the risk of claiming insider status in Hinduism or treating Hinduism as a copy of Orthodoxy, I might suggest that the place of the "Sacred Syllable" in Hinduism is something like the place of the Jesus Prayer in Orthodoxy, alike foundational to the depths of their spiritual treasures, alike the metronome of silence to its practitioners. The concern that the yoga that is drawn from Hinduism constitutes a spiritual path inconsistent with Orthodoxy is anything but kneejerk conservatism, especially if chanting 'Aum' once is the Hindu equivalent of taking the Eucharist once (a point on which I am very unsure). But it represents some fundamental confusion of ideas to speak of "the neutral syllable 'Om,'" as one workbook endorsed a popularization of yoga in the interest of treating depression and bipolar disorder.

Thus far I have focused on the analogies and similarities of hesychasm to the meditation that is found in Hinduism and Buddhism and is part of internal martial arts. It may be described as "divorced from" its religious roots (the founding grandmaster of Kuk Sool Won), but it is a common practice in internal martial arts (I never reached a high enough rank in Aiki Ninjutsu to be expected to join them in meditation), and it may not so easily be separated from its roots as it is presented. Part of the article I read on Georgia and yoga talked about meditation as affecting mind and body and in certain contexts produces a state of extreme suggestibility, quite far from the pattern in the saint's lives where the Lord, the Theotokos, or a saint tells someone something, and ends up doing so at least two or three times because the devout Orthodox is simply more afraid of being deceived than of failing to jump at a command they consider themselves unworthy of. The state of extreme suggestibility produced by meditation opens the door to demonic "insights", and one of the questions raised was, "Do you want to train in a discipline where the leaders are likely under demonic influence, in postures intended to be part of a spiritual path where you, too, will be invited to the place of suggestibility where you will be open to demonic influence?" The entire discipline points to the demonic; why think we can handle it safely? St. Paul writes, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?" It might be begging the question to assume immediately that yoga is one of the cups referred to in this passage, but it is also precariously close to begging

the question to assume that the passage is simply irrelevant to whether it is wise for Orthodox Christians to practice.

Have I been able to smoke without inhaling?

Before talking about martial arts, which I will get to after laying some preliminaries, I would like to talk about an area where I did my best to "smoke without inhaling." I had come to believe that how Dungeons and Dragons and fantasy literature portray magic is not acceptable: perhaps it would be appropriate to portray a character's occult engagement as a serious sin that opens a door to the demons who hate us, but as it was argued to me, it's merely a depiction of a world with alternate physical laws, and when I took that up seriously and asked, "Do you know to what tolerances the constants of the physical world are tuned? If I were to have aim that good, I could hit something much smaller than a proton at the furthest reaches of the universe. Having alternate physical laws that would support ordinary life as we know it and in addition pack in magic is a very tall order. Would you also read fantasy of a world where adultery was harmless due to alternate laws?"

This last polemic may be beside the point here, but what is more to the point is that a friend, not to say very experienced author, responded to a mailing list post suggesting that marketing-wise the first three books an author publishes establish the author's "brand", and suggested that my brand might be non-magical fantasy. And while I would not wish for that brand now, this was a carefully considered suggestion from someone who had

read my work at length, and it makes sense. The list of works that could be called nonmagical fantasy, some written after he made the suggestion, include the short stories "The Spectacles," "Within the Steel Orb," and the novellas, *The Steel Orb*, *Firestorm 2034*, and *The Sign of the Grail*. And there is a reason I have not displayed any of the novellas on my books page; *The Sign of the Grail* in particular was a work where I realized that my greatest successes (and in a work where I made some bad decisions that jeopardized the work) let me realize that what I was attempting was impossible. I would describe it as, "I succeeded, and in succeeding realized that what I was attempting was impossible."

Some time later, a priest or monk was speaking me and warned about the perennial temptation to escape the here and now. This temptation is hard to pin down; it can take place physically, or mentally by imagination, or by street drugs, or... When this was pointed out, after initially resisting it, I realized that a great many things I did lacked the joy of gratefully accepting the here and now: they provide escape, and one good friend praised "Within the Steel Orb" precisely as a way to escape that he couldn't put down.

I would have said then that I smoked, but didn't inhale. I would now say that I inhaled more than I thought, and taking a "smoke, but do not inhale" attitude to sin is a losing proposition. Besides the works listed I made a role-playing game, *The Minstrel's Song*, which is free of magic but still delivers the escape of fantasy. If you will, it offers a more dilute, less forceful delivery of poison than *Dungeons and Dragons*, *Shadowrun*, or many more of the plethora of role playing games out today, and perhaps God may use it

to wean people off of that kind of recreation. I may have had a clear conscience when I wrote it, but remember Christ's words, "*I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit,*" and this is one of the things God has pruned from me.

Proverbs asks, "*Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?*" This is God speaking, and the whole topic of fantasy, especially non-magical, represents an area where I tried to "smoke, but do not inhale," and it is evident to me that I did inhale a good deal more than was good for me, and a great deal more than I realized. I had, and probably do still have, feet partly of iron and partly of clay.

Martial arts without inhaling?

When I touched base with my spiritual father years back about martial arts, he permitted it up to a point; I know that spiritual prescriptions are not to be copied from one patient to another, but he allowed me to study martial arts that were really just techniques, but not martial arts that were more of a philosophy. I had previously had about a year's combined study between Kuk Sool Won and Karate; I thought that I would study another martial art without inhaling, and simply try to dodge certain aspects in studying Aiki Ninjutsu. (I tried to follow the spirit and intent of my spiritual father's words, but perhaps I should have tried to ask him once I became aware of the neuro-linguistic programming and success plans.) What I really wanted was

the stealth training, but God closed the door to the weekend training that would cover stealth.

After having gotten a certain point in, I emailed the instructor saying that I was coming to appreciate that Aiki Ninjutsu represents a complete spiritual tradition and does not mesh well with Christianity. I mentioned as an example the student's Creed, which begins, not with the magnificence of "I believe in one God...", but "I believe in myself. I am confident. I can accomplish my goals." I said that believing in oneself represented a fundamental spiritual failing in Christianity. Had he asked questions or tried to understand me in dialogue beyond my first words, I would have referred to him to Chesterton in *Orthodoxy*, Chapter 2:

THOROUGHLY worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, "That man will get on; he believes in himself." And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written [the asylum] "Hanwell." I said to him, "Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know

where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. "Yes, there are," I retorted, "and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has 'Hanwell' written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus." And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" After a long pause I replied, "I will go home and write a

book in answer to that question." This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

I said that if he were to want to know more, I would have referred him to this passage. (The Fathers do not rebut the phrase "believing in yourself", because it was coined and popularized after your time. When it was called "pride" or similar names, it was ripped to shreds.) Perhaps some of the more recent writing from Mount Athos may address "believing in yourself," but I am limited in my grasp of what is current on Mount Athos.)

He responded with an authoritative statement that his art was appropriate for people of all religions or no religion, including Christian, and gave a recipe for success that began with believing in oneself. It was an Activist recipe, not a Saint's, as I lay out two ultimate orientations in "Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist," not a saint's; I did not expect him to take the role of the saint, but he seemed to only see the Activist approach as a live option. Now the Saint and the Activist do not represent mutually exhaustive options; I would expect Japan's history to hold at least one other model besides them; and the martial art was presented as drawing on centuries or millenia of Japanese history, but it seemed to incorporate neuro-linguistic programming.

And on this point I will notice a difference between the martial art I was taught and prior martial arts: Kuk Sool Won and Karate both spoke, relatively frequently, of emphasizing "harmony between opponents." In Aiki Ninjutsu, the code of ethics includes dealing with others in a "harmonious" way, but I never heard advocacy of humble harmony between opponents: by contrast, one of the more

advanced lessons covered with beginners is "become the center:" you dictate what is going on. The art may have been combined with Aikido, which is perhaps the most harmonious-with-opponents of martial arts, but as it was combined and presented, I never heard on the mat someone speaking of harmony with one's opponents, and I heard and saw practice at becoming the center. The teacher seemed to be trying to "win through becoming the center" rather than "win through harmony with one's opponent."

For my next point, I need to say a couple of words about the ki that is central to internal martial arts. "Ki", translated "spirit" and "energy" in the Aikido poster hanging in the dojo, is a foundational concept in so-called "internal" martial arts and appears to me to be a large part of the inspiration for the Force as dramatized in Star Wars. The two are not interchangeable (for instance, I have never heard a martial artist discuss a light side and a dark side to ki or try to levitate something), but I'm not sure of any other concept readily accessible to the Western mind that translates "ki" (the Greek "pneuma" has been a translation suggested by a Tae Kwon Do leader, but it is an approximation while "ki", "chi", and "qi" in Asian languages do translate each other or rather refer the user to the same concept). Interacting with ki is at the heart of internal martial arts.

Perhaps I should make this point hesitantly, because when a Protestant tells an Orthodox who represents the living Tradition, "I understand your Tradition better than you because of my book learning," it normally signals a profound confusion that can get better only if the Protestant gets rid of the book and actually openly meets the Holy Tradition as it appears before him. That is one of the

reasons I was very slow to disclose “Orthodoxy, Contraception, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article,” because my book learning contradicted the plain and unanimous teaching by priest and laity that Orthodoxy allows contraception if you'll follow a few basic rules. I am still concerned that I published it too quickly.

With that stated, books like *Essence of Ninjutsu* by the grandmaster attribute a profound and occult spiritual significance to kiaiing. I do not remember if it was in this book, but I remember reading the grandmaster forbidding people to take pictures of him during lectures, and when people tried to take pictures, he kiai-ied—and the pictures did not turn out. The one exception was a photographer who kiai-ed as he took pictures, and this was treated by the grandmaster as a "sometimes, you gotta break the rules" exception. Two of his pictures were included in that book; one featured a blur which was claimed to be a grandmaster from prior centuries advising him as a familiar spirit. It was also presented that a sufficient kiai can without any physical blocking stop an attacker. Et cetera. To kiai seems to be the martial arts equivalent of Orthodox making the sign of the cross.

The point may be raised that there is something very natural about tensing your muscles and maybe grunting in physical exertion. I would respond with the following analogy: There are natural hormonal levels in people's bodies, which drop off with age. Then there is traditional medical use of steroids, including my use of steroids after radiotherapy knocked out my thyroid function. Then there is the greyish area of general "hormone replacement therapy" as handled by anti-aging, which takes as axiomatic

that a 62 year old man should have identical hormones coursing through his blood as a 26 year old man; this is an obstacle to genuine maturity in the aged. Then there is traditional use of steroids which doses up to ten thousand times the doses used in traditional medicine, which falls into the category of "Somewhere back there, way back there, we crossed a line." It is natural, up to a point, to tense one's muscles and grunt or yell when doing physical exertion, *and with a clean conscience I always breathed out when I was striking*. But the further along the spectrum you go, the more you have crossed a line, and if you are working to a kiai that will do things a skeptic would not believe, you've crossed a line.

Perhaps the most basic interaction with ki that I have seen in martial arts was to "ki out", as it was called in Kuk Sool Won and maybe Karate, or "kiai" in Aiki Ninjutsu, sometimes translated "spirit yell." Aiki Ninjutsu, unlike the other two arts as I was exposed to them, also has a system of four vowels, wrapped with consonants into English words in most English-speaking areas, which are used in different contexts; I am not sure about this but I believe they are connected to the elements of earth, air, fire, and water as they play out. And I emailed the instructor asking if it would make sense to train given that I was not comfortable with this spiritual practice. He gave me another "become the center" answer that spoke of my confusion of terminology, and I wrongly assumed that because it was called a "spirit yell", it was a spiritual practice. But in my earlier practices totalling to about a year, I kied out and was never comfortable with it; *it felt wrong*. This time through, I watched a video where his beautiful wife, also a black belt and instructor, kiated while cutting with the sword. What I

saw in this was spiritual ugliness, as watching something unclean.

Besides telling me I was confused about terminology of the "spirit yell" and called it a spiritual practice out of confusion, he said that I was spending too much time trying to see how my religion would "fit into things," gave a sharp quote about narrow-mindedness, and said it would make sense to "discontinue training."

The other two times I was involved in martial arts, I did not try to avoid inhaling, and these were some of the driest times spiritually that I knew. This time, I signed a contract saying, in essence, "It is your choice what things you will participate in on an entirely voluntary basis; if you choose not to do certain things, it is our choice whether or not to withhold [advances in] rank." Now I had expected to make progress slowly; martial arts' first training is training me on my weakest point and while I believe I might advance quickly at higher levels where I would be in a better position to use my strengths, I expected slow progress. If I wanted to be trained differently, I could at my option pay for private lessons, but I was trying to just get through the basics without asking for exceptions to how the training usually works. I had not expected that the Sensei would like my asking about practicing without the spirit yell as a spiritual practice, but I was not expecting him to say that that was reason to discontinue practice.

Now if you will ask if I was angry with him, I would say "no", and I don't want to hear about him being hypocritical in his words about my narrow-mindedness. It seemed, if anything, like God acting through him to say "You have had enough" and take away a bottle of wine.

There were other times I quietly opted out and got away with it: on entering or leaving a class session, we were supposed to clap twice to get rid of bad energy and then clap once to acquire good energy. But I had been told repeatedly that I needed to yell a vowel on striking a target, and my opting out was noticed and given corrections during the last session.

Before I began practice

I had practiced two other martial arts, Kuk Sool Won and Karate as mentioned, and did not attempt to "smoke without inhaling." Both of those I did with an unclean conscience, and there was an incredible growing dryness in my spiritual life. This time I tried to avoid inhaling, and in large measure the question on my conscious was, "You deal in two forms of power that do not basically edify. Do you wish to deal in one more?" I have, for now at least, a regular paycheck coming in, and the Gospel is remarkably cool to the usefulness of money, especially when it is not used for alms for the poor. I work with computers, and I am rather skeptical about whether they are as good for the whole person as they might seem. (See the collection: *The Luddite's Guide to Techonology*, \$25.99 paperback, \$2.99 Kindle for more details.) The moral of these things is not that the forms of power are utterly unlawful, but that they are less valuable than they seem, they require us to take command of them if we are to use them rightly, and most of the time they could use debunking. And in fact I did try to debunk them in the discussion of the Sermon on the Mount in "Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist." "I spoke of being "naked as Adam", and at the risk of

belaboring a metaphor underscored that what is forbidden here is not literal clothing but metaphorical armor. Now martial practice can be consistent with being "without metaphorical armor;" one martial artist made a parody ad for martial arts touting such things as, "Get beat up by people twice your age and half your size!" The further people get into martial arts, the more aware they are of their vulnerability, and it's pure snake oil when someone advertises some super elite program that will make you the world's greatest martial artist in two months. So I would be cautious of saying that no one in any martial art can be living the Sermon on the Mount, but I believe the teacher did me a kindness by virtually expelling me from the art, and I am in no rush to find another. Instead of trying more efforts to acquire dubiously helpful forms of power, I could turn my attention to areas where I could better use what computers I have. The Philokalia tells of people who were mired in clay and calling out to others not to become mired, found their salvation. Perhaps that describes *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, because while I may have some of the detachment that is argued, I am a great deal more enmeshed with technology than with some other things. I would not say that I am strong enough to successfully "smoke without inhaling" when dealing with technology.

Conclusion

When I first visited the dojo, I saw a ?red? belt student wearing a black T-shirt with tattered letters, saying on one side,

The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

– Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

I wasn't able to look up what the other side said, but I remember it was a quote from the same book. And I said mentally, "I know what kind of people I'm dealing with." Maybe I should have been afraid, confronted him, or something else; I have never seen such socially acceptable hate speech. But part of my reaction was, "Ok; I've been warned; this will be like my time studying theology at Fordham.

The instructor spoke of my terminological confusion in referencing the term "spirit yell", and in fairness that was not the primary term and was not elaborated at length. The primary term, however, was "kiai", and the philologist in me believes that the root of "kiai" (Aiki Ninjutsu) was ki. Certainly the term "ki out" (Kuk Sool Won) refers to ki. In the groundwork book that is given to newcomers, my instructor is identified as a third dan in Toshindo and also having rank in Aiki Ninjutsu. "Toshindo" is an alternate way of reading the characters to "ninpo", which is ninjutsu considered in its spiritual aspect. In my opinion, he shouldn't have been surprised when I said that Aiki Ninjutsu looked like a complete spiritual system to me. But

however much he may have contradicted my identification of kiai as spiritually significant, either it was a *sine qua non* of my continued participation, or my not asking this kind of question about how it fit with my faith was such, or both. And though this was passing, the book identified which of the four elements one was most closely connected to, by astrological sign. In retrospect, I marched past too many red flags; the onus for my remaining under such conditions is primarily on me.

As a child I read of ninja who had stealth, and their stealth technique was called ninjutsu. Something of that captivated my (among many) people's imagination; etymologically, 'ninjutsu' meant the technique of becoming invisible, an invisibility I assumed was metaphorical for physically skilled stealth, sixteenth century ninja suits, and the like. On my conscience's prompting, I did not do what I very much wanted to do in going to the training weekend in a wooded area where stealth is best taught. Instead I went through a crunch at work where it would have been political suicide to be unavailable at work, although I did not expect this when I did not sign up for the training. And my imagination was enough captivated that I decided not to heed some strong red flags. The guilt for this is my own, not any of theirs.

My endeavor would have been perhaps using people had I consciously embarked on it as a philosophical experiment. Martial arts are often considered to be deeply occult (I doubt the clapping of hands was the only action with an occult intent), and while I would have to limit what I say to exclude Western arts such as fencing or boxing, and arguably some Eastern arts as well such as Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, which one formerly Christian practitioner told me

had none of the philosophical element. Certain things still appeal to me more; I would much rather pin an opponent by skill than pummel another person to the point of not being able to get up for ten seconds. To me the combat training was a secondary goal to training in stealth. But even then the lesson I would draw from this is less about martial arts, than trying to smoke without inhaling. While I ignored red flags and the sharp warnings of my conscience, I kept my conscience clean once I was in training, and peer pressure took a back seat to trying to keep my conscience clean. And perhaps I was succeeding enough at smoking without inhaling that the teacher ended my training. But the overall lesson I draw from this is that it is foolish to think, "I can smoke without inhaling." Perhaps at Fordham the position was one where I had to try to smoke without inhaling—and did so at the Lord's bidding. Never mind situations like that; they do happen. But it was a severe breach of wisdom for me to take on a situation where I would have to smoke without inhaling. Practicing the techniques put violence before my imagination and stained the purity of my soul. That was consistent. I do not wish to dictate to soldiers who bear the cross of St. George what they must do—but I was not a soldier following orders either.

Whether with regards to fantasy or martial arts or entirely unrelated circles of temptation, it is an error to try to smoke without inhaling. *"Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?"*

Intent

Hunting intent

The nature connection movement materials I've read trade in a concept of "hunting intent." One thing the author mentioned was a story he repeated about nature photographers who saw a beautiful animal scene / photograph, got excited and got their cameras, and wouldn't you know it, the scene immediately went away. His response was, "Yup, because of your hunting intent." Prey animals avoid predators most when the predators exhibit hunting intent, and it is part of our nature that if we get excited and want to capture something on film, we human hunter-gatherer predators are exhibiting hunting intent. Even if we have no intent to kill or eat.

The one point where I most clearly saw the power and nature of hunting intent was during the time I was caring for a flock of ducks. The ducks avoided letting me get too close, a point that I used in corralling them, but seemed not to have a "red alert" in their avoidance. When I corralled them, there were often one or two ducks that

didn't go into their bedtime area immediately, and I would have to separately corral them after the others were in the fold. One time, the duck I was trying to corral went into a narrow and confined space, and I thought, "Aha! I can grab this duck and put it away for the night!" The duck moved out ASAP and flew a good forty feet away, and I had to go and corral it in. What I learned from that experience was that pretty much all the time before I had been corralling the ducks and occasionally making remarks about the bird brains of a straggler, but I had never shown hunting intent, an "Aha!" that found an opportunity to pounce. When I had exhibited hunting intent, the ducks got the lead out completely and fled me as an active predator. Having learned that lesson, I avoided subsequent hunting intent in managing the ducks.

Animals calling my bluff

In various dealings, you can't really lie to animals; they will call your bluff if you are bluffing.

There was one time where I saw several opossums, and I had a weapon in my hand and was waiting for them to flee. They held their ground, a point that filled me with fear. I may have had a weapon, but I had no real intent to attack. Another time, there was a bird of prey atop my brother's fence post, and I got to a few feet away from it, but I did not intend to attack, and stood its ground. I was nervous.

I might comment briefly that animals may not understand or recognize what a weapon is, but they know when you know you can kill them. One man talked about how he had a nuisance bird on his roof, and when he came out with a BB gun, the bird fled for the time, but when he

came out unarmed and unable to injure, the bird stood its ground. Another person found that when he did not have a gun, dogs nipped at his heels as he was on a bicycle. He tried carrying a gun, and the dogs left him alone whenever he had a gun. However, they resumed nipping at his heels whenever he did not have a gun.

The same can be true with people. There was one point where I was talking with my brother and some mention was made of "watering the cat." I said, "Water the cat? Yes, I'll be glad to water the cat," and got up to try to find a watering can. My brother quickly told me "no" and to sit down. Not terribly long later, he was going to leave and asked me to "feed and water the cat." I said again, "Water the cat? Yes, I'll be glad to water the cat," and stood up, but my brother just sat and smiled, calling my bluff. I kept the cat's water dish full but did not approach the cat with a watering can.

There is also a story I heard of of a police "dog-whisperer." The whisperer walked between two barking guard dogs at a criminal's place, and they completely let him pass because he was completely and entirely calm. When another police officer tried to follow him, the dogs started barking and defending their turf.

There was one time more recently when I was dealing with a mouthy German shepherd belonging to another person at the monastery. She never bit me for real (she would have cut me to the bone if she were really trying), but she kept on trying to annoyingly put her mouth on me. At one point when she was out and was lunging at me, I started putting my foot out for her to run into, and she stopped mostly lunging into my kick. That curbed the lunging at me, but when I went out carrying a clumsy

armload of trash and recyclables, she lunged at me, having picked up instantly that I was shooting blanks.

At one point inside, I grabbed a magazine, rolled it up, and made every intent to clobber the top of her snout if she came and mouthed on me. She remained at the other side of the room and cringed. However, I did not like the experience I was giving myself to get her to leave me alone. The cure of an intent that would get her to leave me alone instead of trying to mouth on me was to me worse than the disease.

Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives

Elder Thaddeus's *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* has two major points that I would like to draw out:

1. First is what I call a "Little Law of Attraction." The Little Law of Attraction does not mean that if you think about getting money, money, money, then a huge windfall will fall across your lap. It only means something that seems far less useful: thoughts of peace will bring more and bigger thoughts of peace, while thoughts of anger will bring more and bigger thoughts off anger, and interpersonal conflict with them.
2. Second is that we all have a highly sensitive "radio receiver" that can match in us the feelings of others. If another person is calm, that calm will be contagious; if another person is angry, that anger will be contagious, and we have an opportunity for an

escalating cycle of anger.

Now I would like to contrast Elder Thaddeus's Little Law of Attraction with the New Age / Oprah version and explain why something so innocuously smaller is actually even better.

What *The Secret* offers as an approach is that you think of what great acquirement of things will make you happy, and then attract those things and make yourself happy by doing so. So you decide that you want a stretch limousine made from a Porsche SUV, a medieval palace to live in, a husband who has every conceivable perfection (including, apparently, being completely satisfied with a very imperfect wife), everybody to like you and give you unending compliments, the ability to eat anything you want and still have a figure that would make a supermodel jealous ("now I maintain my perfect weight of 116 pounds and I can eat whatever I want"—*The Secret*, page 62), and so on and so forth, and then blackmail the Universe to make all these things fall into your hand.

Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives looks pretty lackluster in comparison. It does not really let you delegate childish wishes to the universe. It does not, in the main, really offer a way to get a nice SUV or a dream job, nor does it have pretensions to do such. What it does offer—and how insignificant this seems in comparison—is the ability to unplug your contribution to cycles of conflict, and be at peace with yourself (my abbot's leitmotif of "Never react. Never resent. Keep inner peace." is part of what the Little Law of Attraction *can* deliver and it fits quite naturally with Elder Thaddeus's points) and at peace with others, and be truly happy along the way. And by that route it delivers the

happiness, contentment, and inner peace, that Oprah's Law of Attraction falsely seeks in circumstances that fall to few.

(And if I may make an aside, getting a limousine made from a Porsche SUV and every other whim you want won't make you happy. My abbot talked about how he was dealing with land developers who were making more money than they knew what to do with and buying Rolls-Royces, but were absolutely miserable with it. In my own experience, when I got my last six figure job and purchased anything I wanted, I got my way, and it seemed like Hell.)

What Elder Thaddeus offers in the end, is inner peace, calm, contentment, happiness, and eventually loving and harmonious relationships with others even if one starts with conflicted relationships. This is essentially what appears to provide a means to in the end: discontent with what you have now and grasping for a really nice car and house is an attempt to reach a place where you will be content with what you have. What Elder Thaddeus and his Little Law of Attraction offer under God's Providence is essentially to dispense with distractions, **cut to the chase**, and quietly, humbly offer what in more concrete wishes people seek from the New Age's Law of Attraction. And it offers something *The Secret* does not, being brought into a larger world and dancing the great dance where *The Secret* offers so many resources to enclose yourself in the Hell of self.

The Little Law of Attraction may seem like a paltry consolation prize next to the New Age version. It is not, and it is an instance of "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy."

Lessons from a cageless, no-kill cat shelter

One of the things I was told serving as a "socializer" (someone responsible for keeping cats company and treating them well as pets so they will be well-socialized when someone comes to adopt), that cats will pick up emotions and sometimes when parents bring their children to see their new pets the children are super-excited and their excitement terrifies the pets. I was never in the strict sense excited on visiting the shelter, i.e. I don't believe my pulse ever rapidly increased. I was deeply calm and happy, then, and what I was giving the cats by being calm and keeping up a gentle patter was described as, "The cats like it when you come over."

Part of the picture is that I avoided visits when I was feeling something I didn't want to share with the cats. Once or twice I even turned around from the parking lot and abandoned the visit I had intended, because I was feeling contagiously bad.

Something like that is active in people, too. Our anger or calm is contagious, and anger can make a feedback loop and a downward spiral. And there was one time at a job where I insensitively told a joke that I had previously told with great success to young and dazzlingly beautiful women, and was not mindful that this time the person I was speaking with was not exactly young or dazzlingly beautiful. And I deserved a verbal reprimand from HR on that. Instead, she gave me a long and intense chewing out that ended with her sobbingly telling me that I had destroyed a benefit for the whole company (of four days' paid "volunteer time" per year). I talked to my boss in puzzlement, and he

assured me that the decision had nothing to do with me whatever; no one knew where the benefit had come from, he said, and he pointed out that he was wearing a volunteering T-shirt but did not see the importance of paid volunteering. Then I stated that I believed harassment against me had occurred, and I could see his demeanor changing by the split second. He slashed my annual bonus to a fraction of what he said, and I was and stayed for a while angry, which he did in tern. Then he started giving me really big assignments that had to be done overnight and was profoundly upset when I pulled off the assignments, and then shut down an essential, mission critical system in such a way that people thought I had shut it off on my own authority, and when I incredulously asked why, he said one of the error messages was not professional enough, and he was furious when I improved the error message and restored functionality to the system (he asked me how I had decided to do it that way, and was upset when I said I'd asked a colleague and followed his suggestion). After that, he said I hadn't improved on not testing my code enough, and "I have to let you go."

I am not interested here in whether I qualify as a victim; I had started the whole process without malice but with reprehensible insensitivity. After that, I joined the circle of escalations, and I believe I would have remained at the company if I had not contributed to my part of the downward spiral. Whether I was a victim or not, I had a say in what happened, and if I had not responded in anger, I don't believe I would have come to termination, at least not around that time and perhaps not ever at all.

The interlocking dance of anger has opportunities to get off the un-merry merry-go-round, and the way to do so

is by choosing to be calm when met with anger. You have a choice, and as alcoholics are told, "You have more power than you think." As to exactly how, I refer the reader to *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* for one resource, and more broadly to the Orthodox praxis of "nipsis" or watchfulness.

Stranger in a Strange Land

In Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the hero and Messiah Michael Valentine Smith is biologically a man but raised and culturally identified with Mars, which included a refined culture and the discipline to have psychic powers. At one point, amidst other shambles he created, we read,

Jubal was surprised at how little shambles Mike created as "private Jones" and how long he lasted—almost three weeks. Mike crowned his military career by grabbing the question period following a lecture to preach the uselessness of force... then offered himself as a test animal for any weapon of any nature to prove that force was not only unnecessary but *impossible* when attempted against a self-disciplined person.

They did not take his offer; they kicked him out.

In that story discipline included psychic powers, but I remember thinking about what I might do if challenged by a martial artist. My brief thought was that I might say, "Let's meet at such and such place in a week. You can bring

any weapon you want; I will be unarmed," spend the week praying, and be calm, or try to be calm, without flinching or defending myself. The martial artist might be bothered by my not following protocol, but possibly I might emerge unharmed.

In fact something like this already happened. At a food pantry, I nicked the bumper of a fellow client, a first-generation Indian immigrant. In India, Gandhian nonviolence notwithstanding, it is common practice to get out and fight after a car collision, and some Indians have been awed at Americans who calmly exchange driver information after an accident. In this case, the immigrant put up his dukes, moved back and forth, and kept saying, "That's not right [what you did]" and "You'll pay for this!"

For my part, I stood still, calmly, with my arms down, not answering his hostility, and not preparing to defend myself.

He remained angry with me, but he never touched me.

Modern woods

There was a nun (and iconographer) whom I chauffeured for a while, including taking her to a shop I vaguely remember being called "Modern Woods" where she was getting boards to use for icons.

During the time, I saw what looked like a small bear ambling towards me, and I immediately looked at the employees for a cue about whether I should be afraid.

The people at the shop were completely at peace without a hint of flinching that the animal was moving towards me, and I chose to be calm.

The bearlike animal was a very big and very sweet dog, and before the nun completed her business, I made friends with the dog.

We have a say about whether we are afraid or angry. We may not be aware of how, but it is possible, and the whole Orthodox tradition of spiritual watchfulness enables such freedom in not choosing to be dominated by fear or anger.

The Sermon on the Mount and not following protocol

It is standard protocol to be nervous when someone has a gun pointed at you, and at least one martial artist has told me that by being calm and not following protocol, you make the person who has the gun uncomfortable. When I asked him, he explained that he could take the gun away, something he had practiced thousands of times. But the focus of his suggestion was just that by not following protocol you get people out of a particular destructive groove.

The Sermon on the Mount talks about not following protocol in a hostile situation. The three specific examples are going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, and handing over cloak and tunic, but the cultural context is not obvious to a casual reader today.

(I would preface the cultural notes by saying that even without a cultural familiarity, the text does not say "Do not *respond* to evil;" it says, "Do not *resist* evil," and this observation is not a nitpick. Each time Christ mentions hostility expressed against us, he offers a *response*, and it is

specifically not an obvious response and certainly not leaving evil without *any* response.)

In the Roman Empire, there were roads with mile markers, and a soldier could legally conscript someone to carry his pack for a mile, but there were stiff penalties against soldiers who required more than this. The standard protocol behavior would be to set down the pack immediately on reaching the next mile marker. A "not following protocol" response would be to carry a pack for a while, and then try to keep on going instead of putting it down the instant you have gone a mile. One can imagine surprised behavior between a Roman soldier who could conscript only a while at a Christian's insistence on keeping on carrying the pack for another mile. The "not following protocol" would be a powerful response regardless of whether a person was in a position to resist being conscripted to carry a pack for a mile.

The reference to "turning the other cheek" is more specifically to turn the left cheek to someone who has slapped the right cheek. That means turning the other cheek would be in response to being slapped with the left hand, and there was a *big* difference between slapping with the right hand versus the left. The penalty for slapping an equal with the left hand was a hundred times the penalty for slapping an equal with the right hand, and the penalty for slapping a superior with the left hand was capital punishment while the penalty for slapping a superior with the right hand was only monetary. To the downtrodden, Christ's advice to turn the other cheek was to "not follow protocol" and give a choice between slapping again, but this time, a slap with the right hand that would treat the inferior

as an equal, or not slapping again, thereby effectively rescinding the previous slap.

As far as being sued for clothing, clothing was harder to come by than here and may be one of few possessions a person had. Christ tells people who are suing them for one of their garments to give both the outer and inner garment and walk out of the courtroom effectively naked. Now public nudity was forbidden, but the onus was not on the person who *was* naked, but the person who *caused* or *beheld* the nakedness. Thus the advice is to not follow protocol in ways that would leave the plaintiff holding the bag.

It was by the Sermon on the Mount not following protocol that an Orthodox elder responded to a subordinate who had let loose a torrent of toxic words against him by giving him a small gift and saying, "Always talk to me that way!"

And by the way, when I was an undergraduate, there was one friend who was beautiful and whom I was attracted to. In one conversation, her boyfriend asked her why she didn't follow what I suggested and start to disrobe. I suddenly found myself uncomfortable and hoping she would not begin to lift her shirt.

Conclusion

Negotiation of intent, such as I have outlined, and being able to creatively not follow usual fighting protocol, may be more central in importance than the ability to land or block a punch. Blackbelts may be some of the last people you'd expect to find in a fight, but I know my first martial arts instructor, at a third degree blackbelt, had managed to get through his practice, including some unnervingly close

calls, without going in hands on. However, what it is that keeps a martial artist from fighting live is, I believe, available without extensive practice of physical combat, and all that we really needed to know, we learned in the Sermon on the Mount.

Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict

One brief comment

I was not happy with this when it was new, and think that something in it still isn't quite right. However, I still think there is much in it that's worth reading.

As a child of perhaps ten, I told friends that I was going to make a martial art, made up a name that sounded Asian to me ("Tong Fior"), and got into an argument about it with a classmate (nowhere near physical blows). The preferred term for this in the academy is the highly abrasive term "Orientalism," although the better tempered anthropologists would regard it as the normal and natural contact when any one culture starts to meet another, and is really the same Orientalism by which the nationalistic *Independence Day* movie enjoyed tremendous popularity well outside of U.S. political borders. In the one kind of Orientalism, there are people in the West who want to be

some romanticized image of the East; in the other there are people in the East who want to be some romanticized image of the West. I have difficulty finding much of any real difference between these instances of "diffusion" as the term is understood in an anthropology department.

And as is illustrated below, as Proverbs says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart" is mysteriously tied to the Lord granting the desires of your heart, and sometimes in the oddest ways.

Obligatory quotation from G.K. Chesterton

G.K. Chesterton, in a passage that is politically incorrect enough today, wrote,

I am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not suddenly of pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This consists not of suddenly pressing, but that of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon is in the very worst spirit of the East. But there is no force so hard to defeat as the force which is easy enough for conquer; the force that always yields and then returns.

But hold that thought for a second, and I speak as a fan of the Land of the Rising Sun for ages. (And not just for that one single Google AdWords ad impression that

changed eBay's AdWords presence forever: "Buy Japanese sushi on eBay! New and Used.")

Someone said, in response to a Quora question about whether anyone had regretted getting a PhD, and one of few PhD's to say "yes" said basically that you don't get a doctorate to get a superhuman high social status and be addressed as "Doctor"; he said "a PhD is just a paper that comes along the way as you are doing something you love."

The personalities of martial arts

Something very much like that related to what what we now understand as a belt system. A martial artist wouldn't be awarded a blackbelt (or anything else besides a white belt) on the grounds of a formalized test. When you started, you got a white belt that would be slowly blackened by the practice involved in developing expertise for years and years and years. And I believe that most of the better martial artists today would say that the older approach is still foundational in better practices today; it's just obscured and harder to discern, and certain entirely justified concessions to societal needs have been made.

I remember being offended when I saw how parts of Aikido in Aiki Ninjutsu work; it brought up memories of very frustrating matters of conversation, where a friend (and I do really mean friend) gave infuriating claims of agreement where he would say "*I agree with you* that [fill in the blank]", and the beginning, middle, and end of every such "agreement" was to wrench some belief of my mine out of context, placing himself as someone in a position to understand, interpret and explain my beliefs far better than I could, and use it as a sledgehammer against something

else that were just as foundational to those beliefs. During those years, he never claimed agreement except as the presentation of an attack. And that is specifically what I saw in physical form in how to respond to an opponent's punch. You grabbed your opponent's arm, and so to speak "corrected" the direction it was moving, and add exaggerated force to what your revision of the punch has become. This was disappointing enough to be offensive after reading the tale of a martial art founded by a legendary, great O Sensei who stood unarmed and kept dodging a master swordsman until the attacking swordsman collapsed from fatigue.

I'd be a little cautious about glibly identifying this as "Aikido," which etymology means something close to "Way with harmony and energy," as Aiki Ninjutsu represents a new fusion that draws on several older sources and has modern elements. The fusion may not particularly Western elements, but it has a Creed (with an apparently deliberate uppercase 'C' as in "Craptastic"), with the Creed beginning with "I believe in myself. I am confident. I can accomplish my goals," and when I started to give a thinking Christian's objections to believing in oneself (see Chesterton's take below), I saw in verbal form the foundational lesson of "Become the center." What I never heard was so much as lip service to "harmony between opponents" that is a leitmotif in so many genuine martial arts. The technique associated with "Become the center" forces all else to resolve around oneself, and the teacher seemed a bit "become the center" in that he spoke with decisive authority and I was not allowed to even contribute anything to the conversation beyond accepting decisive authority.

G.K. Chesterton incidentally has something to say about "become the center" or rather just believing in yourself. The sting with which he opens chapter 2 of his book *Heretics* make the stinging remarks of Sumo wrestling quoted above almost sound like praise:

THOROUGHLY worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, "That man will get on; he believes in himself." And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written [the name of the lunatic asylum] "Hanwell." I said to him, "Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums." He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. "Yes, there are," I retorted, "and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken

poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can't act believe in themselves; and debtors who won't pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one's self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has 'Hanwell' written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus." And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, "Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?" After a long pause I replied, "I will go home and write a book in answer to that question." This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

Enough of Chesterton; like *The Onion*, he has something to offend every palate. (He was beyond being dismissive of the thought of his joining the Orthodox Church.

Some people might be surprised by remarks above; my memberships in 3-4 martial arts lasted for a few months, and while I have had some successes (Kuk Sool

Won and the local Shokotan paired me with blackbelts or blackbelt candidates by the end, and one fellow Karate student was getting very infuriated when I responded to him about a quarter second earlier than expected; I moved to meet him as he was moving, not after, without the faintest interval between the two), I found that spirituality was very dry until I repented of it as sin (a mistake I should have made once, if even that). And just to be clear, everyone I've heard of in any martial art at all says that you improve after a couple of months, but real mastery takes *years* and *years* and *years*. (I think my case was simply not how things work normally.)

God practices Ju-Jutsu, and we should too, as an act of submission

Perhaps the single greatest illustration of Jiu-Jutsu in the Bible is where a Saul burning with wrath and destruction, trying in overweening pride to annihilate the Church, was stopped cold by the uncreated Light of Heaven, the Light who strikes terror in those not indwelt by It, and provides what may be the only place in the Bible where the Lord quotes a pagan Greek source: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? ... It hurts you to kick against the goads." The action of an Orthodox Christian is not, on the balance, to invade another's mind and straighten it out. It is not, on the balance, either our place to really defend ourselves. It is to, in the words of a Protestant hymn, "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," and remember that you too are a sinner and try to be merciful and forgiving as others join you as you continue kicking against the goads.

Furthermore, the more you are in trouble, the more stress you are in, the more conflict or worse, the more more essential that you grow beyond any abilities you know in deiform love to *forgive*, to *have mercy*, to *pray*, to *turn the other cheek*. The Sermon on the Mount is not an ornament for the beings of some mythical world more perfect than Star Trek. It is a battleplan for those of us who live in a world of conflict and violence.

The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount.

De-mythologizing done right

Bultmann is a foundational character in the academy, enough so to have provoked C.S. Lewis to write "The Elephant and the Fern-Seed." Bultmann came up with a new way of moving beyond mythological trappings found in the Bible and theology. Or at least that is how his progressive circles understood their stance; I'm not completely sure how an Orthodox might best respond, whether "You have a valid enough point, but why does it loom so suffocatingly large to you?" or, "Um, you ARE aware that your fresh and new discovery is a recycled version of a topic that an Orthodox Christian worked out with power, well over a millennium earlier than you, and by a canonized saint at that, and the saint did a profoundly better job than you?", or extending an invitation for the distinguished scholar to simply *become a catechumen!*

However, I would like to take up Bultmann's point, or rather that of the canonized saint of over a thousand years before (Pseudo-Dionysius), or rather *God's* point. A standard illustration is, as we repeatedly read in Exodus, "God hardened Pharaoh's heart." This claim should not be taken literally; I've yet to read even someone very wrong read the text as meaning that God stiffened Pharaoh's cardiac muscle (heart) the same way an arm or leg or back muscle stiffens with a cramp. But it goes deeper. The claim that God changed Pharaoh at all is too crude. Pharaoh hardened his own heart with Satan's *help*. God (and the image of Jiu-jitsu must eventually be dropped as well) exercised Jiu-jitsu and let Pharaoh reach destruction by the only way that Hell can ever be reached: *by his own steam*.

I now remember once feeling particularly squeamish about a mailing list conversation where one Orthodox sympathizer clarified, in perfect sincerity, that where Genesis 1 repeats, "And God said," that was such a human way of speaking that it meant that God spoke, in her words, "with lips and a tongue" as one would expect of mortal man. And I made no effort to assume command of the situation and straighten out her mind for a couple of reasons. First of all, even if her assertion was analytically wrong enough to fill me with squeamishness, unless she is troubling others (in which case someone well above my pay grade should be laying down the law), it is not my place to use my book-learning to take away the little that is held by someone who is not even a member of the Orthodox Church. But that is just for practice. The beam in my eye has to do with believing I need to have my way, that I should be in power or in control, or anything else. She might have thought it helpful

to give Pharoah an intake appointment at a cardiologist's. *I do much worse.*

How?

Perhaps one way of putting that is this: we are inclined to believe that God violated the free will of Satan and Judas, because they killed the Son of Man and He came back to life triumphant. But a slightly closer image is that he was on higher ground, he let their free will be as sordid as they chose, *and in a way beyond Jiu-jitsu* the God who is beyond motion met them fully and attentively, with a heart full of love, and the evil that cannot grasp love tried to give its strongest and most venomous strike, they struck where the everywhere-present God is not and the full force of their blow slammed into a brick wall and their sting was inflicted only on themselves.

But be careful:

One subtle note to those who find alluring the image of Satan slamming his horns full force into an adamant wall next to which diamond is as as a crumbling dust: if you find the image attractive, *beware of adopting Satan's ever-seductive, ever-destructive pride.*

One joke good or bad that I heard many, many times as a child ran:

There were two morons working in a hot pit enduring the heat while their boss sat in a cool air-conditioned building outside of the pit on the ground above, not doing much of anything.

One day the morons got to talking and said,
"How come we do all the work and our boss

gets to sit in an air conditioned building? So the first moron got up from the pit and asked, "How come we work in a hot messy pit all day, and you're in this office getting nearly all the money?"

The boss said, "Because I'm smarter than you."

The moron asked, "Why?"

The boss walked over to a thick tree and held his hand in front of the trunk. "Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

The moron swung his best, and the boss deftly pulled his hand away, leaving the moron to slam the full force of his punch into the rugged trunk of the tree.

After he had stopped crying, the first moron climbed back into the pit.

The second moron said, "What did you find out?"

The first moron said, "I'm smarter than you."

The second moron said, "Why?"

The first moron put his hand in front of his face and said, "Hit my hand as hard as you can!"

There are two, and no more than two, essential options to us. One is to join hands in the Church and dance with the Lord not only of men but of angels and eagles, cultures and corporate worlds, a vast universe held in the heart of a God so small as to be without parts, and join in the unfolding mystery of the Lord of the Dance in whom alone the Divine Providence unfurls. The other option is to help Satan rearrange your face. There is no inconsistent option which lets you remain impenitent in pride and yet remain impossibly free from Satan's clutches. And more could be said than that: as Fr. Thomas Hopko famously crystallized, "*Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted until your last breath.*"

This is also the point expressed in what may be the most piercingly beautiful of St. Nicolas' *Prayers by the Lake* in which, as I would offer images Hope is praised, the Hope Who is eternal, the Hope which glimmers in young children who race out of bed on Christmas morning in all the pageantry of the Great Dance and can't wait to open the first present but hasn't the faintest idea of what the first present may be. But there also hopes, with an 's' as in "Shit", *hopes* that have certainly plagued *me* enough hopes really that God will obey the plan that you have worked out to him, and set expectations that God is to jump to your plan, and in the event of any problems, he should contact you immediately for further orders or instructions. It is, on reflection, an act of mercy that God sometimes says, "No" to people who give the most meticulously drafted orders, and perhaps work with people who order him around for decades to teach them, just a little, how to live a life that is dancing the Great Dance.

Gandhi and *satyagraha*

Having tried to underscore the absolute necessity of humility, I would like to move on to the next order of business and compare myself to Gandhi.

Gandhi was a Hindu, in one of three world religions that took its genesis in India. It is my considered judgment that Gandhi's achievements could have been made solely within resources directly provided by his native Hinduism. However, that sounds like an outsider's guess to anyone who understands this figure in history; however rich Hinduism may be, Gandhi through whatever reason chose to draw on outside sources.

The most shame I have ever felt about being a Christian was when a pastor in church explained that Gandhi wanted with his whole heart to become a Christian, and when he sought out a Christian evangelist, the racist evangelist rejected him for the color of his skin alone. That experience soured Gandhi enough that he was never again open to being a Christian, but please look at this closely.

I would draw out four decisive influences on Gandhi:

1. **Gandhi's native Hinduism** about which I will now only say that it is deep as an ocean.
2. **The "purer than the pure" Jainism** from which he took profound inspiration without also membership (we proverbially say that someone "wouldn't hurt a fly", while to this day Jain monastics sweep the ground in front of them with peacock feathers to avoid accidentally stepping on a bug), as

Jainism is also a world religion that came from India.

3. **Christianity:** *this was the religion of the British colonists*, and Gandhi spoke and acted warmly towards his sharpest critics. Gandhi also said things that would astonish people for a speaker who wasn't Christian: "Jesus, a man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act." He elsewhere states that his three heroes are Jesus, Daniel, and Socrates, all of whom saw their lives as nothing next to the salvation of their souls. And finally:

4. **Western-style political activism:** (Well, I suppose we all have to be wrong about *something*.)

I do not know how to explain Gandhi's singular stature in actively trying to adopt the strengths of Christianity and activism. True, he was soured by personally rejected by a Christian evangelist who was *beyond* moronic, but what I would ordinarily expect is for Gandhi to grind an axe against the English and Christians for the rest of his life, with an anger transparently visible to everyone else besides him, all the way icily insisting, "I am not angry!" As it was, he kept reaching out in love to English and other people who met him with total hatred, and by what is called "satyagraha" purchased the freedom of the one nation in history that achieved its from colonial domination by nonviolence rather than war, and remains the one nation in the world that I am aware of where rah-rah nationalism

express itself by the study of nonviolence rather than by celebrating victory through warriors' killing of others. And this is in a religion where the crowning jewel, the Sermon on the Mount, is a tale of epic heroism where God appears in human semblance and encourages and exhorts a prince who is so devoid of laziness that perhaps he doesn't even sleep, to rise up in full power and annihilate all those marked for destruction. And Gandhi does nothing to downplay the text; he instead contributed yet one more commentary to the vast collection (and the Hindu preference, at least today, seems to be never give this crowning jewel without opening it up by commentary). And now we are in a position to drill down slightly.

Gandhi said very emphatically, "Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills." And I would take this as entirely without sloppiness or guile. However, I would like to delve into a word he used. For the purpose of this section, I will treat Gandhi's use of "nonviolence" and "satyagraha" as two sides of the same coin, or even closer. The term "satyagraha" is not taken from Hindi (which is, along with English, India's modern national language), but from the classical Sanskrit, classical in India as Latin and Greek are European classical languages. My best understanding both as a historian and also as an author is that Gandhi went on a word hunt, searching to find the perfect word to crystallize the consuming quest, as Madeleine l'Engle found a word "kythe", a Scottish word if I remember correctly, that originally meant something like "to truly come to be", and became the central term in her classic *A Wind in the Door*. Madeleine l'Engle did not use the word as anyone before her did, and Gandhi seized on a word that had previously not been a term about violence or its absence, a term that meant

something like "steadfastly holding on to the Truth no matter what."

And there is no either-or between Gandhi's embarking on a quest that ended with a deep term from classical Sanskrit, and his full and direct assertion that truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills. The key to this is found in Christ's words: "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old." A study of Gandhi's use of the term "satyagraha" is a study of bringing forth out of a treasure things new and old which are one on the same.

I freely enough compare myself to Gandhi as an author. I do not feel the need to compare myself to Gandhi on *forgiveness* or anything else truly important besides that we are both made in the image of God, and both sinners.

What is pain? What is yielding?

Here I will not discuss what the image of God is at length, nor dissect that the highest command is to love God with one's whole being and the second *which is like it* is to love your neighbor as yourself. However, I will say that the God who defines health is the model for healthily function and life, and Ju-jutsu is not just how God acts, it's how we act if we're doing right. It means that even in the most intense conflict or combat one is looking up for light. The U.S. in World War II referred to the Japanese Ju-jutsu as "chop-socky", and for all their following the universal wartime rules of due diligence in demonizing the enemy, the most patriotic U.S. foot soldiers learned very, very

quickly that their Western boxing completely fell to pieces when it ran into "chop-socky."

It is said by at least some martial artists and athletes that "Pain is weakness exiting the body." It should equally be said by Orthodox Christians not only that repentance is *sin* exiting the soul, but that *repentance is misery exiting the soul*, if there is any difference at all: *repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret*. And the struggle with anger that is called forgiveness, when we reach victory, is *also* misery exiting the soul.

Jiu-jutsu is a word meaning "yielding", and comparisons with Jiu-jutsu should not be pushed too far, as may be admitted. It is one image among others and one not present in Scripture. But there is a distinction in Asian martial arts (and perhaps Capoiara, for instance), between "-jutsu" and "-do" that is well understood. "Jutsu" means a technique or skill, like woodworking, and "do" means a philosophical or spiritual path. The Western tradition (apart from when Asian martial arts came to be a substantial influence) is entirely "-jutsu". This is true with a couple of bumps, as Jiu-jutsu is of an ancient provenance, the art of Samurai who had not even their weapons, while Judo may be seen as a modern attempt to simplify and cleanse Jiu-Jutsu into a simpler art that would be effective self-defense while eliminating locks and other destructive features. And all of the martial arts have their own personalities and characteristics, some better than others, but none yet let the stillness of Orthodox hesychasm or silence eclipse the meditation that is structural to internal martial arts.

Dojos

So when am I going to start opening dojos? The answer I am hoping for is, "Never." The one possible exception I see is that if the Church is really, *really* scraping the bottom of the barrel and makes me some kind of bishop, or even worse a *real* bishop charged with fully competent administration, love, and care of a diocese, instead of the nominal formality, the "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" concession of being honored on paper as the more-than-a-bishop of some long-lost city without a second living representative. If I bear the heavy cross and heavy crown of thorns of a real bishop, *then* I would have the right to start opening dojos, *except* that wouldn't be the right way of thinking of it at all: most people would call it "the responsibility to continue opening parishes."

Color

I winced when I heard Exodus International was closing its doors... until I found out why, and it was a concern that I held since I first heard of it, no matter how much I respected its mission. Exodus International was trying alone to shoulder a responsibility that belonged to the entire ecosystem of the Church. And one question I had already been asking before I saw the Gay Nineties taking over was why on earth that class of sin was its own world, a separate detached from the rainbow fragments forgiven by Christ at Sinners Anonymous, or as it is more often called, the Church. The reason for the coming of the Son of God was to destroy the Devil's work, and then to keep on pushing for bonus points well past when people can go

Heaven: but for starters, let us to say to take each broken fragment of a fractured rainbow, whether pride or envy or the occult or drunkenness or any shard of lust whether gay or straight, and take these broken fragments and restore them to the to the pure, whole, white, bright, radiant, scintillating Light beyond beauty of the uncreated Son.

The Void

The martial arts classic *A Book of Five Rings*, in a brevity comparable to the Sermon on the Mount, covers five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and the void. The chapter about the void is by far the most *terse*: all else is summarized and transcended.

I have come to nearly the end of writing what I wanted to write, and I have covered almost everything on topic to cover except one thing: the original, central point that motivated the construction of the work. It would not be strange to call the topic "satyagraha:" I do not complain that others may do so, but I would rather look at hagiography.

The canonized saints trample on the rules of nature again, and again, and again. Saints walk on water; one monk, the only one on a monastic coast worthy to retrieve an icon miraculously floating on water, when he absolutely *had* to do so, crawled on top of the surface of the water on all fours like a dog, because in his great humility he considered himself utterly unworthy to stand up normally and walk on top of the water like Christ did. Saints pass through fire unharmed, although not every time. Many saints have been burned to death as martyrs, but it seems to happen that when the fire went out the martyrs looked as if they were merely sleeping, with a smile on their faces, and

without a thread of their clothes or a hair on their heads singed or the faintest scent of smoke. In the lives, it seems that the only way that persecutors can get certain saints to die *and stay dead* is to behead them (hello, ISIS?), and even then, the saints occasionally pick up their heads, walk over to their preferred resting place, and there set down their severed heads and only *then* give their consent to really die.

Furthermore the God who works in the heart of hearts to giants among the saints is also works in the hearts of the faithful. Monastic giants trample on scorpions with bare feet; many more faithful trample on pride. Majestic saints open the eyes of the blind; and men reject lust and find their sight truly opened. St. Paul the Apostle raised the dead more than once, and innumerable more among the faithful, across many centuries, have fed the hungry; and furthermore, in a point that many, many officially canonized saints have driven home across the centuries, *feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead*. The term "saint" referred originally to every member of the Church without exception, and one and the same God works in every stripe of saint to ultimately transcend the chasm between what is created, and what is uncreated. The wall between God and we who are merely created is there so that we may rise above it.

And in all this, the inner struggle of the *Philokalia* is vibrant in its nature. Its watchfulness or inner "nipsis" acts in moral and ascetical character like an author searching from just the perfect word, ever attentive, never hurrying, never impatient, always expecting. It is like the great Noah, who followed God's command to build a huge boat in the middle of the desert, and was then the sole survivor from a deluge. It is like a diligent martial artist, who lives by the

words, "The more you bleed in the dojo, the less you will bleed in the street." It claims no exemption from suffering, nor entitlement to wishes fulfilled: if the Measure by whom all saints are measured was the great King who only wore a crown once, and then only a crown of twisted thorns, then we are advised to properly take up our crosses in this earthly vale while we can still repent, because once our life has gone, the opportunity to repent will vanish forevermore. *But sometimes there is an inner struggle of building a boat in the desert*, and trusting the Lord of the Dance to know that he knows what is the right order and that if your next step is to leap before you look and only find out why *after* you have leapt. For those of us who are children at least, God shows us the reason why just after we have leapt because he knows that out of our weakness we will not exercise faith if he presents us with the reason beforehand, and identically knows that out of our weakness we will not maintain faith if too great a delay comes between the obedience and reward: in all things he meets our weakness that we might meet his strength. *And all of this has every connection to how we can be entangled in our world's conflicts, get hurt again and again, and meet a joy that is beyond any of the conflicts and hurts.*

Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Destroying Asian Philosophy* talks about "ego-reading"; reading to push through a text, or as the problem appears among hiking, rushing to get to a point as forcefully and as quickly as possible. He points out that paradoxically those who rush to just get something done tend to not arrive at the intended destination at all. People who make progress in one activity or the other are, although I do not recall if they are stated in these terms, are people who have something in mind other

than forcing their way to an external goal. Had the book been written later, it might have used the term "auto-telic", which describes an activity that is its own goal. Where martial arts like Aikido are called "goalless" by practitioners, it would be more literal, at some loss of striking contrast, to use a presently preferred term of auto-telic and say that an Aikidoko is not worrying about if he as a student will reach black belt, or on a much lower scale how interminably long it will take to master what should be a simple technique, or whether there will be enough progress in managing anger or weight, or anything else. A proper practitioner of Aikido's attention is fixed on Aikido itself, rather than paralysis by analysis over whether Aikido can be successfully used as a bridge to something external. You practice Aikido in order to practice Aikido.

The *Philokalia* offers something that seems much less but ends by being much more. The basic framing of work is different, and quite at odds with today's conception of interesting work. The usual physical craft of self-supporting monks in the ancient world was basket weaving, cynically understood by some in academia today as a legal fiction to let high-value football players keep the alumni without needing to perform proper academic work. The most common craft of self-supporting monasteries today is crafting incense, which at least supplies something elevated to Orthodox parishes. But this way of thinking misses the point for both the ancient and the modern arrangement, which I personally only understood when watching my brother's Mythbusters show and hear Adam gush at how "meditative" the repeated monotonous physical action of weaving a braided kangaroo leather bullwhip was. The chief merit of basket weaving and incense making alike is that

they are repetitive motions that occupy the hands, and it is not clear to me that it is particularly helpful to think of incense as a high-status thing. The ancient and modern monasticism alike the preferred obedience is something that engages the hands while the heart pursues purity. That is the center of gravity. And in modern monasteries, there may be some non-meditative work that needs to be done, but the general pattern is to have most monks heavily engaged in meditative labors for the benefit of the monks themselves in a setting where people do not distinguish sacred from secular or work from prayer. The work is there to help prayer reach perfection. And really, cleaning toilets is more often mentioned as the standard example of honorable obediences than making incense.

But the same center of gravity applies outside of the monastery; it can just be frustratingly more difficult. One monk commented to a cleaning lady that she had a more fortunate position, and I as a programmer and knowledge worker had a less fortunate position, because it is entirely possible to be engaged in prayer while scrubbing tables, but significantly harder to be absorbed in prayer while your mind is chasing bugs in a computer program. And no, this was not a matter of the monk being gracious to someone with lower status and knowing that I would not be hurt or offended by the suggestion. It was unvarnished candor.

What is necessary for people is the same in or outside of the monastery; it's just that with all the modern inconveniences and interesting and entertaining work the near-identical needs are not met to the same degree. Monks say to each other, "Have a good struggle," and struggle is expected and normal; people who approach monasteries to loaf around or have some romanticized image be their life

may succeed, but not without considerable growth. And to the point of struggle, it is the norm and it is necessary for salvation in or out of Heaven. Those scientifically minded know that when physicists have examined how different the physical constants could and support life as we know it, the invariable conclusion is that life as we know it could not be possible unless the universe were tuned, not to put too fine a point on it, but with mind-boggling precision as if there were a God creating a universe universe that was incredibly fine-tuned, *just* to support life. And with a similar question among those who have any idea of the dimensions of the earth and the incomparable dimensions of the universe, "Why is the universe so vast, and the earth smaller than a grain of sand when held next to its grandeur? *How much legroom does the human race need?*" the answer is, "A universe's worth: no less!" And if we ask, "How much legroom does the Church require for salvation, that the saved may have eternal joy and shine with the uncreated Light in Heaven?" the answer is to me my least favorite part of this book and one that brings me to tears. The answer is, "Hell," or possibly more strongly and chillingly, "*Every single soul* from among the innumerable multitude of those who will be eternally damned to Hell!"

One pastor tried to say this without a laugh, and failed, that he was one place in the American South during a heat wave, and just before elevator doors closed, a jogger stepped in, sweating bullets, and said, "It's hotter than *Hell* out there!" The pastor said, slowly, "No. *It isn't*," and crept out everyone else in the elevator. But the damned exist, there is always at least possibility of salvation, God does ever better than they observe, and the damned do one thing that is essential. They provide other people with

conflicts that can be part of a saving struggle. And when the Crack of Doom comes those who treat you abusively you will partly answer for your sins in your place. This is first a cause to feel relieved, then giddy, then at least for a moment when the full implications begin to unfold, *pure terror*. Christ *died* for your sins, *and so did Judas, Arius, Marx, Jung, and Hitler*.

But God has ordained things, and monastic and non-monastic alike need struggle, which often takes the form of conflicts, of things that we don't think belong in our lives but God knows they do. And joy does not consist in being exempt from struggle. It consists of growing in struggle. It consists of having a good struggle. And if you earnestly engage your struggle you may experience the power in the final crescendo of Fr. Thomas's crystallization:

Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.

When you fall, get up immediately and start over.

Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

In all these things and more, the Sermon on the Mount as it unfolds including the *Philokalia*, like as the

Mishnah and Talmud, acts as a stone from Heaven of inexhaustible wealth:

“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 disciples in the world

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.

“Ye are the Light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your Light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.

Righteousness: The Law fulfilled

“Think not that I am come to destroy the Law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, ‘Till Heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no

wise pass from the Law, till all be fulfilled.’
Whosoever therefore shall break one of these
least commandments, and shall teach men so,
he shall be called the least in the Kingdom of
Heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach
them, the same shall be called great in the
Kingdom of Heaven. For I say unto you,
Except your righteousness shall exceed the
righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye
shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of
Heaven.

These things slip through our fingers. They are simple, simpler than breathing, and we in our weakened state need some great systematic theology with slippery concepts we can pin down to grasp. So God meets in our weakness and gives the *Philokalia* to meticulously assess every detail of internal struggle and the eight demons that became the seven deadly sins in the West. "Do not store up treasures on earth" is a simple commandment; it does not only tell us we do not need Rolls-Royces to experience true blessedness, nor do we need our health (saints have lived to great spiritual heights amidst great illness, and not just because they were extraordinarily good), nor do we need our thoughts, or plans for our future in days or minutes, or an identity such as we try to have in the West, or "My Opinions". We are to chase instead of the treasures that we can eat from today and forever, and come to that place where every drop of blood we bleed in the dojo eclipses a galaxy of diamond in its worth on the streets of Heaven.

Cooldown: *The Alchemist*

The Alchemist, like many favorite picks on Oprah, is the sort of thing that makes me nostalgic for when my brother still had a beautiful tropical bird as a pet, and moreover makes me positively *yearn* for the days the house still had a birdcage that still needed lining. None the less, there is a vignette that I would like to draw out.

The teacher-figure in the course is the towering alchemical figure of Melchizedek, who is immortal, can turn lead into gold, can already turn himself into wind, and presumably has numerous and extraordinary other cosmic powers not explored in the text, and teaches the student-figure after making a sweeping dismissal of all the other traditions in all the world's other religions, and even a Western scholar whose heart was in the wrong place along with alchemy being dismissed for rhetorical weight.

The student figure never becomes immortal, never gains abilities to change metals personally, has no idea how to turn himself into wind (at least to start off with; the quest where he learns to make this self-transformation is core to the book's plot), and ends up after a long heroic journey to and back finds out that there had been an enormous quantity of gold lying buried under his back yard right where he started.

But a major point is this: both Master and student are equally alchemists, or at very least at the end. The student does not have all the master's cosmic powers, and even after he has turned himself to wind it is debatable whether he has *any* cosmic powers, but the question of whether they have identical arsenals of cosmic powers matters no more than whether their eyes are of the same

color. Both are equally alchemists; the student follows his teacher in delving deeper into a pride that destroys all capacity for any joy, and an occult mindset that destroys the sanity of all those who practice it in the real world. They are both alchemists, master and pupil, and both participate fully in the tradition, *on their own paths*. That the teacher's path includes having the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, and the student does not, and the teacher can transmute lead to gold and the student cannot, is neither here nor there. Teacher and student both follow their personal paths within alchemy. Perhaps it would have been fundamentally humbler for the student to keep on asking that the teacher give him a sole drop of the Elixir of Life and induct him into turning lead to gold.

(By the way, did I mention that there is a way to obtain gold that is purer than 24 karats, such as alchemists did not reach high enough to quest for?)

With all of the above efforts to rip *The Alchemist* to shreds, and others I've held my tongue on, I still wish to make one point clear: The book's way of looking at difference is less than you think. The further you reach the Kingdom of Heaven, the less it matters that you have precious little money or gold. In fact wealth properly understood is a liability and a handicap more than really being much of any asset that puts you in a better position. Peter Kreeft, a Catholic philosopher and apologist who helped me along the way to Orthodoxy, found one great spiritual advantage to money: *it doesn't make you happy*. If you are perennially struggling financially, and you see Break My Window around you on the street when your beater breaks down frequently, it's awfully, awfully hard to avoid thinking that so many things would be better if you had a

good bit of money. If, on the other hand, you have a top-notch chauffeur for a Rolls-Royce, and you're *still* miserable, a great deal of the sting has been taken away from the temptation that just having more money is all you need. You can still be greedy and covet things, but it becomes a far weaker temptation to think that your spiritual emptiness *actually comes* from the fact that you are not in a position to have Michelangelo's David in your garden and the Mona Lisa in your living room.

The martial artist I respect most was asked in class how many times he had had to use his martial arts skills. And he slowly, gently, humbly said, that he had really been fortunate and hadn't needed to use his his martial art, even though there were a couple of awfully close calls [during years and years of study].

And I submit that his answer, as stated, is wrong, or at least his wording was deceptive and misleading.

He was at the time a third-degree blackbelt. I don't know what he is now. For non-martial artists, as far as sparring goes, a first-degree blackbelt is a third-degree blackbelt's chewtoy. He is past the point where people are said to be able to kill a tiger with their bare hands. I am all but certain that in every one of those close calls, he could have killed the other person immediately. His teacher, at a martial arts show, stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and then the teacher was simultaneously attacked by five blackbelts with swords, and an instant later the teacher stood holding two beautiful, ornamental-looking fans, looking quaint, and picturesque, and exotic, and all around him were five blackbelts, on the ground, *crying*.

The martial artist I most respect said, humbly, gently, modestly, that even in the close calls, he had said, "You're the tough guy," and backed down, or run away, or almost *anything* possible (whatever it took), coming out the loser in every social confrontation, and he went on to say, "Most people who think they want to fight don't *really* want to fight." And I submit that the proof of his profound mastery of his art was this: he has passed through minefield after minefield after minefield such as I almost certainly could not, without stepping on a mine even once. The point is not that he happened to be carrying a first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The point is not that he was carrying a very, very good first aid kit in case he did step on a mine. The proof of his mastery is that, as of my last knowledge, he had never needed to open his first aid kit, not even *once*. And indeed martial artists often defuse a potential fight before most outsiders would recognize there was anything going out of the ordinary going on.

Incidentally, though there was no question of my ever wanting to give a physical attack when I was in his class, I was quite the jackass and quite the belligerent student, and he only ever answered me with humility and gentleness. In the end, his gentleness conquered me.

What about what I have somewhat whimsically called "Tong Fior"? In my own opinion, my credentials make for an pretty impressive parody of martial arts, unless you want to go through the *ha, ha, only serious* route. I've lifted weights (and lifted weight machines, and broken weight machines by applying too much force), climbed with devotion, in riflery went from no rank to Sharpshooter, Bar VIII in one week, punched at bags, dipped a finger in a few martial arts, made my own approximation of ninjutsu

stealth (and unintentionally got a stunned "Whaaaaa?" when these skills came out in campers' response to games in nature with me as their camp counselor, asking, "Did you go to some special Daniel Boone school [to be able to move so silently and be sensitive to sounds that were apparently around 0 dB]?"), and am gifted to the degree that professionals say "You're smarter than most geniuses" or "The average Harvard Ph.D. has never met someone as talented as you" (the gifts are not magic powers but for some purposes they might as well be), and other things which should be preferably viewed as ornamental at best. One question outsiders ask of martial artists is how well they'd do in a real fight; the question comes perhaps with hope at a training that would make the asker all but invincible, the basic response to *that* question is "HTTP Error 404: Missing Page": if you're not already the one and only Miyamoto Musashi, Japan's "sword-saint", no martial art can change that at all. I would show respect for Kuk Sool Won by saying that one second degree black belt said, "I would give myself one chance in two. But the more chances you give yourself, the less you have." I've had experienced the martial arts practicality, as one martial artist's parody ad said, "Get beat up by people twice your age and half your size!" There is one point where I expect victory would come, and that is if the Spirit of the Lord comes on me. Orthodox priests should not employ physical violence, and in the profound story of *Father Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father*, people are flabbergasted when the weakened and aged monk Fr. Arseny steps where a fight has broken out and strikes a forceful blow. Possibly if the Spirit of the Lord falls on me, I might blast through a 9th kyu, or

possibly for that matter a 9th dan. In all other cases it is not my concern.

The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount, and the struggles I now wrestle with are not flesh and blood, though they have brought me through mortal danger more than once. Kuk Sool Won in every school but one says, "We need more practice!" The Kuk Sa Bo Nim (Grandmaster)'s headquarters school says, "*You* need more practice!" I'll go with "We need more practice!", please, or better "*I* need more practice!", or if I can bring it even closer to my true needs, "Lord, give me more time to repent."

(And a true monk leaves us both in the dust. Though extraordinarily many married Orthodox perfectly well without any of the structure by which God condescends to meet monks.)

Two Victories in Tong Fior: Following the Lord of the Dance

In “Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict,” I whimsically called myself a martial arts grandmaster, having the striking credentials of having studied three separate martial arts and failed in all three.

But there are a couple of events that happened recently, something that amounts to self-defense in a more usual sense of the term. Let me give them in reverse chronological order, and let me offer a framing perspective for this thing.

Walking on water—for *ordinary* Orthodox!

In “Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict,” I wrote:

The canonized saints trample on the rules of nature again, and again, and again. Saints walk on water; one monk, the only one on a monastic coast worthy to retrieve an icon miraculously floating on water, when he absolutely *had* to do so, crawled on top of the surface of the water on all fours like a dog, because in his great humility he considered himself utterly unworthy to stand up normally and walk on top of the water like Christ did.

A bit later in “Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict,” I make an important connection between saints and more ordinary Orthodox:

Furthermore the God who works in the heart of hearts to giants among the saints is also works in the hearts of the faithful. Monastic giants trample on scorpions with bare feet; many more faithful trample on pride. Majestic saints open the eyes of the blind; and men reject lust and find their sight truly opened. St. Paul the Apostle raised the dead more than once, and innumerable more among the faithful, across many centuries, have fed the hungry; and

furthermore, in a point that many, many officially canonized saints have driven home across the centuries, feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead. The term “saint” referred originally to every member of the Church without exception, and one and the same God works in every stripe of saint to ultimately transcend the chasm between what is created, and what is uncreated. The wall between God and we who are merely created is there so that we may rise above it.

And the ordinary faithful can and do, at least at times, trample on the rules of nature. Ordinary faithful can and do take decisive action without being able, and perhaps not even trying in pretension, to get their ducks in a row. And they are less solipsistic than the rest of us; they recognize that God’s Grace ~~allows~~ *impels* us to leap before you look and land on solid ground if you see something through your inmost heart but not with any eyes save those of faith.

What I have to discuss is baby steps towards walking on water, in the ordinary faithful sense, because it is in fact possible, for Orthodox who will never be canonized, to trample on metaphorical water as they trample on literal pride. And in fact, there is an idiomatic statement that someone “walks on water” that is not intended or received literally, but a statement that someone can do amazing things. The image is significant.

This article is lost if it is only taken as a note on physical self-defense. Part of it is about the Lord of the Dance whose Grace exceeds all measure, and the strength

flows from Grace through synergy with our genuine participation, but a martial artist would have every reason to say, “Dude, that ain’t martial arts skill on your part. You were just astonishingly lucky to hit home on one kick, and *don’t count on such luck in the future!*” And if I hear such a remark, I believe I would remain silent, but my opinion is that this represents *neither* martial arts skill, *nor* sheer luck, but God’s providence and synergy.

It has been stated that miracles occur to cover for human weakness, and those who do miracles usually don’t want to be there. This may be because God wishes miracles to happen without injuring our precious humility, and however much people try to show respect by saving another person’s pride, God wishes to save something infinitely better: our *humility*. And I would like to discuss two ordinary-grade miracles in my own recent experience.

A safe place

I was in a highly impaired state when I called my doctor’s office and asked to make an appointment. Within a little bit of phone tag, I was told to go the ER, and never mind about making an appointment. Shortly after that, I was told I had reached *a safe place*. This was a good thing, because by the time I eventually reached the safe place, I was running on something like one neuron.

Once I was in the safe place, I was approached by a man who wanted to order me around, and I obeyed the first time or two before saying an unchanging “No.” sluggish thoughts ran through my mind, one of the first of which was, “He’s getting ready to be violent with me.”

Then he punched me in the face hard enough to knock me to the ground.

After about a second more had passed, I thought, with my mind moving like sludge, “I should kick him in the groin.” I managed a weak enough kick that astonishingly connected, but a kick that hit him hard enough to slow him down. Then, after another second or so’s delay, I thought, “When you’re in a self-defense situation, you’re supposed to make noise.” So I shouted, “HELP! STAFF!”

Hospital staff arrived, and soon separated us. I was given a CT scan for my head that came back squeaky-clean, and the person who was responsible for sutures looked more closely at the wound and said it was a shallow enough cut that stitches were not needed.

I am, incidentally, grateful that I was running on one neuron at the time. I do not seem to have injured my fellow patient above inflicting pain; I received no injury worthy of any real treatment. I surprised the staff by declining medication for pain (“Wow! High threshold of pain.”); I was bleeding but did not feel pain worth the bother to medicate. The reason I am grateful I was running on one neuron at the time is that if I were running at full steam, I would have hit him way harder. The most obvious choice would have been to drop to a fighting stance, with arms in place to at least try to be ready to block a blow, aim for a hard knee kick to the groin, followed by an even harder kick to his ribcage meant to send him sprawling, followed by standing with my foot over his windpipe for however long help took to arrive. And that’s more force than I would like in dealing with someone who wasn’t *genuinely* trying to harm me, just somebody who’s trying to be a tough guy, and the preferred response in Kuk Sool Won was to *let* the other person be the

tough guy, back off and lose in every way socially if you think it would help at all. The great gunfighters of the West, or at least the ones that *survived*, would all be much happier to buy someone else a drink than get into gunfights. They might have been successful in the duels they fought, but they did almost everything they could to avoid as many duels as they could.

The #1 preferred response is to run away, preferably run away screaming or making lots of noise, but I have an old knee injury that means that if I try to bolt away, I will be on the ground in profound pain. I'm not billing myself as someone strong who won't run, just someone weak who can't do so without *begging* for self-inflicted injury.

Or as was stated in Kuk Sool Won, after giving numerous subtle and potent techniques, the instructors said, "If you're in a real self-defense situation, go for the knees," and had us practice kicking *hard* at knee-level pads. Or as Marines chant, "Ra, ra, *ree!* Kick him in the *knee!* Ra, ra, *rass!* Kick him in the *other knee!*" I believe that either response on my part would have been treated legally as an open and shut case of self-defense, but in my weakness God gave me a much less forceful way out of things. Also, when someone in scrubs told me that I that I could press charges, and I simply shrugged it off. What I only thought of later as something good to say was, "He has his personal problems and I have mine. I neither wish, nor see the need, to trade places." Also, I had been getting a bit bored, and staff TLC made for a minor change of scenery.

I regard the encounter as providential, the work of the Lord of the Dance who would help me outgrow my solipsism. And it turned out better than I would have achieved had I been operating at much more than one

neuron. There is a core concept in some religions of, “I cannot harm you without harming myself.” I’ve survived a long-term, painful knee injury. I am glad not to have inflicted the same on a fellow human being, even if he picked a fight.”

Self-defense and dealing with police

This was an experience on a few more neurons than the physical assault. And I am intentionally using “self-defense” in a way that is other than the most common usage. I am not, for the moment, talking about hiking up a skirt and kicking, or using a knife or pepper spray, or mastering the basics of a simplified art like Goshin Jutsu.

After a harrowing and difficult week, it came time for a farewell visit with a friend. I was at this point really struggling, but I decided not to back down on this commitment, which might be my last opportunity to see that family face-to-face. He asked me when I would arrive, and I stated what I hoped, and I received no response.

A couple of hours after I went to bed, I heard a voice say, “Sherrif’s office.” I gave a confused “Hello?” and went to the doorway. There were three Sherrif’s officers, who told me that my host was uncomfortable having me in the house with his wife and asked me to leave. (My immediate, unspoken reaction was, Wow, are the demons sore losers!)

They asked me some routine questions, but the one I remember most was close to when they wound down the conversation was, “So, this was some kind of really horrible miscommunication?”

What had gotten them to that point was that I was extremely calm (partly because I was sleepy) moving deliberately slowly, telling them (or asking permission for) what I wanted to do next, and being compliant, and the longer we spoke, the more puzzled, and even baffled, the officers appeared to be that someone had involved the police in this matter. They let me collect my belongings, and still had to escort me off the property, although I am not sure how happy they were to be doing their job in that moment.

Now what does this have to do with self-defense?
Everything!



One time a year or so before, there was a truck show oriented to interest kids, and among police cars, ambulances, etc., there was a multipurpose military vehicle

that I would loosely call an armored SUV, and more specifically an armored SUV on steroids. I asked some outsider's question about what the vehicle was intended for, and he responded. Then I went home, and realized I needed to say something more to him.

So I came back, looked down, and said, "Someone described service in Vietnam as, 'If you've survived two weeks in the jungle, a twig snaps and you're awake with a knife in one hand and a gun in the other.' I know you have one of the nastiest jobs out there, and you have my respect."

His response was beyond astonishment. He said, "And you mine," and his voice was suddenly at a much higher pitch. I think he took my remark to be astonishing for a civilian to *get* how hard an occupation it is to be a soldier, let alone state his job description in one sentence!

Now let's talk about police. I didn't open a can of whoop-ass, nor would I have done so even if I could. At least with decent police officers (including the ones from the Sherriff's office), you may not have bullying and power plays, but police work is not easy work, and military veterans who have gone the police route have often found that the work is terrifying.

One person explained it this way. *Each time* you have been pulled over by a police officer, you have known three things:

1. You were (probably) unarmed.
2. You did not have any kind of rigged booby-trap in your back seat as a weapon against police, and

3. You had zero intent on murdering the officer.

No police officer who has ever pulled you over, has ever known any of these three things. And there's a reason why a police officer who pulled you over quietly rests a palm on top of his sidearm.

Police officers need to be able to self-protect, they know that things aren't always what they seem, *and a situation can change in an instant*. This means that one of the most basic concerns in dealing with a police officer who might be afraid, is to avoid giving any real or imagined reason, any surprise or startlement, to think they have to self-protect and kill you, and never assume that an action that is obviously completely harmless to you will be obviously harmless to an officer as well. *Police officers aren't always perfect at reading minds.*

The police officers seemed to be getting further and further from worrying about their own protection. I was, only in small part by my limits, calm, and emotions are contagious. In addition to this, I deliberately moved slowly, and told them what I was going to do (and at one point asked, and was immediately given permission to finish a glass of water).

I said "I wanted to close up my bag," which I had previously told them had a pocketknife (one of the officers said, "Don't take it out," but they seemed to show no further interest in my having a pocketknife in my bag.) Having told them ahead of time and moving slowly, they let me close a zipper that was remarkably close to my pocketknife, and for that matter the officers let me have practically everything else I wanted, and asked what possessions I had brought. My heart was in a (rather foggy) peace, and my actions left

them less and less concerned about being able to draw a weapon quickly enough to self-protect. And on this point, I am less glad, but still glad, that I was in a mentally weakened state. I wouldn't have tried to *fight*, but I don't think I could have been so completely calm as I was, and here being full of calm is of infinitely more usefulness than the best firearm you own.

And on this point there is a story I didn't like when I heard it, where a knight was challenged by a dragon, and the dragon said, "If you'll come up to me and tickle the sides of my throat with your sword, you will have treasure worth more than rooms of silver and gold," and the knight went up, in terror, and the dragon bit off his jewelled sword at the hilt, then began to breathe fire and spewed the molten sword onto the knight's shield. The knight asked, "And what is this treasure?" before his horse began galloping away, and the dragon said, "Your LIFE!" and the knight ran away, grasping a treasure worth more than rooms full of gold.

What did this self-defense accomplish for me? Let me mention three things:

1. As it turns out, I have been subjected to no legal actions at least for now.
2. I was able to get out of that situation with all of my belongings.
3. I was able to get out without an new hole in my chest or head.

The only other thing I can remember specifically being careful is not to reach for things until an officer has

invited you to. If you don't have your driver's license and insurance card out ready when the officer comes, it might be wise not to reach for something in your pockets until the officer asks for driver's license and proof of insurance. (Police can genuinely have difficulty the difference between someone reaching to a pocket for a handkerchief, and someone reaching to a pocket for a weapon. If I really needed a handkerchief in one of my pockets, I would ask permission and move slowly.)

There is no silver bullet besides God here; God in his kindness chose to send me officers who aimed for the little disruption that was possible, instead of taking my behavior as suspicious. I do not claim that any of these three is a bulletproof shield; the bulletproof shield is that which moves with the Lord of the Dance who ever beckons us half-solipsists to enter a larger world.

And by the way, it's easier and safer to be with people to the extent that you understand them and can try to walk just a few feet in the other person's shoes. It may sound strange to say that police officers feel the safest with their guns and bulletproof vests, but it's really one of the most terrifying things out there, and you are distinctly safer if you understand it with a little bit of a police officer's eyes, and make a few simple changes to your behavior like moving slowly, asking permission, or telling what you intend to do (for instance, my moving slowly and saying I wanted to zipper up the bag which they knew my Swiss Army Knife was in), to avoid as much as possible making any police officer see a real or imagined need to self-protect.

And by the way, one accomplished martial artist I know did in fact know how to take a gun away from a gun criminal, as he practiced thousands of times, but his main

comment about self-defense from gun criminals is that most people feel very uncomfortable if they are in a situation where they're pointing a gun at you and you aren't acting afraid. And there is something of this enshrined in the very Passion narratives in the Gospel. The words, "Don't you know that I have power to kill you and power to free you?" were only answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Pilate was positively terrified on a much larger scale than a gun criminal: he was the authority and he had all the soldiers and all the weapons; he had authority to kill at least some people at will; and yet this Man wasn't playing the game of a terrified criminal grasping at straws to escape execution.

That is something realized even outside of Christian trappings. One story in one of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books tells about a top negotiator who was confronted by gun-criminals and demanded to rob her. She said, slowly, "I don't want those guns pointed at me. It makes me uncomfortable." After an awkward pause, they stopped pointing their guns at her. Then she said, "I'm going to reach into my purse and pull out a twenty. Who's going to take it?" Then eventually one person indicate himself, and she handed him a \$20 bill. Then the criminals ran away, terrified! She had not even *asked* for them to leave.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, and it's better than the Druidic awen

One Anglican pastor, and a Marine to boot, commented that "I can do all things through Christ who

strengthens me” doesn’t mean I can wrestle down [name of a humble, gentle member of the congregation who looked like Gov. Schwarzinator, only beefier]. It doesn’t even mean I can wrestle down my colleague [name of another man who also silver-haired and who used to eat glass].” But it did mean something.

In Steven Lawhead’s *Merlin*, an (obviously fantasy) retelling of Arthurian legends, there is one point where Merlin enters what may have been an ambush, and time slows down to him and he moves, from everyone else’s perspective, something like ten times faster than anyone else. He nimbly dances around, dodging a weapon here and striking an opponent there, until finally the book says, “He put a trembling hand out to touch me and I saw his mouth move, but the words were slow in coming. ‘You can stop now, [Merlin]. It is over.’”

This is presented as fantasy, and is in a fantasy novel, but the phenomenon described as Merlin’s *awen* is well enough documented in nonfiction works: *The Dance of Life* tells a documented tale:

Time Compression and Time Expansion

Time compression and time expansion are two objects of continuing fascination for [American and European] peoples. Time compresses when it speeds up. This is evident in emergency situations where one thinks one is about to die (“My whole life flashed before my eyes”) or where there is extreme pressure to survive. An example would be the case of Major Russ Stromberg, Navy test pilot, testing

the Carrier AV-8C. Stromberg had just been catapulted from the deck of the aircraft carrier *Tarawa* and he realized that his plane was not developing power. This eight-second scenario of what he dealt with the emergency and survived took forty-five minutes to describe. “I was very surprised by the whole evolution of the thing. Everything went into solution. After about one second, after about seventy-five feet after I started rolling, I knew I was in deep trouble” (italics added). First, Stromberg had to see if the engine could be brought up to power by switching off mechanisms limiting takeoff power. That didn’t work. There was no way to get the engine up to power in the five seconds remaining before the plane would hit the water at over a hundred miles an hour and disintegrate. Ejection was the second option. However, to eject at the wrong moment would also have meant certain death. Even with only two or three seconds, he had the time to look around so that he could pull the ejection handle at just the right moment: thirty feet above the water. Stromurg ejected and fortunately avoided the crash site by only a few feet. This meager description cannot possibly cover all the possible alternatives to decisions that Stromberg ultimately had to make—at the right time, in the right order, and without panic. If he had been on normal time, none of this would have been possible. If that capacity

to expand time—in this case to about 300 percent of normal time [Sic; I believe the author meant a much more astounding 300 *times* normal time]—had not been built into the human species, it is doubtful that the human race would have survived.

This is called awen, loosely meaning ‘inspiration’ with a poetic center of gravity, and like profound giftedness and kything in Madeleine l’Engle’s *A Wind in the Door*, that I deeply coveted, because it resonated with me, because in turn it was what I already had. I have never been involved in Druidry or initiated as a (Druidic) Bard, though it made mention on my egotistical character sheet; I might in some sense be called a bard in the sense that I am a writer with poetry as one instance, and it would be a surprising claim to be a poet without being a bard, but on a deeper level, 90% of this website is driven by awen that comes in many genres (and life outside of writing) and can almost never be summoned at will: all of the following are examples of awen on my website at <https://cjshayward.com>:

1. Archdruid of Canterbury Visits Orthodox Patriarch, a lampoon.
2. Doxology, a poem.
3. A Four Dimensional Maze, a simple computer game I originally wrote on Apple][.

4. The Sign of the Grail, a novella, or to speak more strictly, an imitation of medieval romance.
5. The Spectacles, a short story.

This is enough of a digression, or not a digression really at all; in *Merlin*, the awen, like the Spirit of the Lord falling on someone in the Bible, quite often is given as near-superhuman abilities in combat.

And what “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” means in relation to the three sherriff’s officers was this: I was not, and am not, competent in general to overpower three police officers without getting hurt. (Nor stupid enough to try it even if I could.) I was given not an awen from the art of war, but an awen from the art of peace, and God used my weaknesses to keep me calm and help the police officers recognize that I was genuinely not a physical threat. And I left the encounter with something more valuable than rooms full of gold and diamond: my *life!*

It may also be that someday the Spirit of the Lord will fall upon me in a combat situation, and then “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” may open a major can of whoop-ass. I mentioned a couple of details about martial arts, where I have never tested above white belt cleanly, in my first martial art the instructors were pairing me with higher-level belts for sparring, eventually including blackbelt candidates and blackbelts. There was one balance sparring game where I was functioning at blackbelt candidate level or something else. I also took exactly one week to go from no rank to Sharpshooter, Bar VIII, innovating like a good athlete, and shot the target on

“Procedures for the Repair and Adjustment of Televisions” two years out of practice on a gun that did not have its sight appropriately adjusted. (The soldier selling targets seemed a bit surprised when I asked to buy ten targets; but I did have enough stamina to shoot them all even if I flagged for the last 2 or 3.) And lastly, while firearms and pranks put together are not really a good idea, there was one target my brother showed me at home. It had two bullet holes in the larger white area of the target, and lead carelessly splattered near the top. I had squeezed off four rounds well into the black circle at the center of my target, waited for him to hit the target with a second shot, and then I head-on blasted the nail that was holding his target up, leaving splattered lead on the target face. (He wasn’t able to hit the target after that.)

Ok; enough boasting; but all above firearms feats have been without awen. If God wants to give me some awen in the narrow sense for some physical fight (as he won through me the fight started by a fellow patient), he may do so. I would prefer something peaceful and ideally holding satyagraha at its heart, but God’s ways often surprise us and are always, from a sufficiently great perspective, either what we wanted, or better than what we would have thought to ask.

And I would call both meeting my fellow patient, and meeting the officers, were miracles in the broader, everyday Orthodox sense. They were God covering for my weaknesses, and both were sufficient and in fact worked better in my already weakened state than if I were feeling more like myself.

That is perhaps, enough, but it really does say something about self-defense proper if self-defense is taken

not only to include being able to provide violent defense in bad situations, but avoiding or improving bad situations. And while martial artists spend a lot of time on blows and joint locks, people where the martial art has taken proper root are fully willing and ready to run away screaming and completely lose in every sense socially rather lay a finger on their adversary in violence.

And you might review the section in Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict under the heading of “God practices Ju-Jutsu...”

The seamless tapestry

Christ’s garment was seamless, and this much, if it is true, is neither more nor less than one thread in a seamless tapestry. I had tried to establish community sites for “Luddite Orthodox”, but this was wrong, not because of its irony, but because it is taking the greater-than-technological virtues of Orthodoxy and expecting them to stand alone.

Tong Fior, if there is anything in it to take seriously, is merely one thread by which one may rely on Providence, but that is really quite something. And if God is humble enough to make us co-workers with Christ, perhaps we might step aside from solipsism, materialism, atheism, and securing our own world, and follow the Humble One who leads the Great Dance!

Tong Fior III

One: It took me a long way to think of putting this without giving TMI, but...

Many: You've found an appropriate way to state it in public?

One: Yes. People who can't back off to save their skin when you're giving an ongoing and repeated "No" seem to sober up instantly at a C&D letter Cc'ed to an authority.

If I may combine two passages from C.S. Lewis: in an optional chapter in *Mere Christianity*, Lewis addresses an objection I have not otherwise heard, that people cannot conceive of God listening to

millions of people all at once. He says that the entire sting of the objection comes from the condition that God deal with an enormous number of people simultaneously; he expects people would allow God to address any number of claimants provided only that they came to him one at a time.

But God is believed to be outside of time, and you have his attention as much as if you were the only person God has created. God is not limited by time, and the attention he gives every person is total, no less than if that person was his only creation. And so God hears with all of eternity the cry of the last seconds of a pilot crashing into a mountain.

The second point, in another area of his writing, winces at Arthurian knights seeking to "win worship," and declaims trying to earn fame before any merely human audience, but he offers one exception: we can and should seek fame before God himself. And next to that fame only before mortals is a consolation prize.

Putting these together, I am wary of whether it is genuinely beneficial to seek for other men to understand the cross you bear. However, this is eclipsed by the exception: we should seek, and have, God's full understanding of every nook of the crosses we bear.

Many: Is your point related to The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab?

One: That may be part, but I don't think it's the whole truth.

Many: It is a teaching of Tradition, and in the Bible, King Saul went from wanting to murder St. David to manhunts and making him Public Enemy Number One after women started chanting, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

One: Well, it would have been better for St. David's political stock if the woman had been singing the cultural equivalent of "David smells bad and his mother dresses him funny."

Many: And...?

One: It did nothing for St. David's political stock with Saul for Saul to hear that his feats as a warrior had been eclipsed. But partly, at least tacitly, St. David seems to have reminded King Saul of the heights of humility, and of service to God, from which he had fallen.

Many: So then, a man heaped insult on you and your writing and his bitterest insults to The Metacultural Gospel, which he actually twisted into an assertion that rape was the victim's fault, perhaps not only because he saw a gem whose equal he would never write...

One: ...but because on a more basic level he was uniquely identified with his two great causes, which he called "Christianity" and "homosexuality," and...

Many: ...and possibly because you reminded him of a time when he only asserted one of his later two great causes.

One: Even if envy is double, and my having only one great cause stung him more than works of genius he knew he would never match, I do not think envy is the best thing to latch on first.

Many: What would you latch on sooner, then?

One: There are two points I would take from Elder Thaddeus, *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*. There are things about the book that I find odd...

Many: Such as?

One: It is the most occultic book I have ever read from a canonical author. Nowhere does it condone ever cursing anyone, but it provides more of a picture of how one might lay an unintended or intended curse than... I don't know what's even the first runner up on that score.

Many: Then what two points would you take from it?

One: The first might be called a Little Law of Attraction. Unlike the New Age-y, Oprah kind of law of

attraction, the Little Law of Attraction does not say that if you think about receiving money, money, money, then a huge windfall will fall across your lap.

Many: Then what does it say?

One: It says that if you think thoughts of peace, you will get more and bigger thoughts of peace, and if you think thoughts of anger, you will get more and bigger thoughts of anger, and conflict with them. And this more focused Little Law of Attraction is actually much more useful for serious spiritual work than Oprah's version.

Many: And what is the second point you would take?

One: The natural—at least to sinners like us, at least a seemingly natural—trend is for us to be Hellishly bent into a vortex of focusing on our circumstances and entering a Hellish despair, while the higher and more beneficial path is to let go of focusing on our circumstances and raise our thoughts to Heaven. It's the harder path, but it's worth it.

And there is one non-point I would take from him.

Many: Which is?

One: I find the book's nexus a bit strange, but such of the nexus I can make sense of is a natural venue to discuss envy. Perhaps part of the envy I faced then was one gifted like many others he had met

answering one profoundly gifted like no one else he had met, but such a factor is at least a relative rarity. More common is what I believe a Roman Fr. Richard John Neuhaus called a narrow escape syndrome, where even the most flaming liberal of academics sense themselves from having made a narrow escape from a conservative background. And really, the ability to say the Creed without crossing your fingers is of eternal significance as profound giftedness is not.

Many: I see. So, what else is happening with regards to Tong Fior? You had a recent self-defense circumstance, didn't you?

One: Well, when I was driving home from church, someone pulled out behind me from a driveway and tailgated me across about four or five turns on twenty miles of road. When I got back to my monastery, I tried to give them as little time to react in terms of slowing down and taking the quickest entry to the monastery I've ever taken, and then slowing down and parking. They didn't follow me in, even though I was reviewing defense after I parked. I didn't need to; the Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount, and all that was necessary for me was to enter the driveway without giving them much more time to react than was necessary. Had it come to a fight, I might sound like a martial artist in saying I would have given myself one chance in four. I couldn't run, which normal martial arts present as a vastly preferable option to fighting, because I have an

old knee injury and would have been on the ground in excruciating pain if I had run. And I'm not sure that their following me was malicious; possibly they saw a URL on my vehicle and were just curious. I mostly managed to keep my cool for over a dozen miles, at least enough to make sensible decisions. The resolution was provided me.

Many: You don't seem to think you contributed much.

One: I didn't. Like two other victories, I followed the Lord of the Dance, and grace enough was shown that it wouldn't so easily be interpreted as my own power—chance, perhaps, might be considered a better interpretation by some. At any rate, this kind of scenario is rare, particularly next to the war with thoughts.

Many: Have there been any other self-defense situations you would mention?

One time when I was going to a food pantry, on the way out I followed the instructions of a volunteer and nicked the bumper of the car in front of me.

The driver of that car came out and almost immediately put up his dukes. He alternately went closer and further, said that he was already coping with the loss of his mother, and "That's not right" that on top of all of this I damaged his car. He said, "You'll pay for this!" as often as he said "That's not right." And by the way, in India—I believe him to be a

first generation Indian immigrant—it is common practice after a car accident for the drivers to start fighting. People can be awed at Americans calmly exchanging information after a car accident.

For my part, I was standing, completely calm, not reacting, offering no response to his criticism, with my arms at my sides. He never struck me physically, but I think not only that I was right to do what I did, but that it brought much better results. He would have been willing to fight, and if I were to have adopted a fighting stance, I would have eroded much of the buffer I created by refusing to cooperate with the dance of conflict. If I had adopted a fighting stance, in which I would have been acting legally, and if I let him strike first the law would have been on my side to defend myself. However the response I took avoided injuring him at all. With at least some firearm ownership you can be told, "The second last thing you want to do is pull that trigger." Kuk Sool Won has a saying like, "If you can run, do not fight. If you can defend yourself by holding, do not hurt. If you can defend yourself by hurting, do not injure. If you can defend yourself by injuring, do not kill." I would expect all of the martial artists I have studied under to regard handling the situation with no touching at all to be better than winning a fight.

And I might mention that one martial artist I worked under commented that someone with a gun will be uncomfortable if you are not afraid. He knew how to take away the gun but did not see that as the most

important point of handling such a situation. The best response he saw didn't really take long years of martial arts mastery, and calm is a choice.

Many: Ok, but what about the war with thoughts?

One: Here Elder Thaddeus is far from our only authority; the whole *Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*, or *Philokalia* for short, is a collection across the centuries about the war with thoughts. Some of us are faced with a self-defense situation where martial arts would help less than once a year; others perhaps more or even less. (People who watch a lot of TV overestimate their chances of being a victim of violent crime.) But the battle of thoughts is with us every day.

Many: What about bullying? That is much more frequent than violent assault in some quarters.

One: On this, I would draw a third point from Elder Thaddeus.

Many: Which is?

One: There is a story about a horrible bunch of kids in a class who threw all sorts of abuse at their teacher. Then a new teacher came, who offered the abuse no reactions whatsoever. Their verbal missiles simply passed through her, and were not even acknowledged.

After sometime, the utterly unsuccessful attempts to get the teacher's goat gave way to a profound curiosity about who this woman was and why she was not sinking under their slings and arrows. And that is when she found a very teachable moment.

We are not necessarily slaves and patients of all that happens to us, and things that might go against our wishes do not need to mar our happiness. We have a choice. That is much of the *Philokalia's* point, or more broadly the one sentence thesis that is explicated at length and in detail in the terse four or five volume collection. Nor is this thesis unique to Orthodox Christianity; *Man's Search for Meaning* finds a similar experience in the Jewish experience of a Nazi concentration camp.

That is part of how I unwittingly shrugged off a physical assault in “Tong Fior: Two Victories in Following the Lord of the Dance.” I did not have much of any say in whether the man would attack me after I disobeyed his second command. I was, however, free to lose interest in the conflict in about five minutes. I was invited to press charges. I did not do so, not really because I was mainly to be leaving for Mount Athos and wanted to stay there, but because I had just lost interest.

Many: So what does your martial arts practice look like now?

One: Besides praying and working with my abbot?

There is something I should perhaps explain. My conscience has never allowed me to practice a traditional martial art. Or modern MMA or whatever. At one point I hung a gallon plastic bottle full of sand to strike with a spearhand when it came near me, and it, which I considered 37% of a martial art, and my conscience was uneasy with even that. The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount, and my training at present is to work more deeply on living the Sermon on the Mount which Orthodox monasticism is all about. Possibly my training in the future will involve practicing fighting; what is before me now is just the baseline of learning to repent.

And at any rate, I would close almost where “The Transcendent God Who Meets Us in our Neighbor” ends:

The temperature of Heaven can be rather accurately computed from available data. Our authority is the Bible: Isaiah 30:26 reads, *Moreover the light of the Moon shall be as the light of the Sun and the light of the Sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days.* Thus Heaven receives from the Moon as much radiation as we do from the Sun and in addition seven times seven (forty-nine) times as much as the Earth does from the Sun, or fifty times in all. The light we receive from the Moon is a ten-thousandth of the light we

receive from the sun, so we can ignore that. With these data we can compute the temperature of Heaven. The radiation falling on Heaven will heat it to the point where the heat lost by radiation is just equal to the heat lost by radiation. Using the Stefan-Boltzmann fourth power law for radiation and where H is the temperature of Heaven, E that of the Earth - 300 K - we have

$$(H/E)^4 = 50.$$

This gives H as 798 K or 525°C.

The exact temperature of Hell cannot be computed but it must be less than 444.6°C, the temperature at which brimstone or sulphur changes from a liquid to a gas. Revelations 21:8: *But the fearful, and unbelieving . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.* A lake of molten brimstone means that its temperature must be below the boiling point, which is 444.6°C.

We have, then, temperature of Heaven, 525°C. Temperature of Hell, less than 445°C. Therefore, Heaven is hotter than Hell.

Applied Optics, 11, A14 (1972)

One brief remark before continuing: one man I knew was in an elevator on a sweltering hot day, when a profusely sweating jogger stepped into the elevator and said, "It's hotter 'n *Hell* out there!" and he replied, slowly, "*No. It isn't.*" There is something amiss with the humorous quote above, and Mark Twain, the great humorist, wrote, "The secret source of humor itself is not joy but sorrow. There is no humor in Heaven." There is a sense in Orthodoxy that humor does not belong in the holiest places, and devout Orthodox I know have a deep joy but laugh little. The connotations of "humorless" do not describe them; they are not sour, nor joyless, nor rigid, nor quick to take offense, but they are luminous with the Light of a Heaven that needs no humor.

But the physicist quoted above underscores something: words are inadequate to capture Heaven. There are situations in life where words fail us: people say, "Words cannot express how grateful I am." And if words fail us for expressing gratitude, for instance, or romantic love, they fail all the more in describing Heaven and God. "Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, heart has not conceived, what God has prepared for them that love him:" words cannot express Heaven, nor God.

In classical theology this is spoken of as God's transcendence: God is infinitely far beyond any

created thing. He is reflected in a million ways in our created world, but the hidden transcendent God is beyond all of them. In a book of profound influence but only a few pages long, *The Mystical Theology*, St. Dionysius writes of ascending towards God:

The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more our words are confined to the ideas we are capable of forming; so that now as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing...

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. He is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. He is not in any place and can neither be seen nor be touched. He is neither perceived nor is he perceptible. He suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. He is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. He endures no deprivation of light. He passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses

may be aware. None of all this can either be identified with it nor attributed to it.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. He is not soul or mind, nor does he possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is he speech per se, understanding per se. He cannot be spoken of and he cannot be grasped by understanding. He is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. He is not immovable, moving, or at rest. He has no power, he is not power, nor is he light. He does not live nor is he life. He is not a substance, nor is he eternity or time. He cannot be grasped by the understanding since he is neither knowledge nor truth. He is not kingship. He is not wisdom. He is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is he a spirit, in the sense in which we understand that term. He is not sonship or fatherhood and he is nothing known to us or to any other being. He falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of being. Existing beings do not know him as he actually is and he does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of him, nor name nor knowledge of him.

Darkness and light, error and truth—he is none of these. He is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to him, but never of him, for he is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of his preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation; he is also beyond every denial.

Over a millennium before a Bultmann would go on a program of saying that the images we have in Scripture are inadequate, the Orthodox Church would do one better. Her saints would tell of the hidden transcendent God who transcends everything we might say of him. And better than this can be said. God transcends his own transcendence, and transcends transcendence itself. And here we must leave Bultmann completely behind as not having gone far enough.

God transcends his own transcendence, and the transcendent God so far transcends his own transcendence that not only is he infinitesimally close to the Creation, immanent to all Creation, but he entered his Creation: God became man. And the reason God became man is that man might become divine. And there is never a sharp separation between Christ coming to save mankind and Christ coming to save the whole Creation: the transcendent

God so far transcends his own incomparable transcendence that he is at work to deify men, and ultimately the whole Creation. In Christ there is no male nor female, paradise nor inhabited world, heaven nor earth, spiritual nor material, uncreated nor created, but Christ is all, and in all, and transcends all, and in him all these differences are to be transcended. The transcendent Christ God transcends his Creation and transcends his own transcendence, and he returns to his Father in victory, bearing deified men and Creation as trophies who share in his transcendent victory. There is no distinction between male and female, paradise and the inhabited world, heaven and earth, spiritual and material, uncreated God and created creation, for the same transcendent Lord is Lord of all and bestows riches upon all who call him, and makes all one in Christ Jesus.

And this Lord who infinitely transcends his creation shouts through it. He shouts through icons, through every human love, through music, through storm and star. It is thus perhaps right to say, "The Orthodox martial art is living the Sermon on the Mount," and more right to utterly transcend the statement in the hidden transcendent God.

A Mechanism

Quotes that have rumbled down the ages

Perhaps the most famous quote in Orthodoxy, a John 3:16, is "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." Or that's at least one variant.

Another quote or two that have rumbled down the ages, if not quite so spectacularly, is:

- Save yourself and ten thousands around you will be saved.
- Make peace with yourself and Heaven and earth will make peace with you.

I would like to suggest a mechanism by which such things make effect, or at least a physical shadow of an explanation. The deepest sense in which such things happen is God's grace, in a relationship where God is totally free and we are totally free, and I do not want to detract from

that. However, there is a physical mechanism, a physical dimension, that I'd like to explore, before saying, "The truth is greater than all this."

Do arguments persuade?

Do arguments persuade?

The pop psychology consensus is that we are emotion with a veneer of rationality, and in the context of interpersonal relations and conflicts, arguments rarely persuade. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the same is true in public debates: political speechwriter Simon Lancaster in *Speechwriting: The Expert Guide* compares rational and emotional appeal to a peashooter and a cannon in their effectiveness, and says that argument is never appropriate in speeches, though it may occasionally be helpful to provide an illusion of argument, and he explains how to do that when it is called for.

However, there are other contexts in which arguments do persuade. In a debate where one person is arguing one position and another is arguing the opposite position, it is likely that neither will persuade the other. However, with bystanders and onlookers the matter is different. In, for instance, the Christological and Trinitarian controversies, arguments loom large in Orthodox Church history. One finds in the Orthodox Church's greatest public speaker, St. John Chrysostom, public argument that there can be (for instance) no interval of separation between the Father and the Son, because if you make an interval between the Father's beginning and that of the Son, you make the Father as well as the Son to have a beginning. This is one of many arguments St. John Chrysostom makes in the course of his applied public speaking.

I believe that arguments can persuade, that argument is appropriate in public discourse, and apologetics are and remain a *part* of the legitimate public face of Orthodoxy, but they are not the whole picture.

Furthermore, I suggest that there are other major factors. And even speaking as an apologist who has been called disciple to C.S. Lewis, I would like to try to expose one major feature of legitimate influence that does not boil down to addressing a task of apologetics.

Furthermore, there is a time to keep your mouth shut even if you are right. I think of one person I know where I have kept my mouth shut about his belief in a flat earth for the simple reason and communication principle that people have pushed him away by trying to argue him out of belief in a flat earth, and if I say more than I have, I will just push him away further, and his position is not morally reprehensible in the sense that authorities need to lay down the law. I am kind to him and I keep my mouth shut, and I have his respect. A study of persuasion by argument shows up that there are some contexts where arguing something, even something true, will just push people away, and the pop psychology consensus that "A man convinced against his will, retains the same opinion still," is on the money.

Bowled over by humility

There was a time when I was visiting Holy Cross Monastery, and I talked to another person about someone who worked in the kitchen (name withheld), who had "bowled me over by humility." The other person knew immediately whom I was talking about and what I meant.

There was something incredibly compelling in those interactions with him, and before long my unspoken reaction was, "I want the mint!", i.e. I don't want some of the money he has, but what he has that he was minting spiritual money with. Now he offered me undiluted kindness in every interaction, but my "I want the mint!" was something that extended well beyond appreciating the kindness he treated me with. I did not want, exactly, for him to treat me so kindly, but I did want to observe and see if

there was some way I could learn where he was spiritually minting money from. *Dealing with him was riveting.*

I think also of another time I encountered someone very humble, and I saw something great, and was again closely trying to observe him and wanting what he had, but I kept my mouth shut.

Bruising someone's humility

There was one other time I'd mention, on a not so theatrical scale, when I told my abbot, "I'm not telling [Name] in order not to bruise his humility, but you don't know what an incredible blessing it is to answer to someone who is humble." And that was appreciated.

Pride wants compliments; humility helps uproot that desire, and so it's not best, when dealing with humble people, to offer comments that will bruise their humility. Pride wants human honor; humility is extremely wary of receiving honor, partly because humility includes an accurate assessment of how empty human honor really is. The suggestion I'd give for dealing with someone who has an awe-inspiring humility is to sit on your hands as far as compliments go; interact with the person, love and appreciate him, and try to get what you can of the mint, but respect that a humble person will regard human praise as fool's gold that is inseparable from hostilities that follow it, and he wants things much greater. I would add to this that such people have their sights set on a much higher target, and you do nothing to hinder them in their quest by sitting and enjoying their humility.

There was one time at a gathering where I was listening with rapt attention to musicians playing, and in a personal conversation after the performance, the performers spoke appreciatively of my listening. I do not remember what language they used but I would use a term like "listening loudly," or listening loud and clear. Someone who is listening in a prickly or hostile way makes it harder

to perform; someone who is listening sympathetically makes it easier to perform, and I give every blessing to "listen loudly," when encountering someone humble.

How not to impart humility, and what is better

There is something compelling in this listening, and something I have never met in meeting the Seraphinians I encountered that led up to writing, and continues after writing, *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*. They were, without exception, very big on my need for humility and fully willing to harass and bluntly criticize me to pound me into being humble. And none of my own humility, such as I have, came from there. If anything, like a bad heresiologist I fell into the trap of picking up some of my opponents' approach in communicating, and however much I may have attempted to argue in a compelling fashion, I do not believe many readers have been drawn to it as by humility.

There is someone else I met who has a deep and contagious calm, enough so that people are drawn to him in the hope that some of his calm rubs off on them. Calm and humility are not exactly the same thing, and the deep calm may or may not have been accompanied by humility. However, there was something of the same kind of draw. People have wanted to be near him in the hope some of his calm will rub off.

In the Roman empire before Constantine, there was a saying, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the faith." Roman citizens seeing public martyrdoms of Christians saw at least one thing that even transcends that wild beasts were let loose to devour martyrs and came and licked the martyrs' feet. They saw families that were summoned to the contest, and who were exuberantly happy, as if they had been summoned to a great feast, and there was something

very compelling about this. Although martyrs had been sometimes healed in the course of their contest, they saw that a pagan Empire could *kill* Christians but not *defeat* them. Now it is to be mentioned in some cases that there were apologetics at play, and Great-Martyr Katherine, for instance, converted the fifty philosophers who were asked to out-argue her. However, there was something in the many martyrs beyond some of them being effective apologists. Rome could *kill* Christians but not *defeat* them, and in the final run killing Christians under those conditions was an act of impotence.

The story is told of one teacher who took over a religion class whose terrible behavior had driven out her predecessor, and whose unruly students found to their astonishment that all their verbal missiles simply passed through her without causing harm or leaving a trace. Their hostility gave way to an incredible curiosity about who she was and why she was not harmed by their missiles.

I was not argued into entering Orthodoxy, and I only reasoned my way into it to a limited extent. I wanted what the Orthodox Church has.

The "fruit of the Spirit" option

The Benedict Option argues forcefully that Christianity has lost the point of sexual morality in the public sphere, and really lost what is to be had in the public sphere of argument. But Galatians 5:22 reads, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Christianity may have lost all legal status above that of bigotry in face of anti-Christian opposition, but the option is as much now as ever open to leave people in the misery heralded by the gender rainbow to see their misery and the "I want what he has!" to our joy in the Spirit.

Years before entering Orthodoxy, I was part of an "Anglican opposition" parish, with a healing ministry for

homosexuals, and one of the priests talked about how as gay he had a vision of a face he did not recognize. But the face he did not recognize was his own, radiant as the ex-gay priest he would become. And he really was unrecognizably transformed in his penitence.

It hurts to kick against the goads, and it still hurts if you have the entirety of the law, public discourse, and political correctness defending the full legitimacy of kicking against the goads. Now that traditional teaching on sexuality is legally no more privileged than bigotry, Christians have lost incredibly much in the public square, but Orthodox and Christians are free now as much as ever to have something that queers want.

A quote that relates to misery

Fr. Thaddeus, who echoed in *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives*, wrote to a spiritual daughter,

I had barely fallen asleep when I dreamt that I had died. Two young men led me into a room and had me stand on some sort of platform between them. To my right were the judges. Someone in the far left corner of the room was reading the charges against me. "That's him! That's the one who cannot get along with anyone!" I stood there dumbfounded. The voice *repeated* the same accusation two or more times. Then the young man standing on my right said to me, "Do not be afraid! It is not true that you cannot get along with anyone. You just cannot get along with yourself!"

My first encounter with the man who bowled me over in humility was when he was cheerfully folding a sheet, and talking about how he loved to do laundry. And it is the

characteristic of humility to be able to enjoy the here and now. An oppressive escapism, sensing the "here and now" to be intolerable, but in many cases the intolerably entirely consists in our inner state. Perhaps really bad surroundings can also make people miserable, but people can find the here and now oppressive no matter how nice a here and now they may be in. And humility, besides everything else above, is a key to joy. As G.K. Chesterton said, "It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride."

Engaging solipsism

Solipsism, at least as a sense that only one's self is believed knowable, is rising and if it does not have too much limelight yet, it will. But engaging with solipsists may take the form of "A Canticle to Holy, Blessed Solipsism," and living the truth in,

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...

Argument has its place, but important as it is, there is more power, especially today, it is more powerful to live a life that will leave others wanting what we have. The lost state of the public arena today is owned by people inside it who, as of my studies, say, "We have lost the metanarrative." and the possibility of choosing your own metanarrative is only another way of saying that our world has lost the metanarrative.

I do not know if many people can be argued out of this position, but the door remains open to living a joy that will leave people wanting what we have. If argument has its place, this is more important for most of us to have. A few martyrs argued opponents out of error, but a great many of them showed such a vibrancy and vitality of life that a Roman state that could *kill* them could not *defeat* them, and the saying "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of faith." was quoted by pagan and Christian alike.

And when time had reached its fullness, impotence gave way to power and pagan Rome became Christian.

Conclusion: One Image Among Others

Pseudo-Dionysius said that all statements about God have some truth, but all ultimately fall short of the truth. But all are not equal: he places them as rungs on a ladder, and going one way we start by affirming that God is One and King, descending to acknowledging that there is truth even in comparing God to wood and stone, while going the other way we deny the adequacy of comparing God to wood and stone, and keep ascending until we deny the adequacy even of saying that God is One and King.

The title of this work, “The Orthodox Martial Art is Living the Sermon on the Mount,” exists somewhere on this ladder, and perhaps lower rather than higher. The exact placement among partially true statements may admit some debate, but I would suggest that the most interesting interpretation is the least literal, somewhat like how “Our social program is the Trinity” may not receive the best

exposition by fleshing out the doctrine of the Trinity along the lines of modern Roman social teaching.

I present an image, and one that is inadequate, but holds some minor merit. When I finish publishing this work, my next project is to tackle Metropolitan HILARION (Alfeyev), *The Sermon on the Mount*, available from <https://cjshayward.com/sermon-on-the-mountain>. I am very much looking forward to an in-depth treatment of that singularity of a sermon, and I invite you to read it.