

Author's Picks: Favorite Works of Orthodox Christian Mystical Theology

From the "Major Works" series

CJS Hayward

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Questions and contact information: cjshayward.com/contact

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Preface

This offers a motley selection of "Author's Picks" from the theology section of the library at [Jonathan's Corner](#). The works are diverse, sometimes surprising, and often surprisingly creative—even when treating theology that is not about being creative.

The works flow out of a lifetime studying the Bible and years of walking the Orthodox Way and sitting at the feet of the Fathers. If you read just one work out of the collected works of CJS Hayward, this one would perhaps be the best.

Akathist to St. Philaret the Merciful

Kontakion 1

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures! (*Repeated thrice.*)

Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven. Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

Rejoice, illustrious and wealthy noble who knew true wealth!
Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!
Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to Christ!
Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!
Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from the world!
Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never be forsaken!
Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!
Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!
Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked for a little!
Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels thereafter!
Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 2

Thou knewest treasure enough to feed thy household for a hundred years without work: And thou wert true to thy name, Philaret or "Lover of Virtue", even when thine own wife saw not the horses on the mountain and chariots of fire which surround the true lover of virtue. But with eyes raised to fiery Heaven, we cry out with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 2

Thou invitedst thine own to join thy love of virtue, and thine own received not thine invitation. But thine invitation remaineth open, and we who receive thine invitation and hearken to the open door cry out to thee in praise:

Rejoice, O diadem of married life in the world!
Rejoice, O thou who knewest virtue as treasure!
Rejoice, O thou who fed a household out of the treasurehouse of thy virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who knew not the greed of Midas's curse!
Rejoice, O thou whose gifts would yet multiply and enrich the recipient!
Rejoice, O thou who was generous when he was rich!
Rejoice, O thou who was raided by marauders yet became no less generous!
Rejoice, O thou who trusted God when he had much and when he had little!
Rejoice, O thou who knewest that riches profit not in the day of wrath!
Rejoice, O thou whose virtue profited in easy times and hard times alike!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 3

Many a generous beggar will give his last penny, whilst few a rich man will give to thee from his hedge of protection. Yet we behold a wonder in thee, who was rich, illustrious, and of noble lineage, and esteemed these not. Thy hedge of protection was the Lord God, and virtue and treasure in Heaven, and thou wert generous unto thine uttermost farthing. To thee, a rich man more generous than a beggar, we cry:
Alleluia!

Oikos 3

Thou transcendedst the virtues of pagan philosophy: fortitude, justice, prudence, and temperance, the virtues of a well lived earthly life. But thou knewest the Christian, deiform virtues: faith, hope, and love, the virtues of a Heavenly life already present in an egg in life on earth. Wherefore we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou whose fortitude sought no protection from earthly treasures!
Rejoice, O thou whose justice transcended human reckoning!
Rejoice, O thou whose prudence was the Wisdom who is Christ!
Rejoice, O thou whose temperance sought from earthly things nothing in excess of what they could give!
Rejoice, O thou whose faith trusted that Christ would faithfully provide!
Rejoice, O thou whose hope in God was never disappointed!
Rejoice, O thou whose love refrained from sharing neither virtue nor earthly possessions!
Rejoice, O thou whose joy flowed in easy times and hard!
Rejoice, O thou whose peace flowed from the silence of Heaven!
Rejoice, O thou whose generosity was perfect!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 4

We will forever underestimate thy generosity if we merely count what thou gavest against what much or little property thou possessesdt, for thine open hand was a shadow and an icon of the vast wealth thou heldest in the generous treasure in Heaven, and this vast treasure thou laid hold to as Philaret, lover of virtue, which is to say lover of treasures in Heaven, eclipseth thy generosity with mere earthly property as the sun eclipseth the moon—nay, as the sun eclipseth a candle! Wherefore, with thee who hoarded true treasure, we cry: Alleluia!

Oikos 4

Beseech the Lord God that we also might seek true treasure in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust corrodes and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherefore we cry out in wonder to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who drunk from the wellspring of Truth!
Rejoice, O thou who were fed by the Tree of Life!
Rejoice, O thou who knew silver from dross!
Rejoice, O thou who never grasped at dross because thou clungst to the Treasure for whom every treasure is named!
Rejoice, O thou who esteemed men of humble birth because thou questedst after the royal priesthood!
Rejoice, O thou who grasped treasure next to which every earthly endowment is but dust and ashes!
Rejoice, O thou who counted the poor and needy as more precious than gold!
Rejoice, O thou who cast away shadows to behold the Sun of Righteousness!
Rejoice, O thou who never forsook the Lord!
Rejoice, O thou whom the Lord never abandoned!
Rejoice, O thou who found that not one of His good promises has failed!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 5

Ever seeking Christ, thou becamest thyself like Christ, the source and the summit of all virtue. Wishing to imitate thee as thou imitatedst Christ, we cry unto thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 5

Every virtue is an icon of Christ, an icon not before us, but in us.
Seeking after the virtues as we seek Christ, we cry out to thee:

Rejoice, O thou divine lover of virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who knew the Source of virtue!
Rejoice, O thou whose virtue was an imprint of Christ!
Rejoice, O thou who perfected the divine image with voluntary likeness!
Rejoice, O thou who teaches us virtue in the Christian walk!
Rejoice, O thou ever willing to share not only possessions but virtue!
Rejoice, O thou in whom Christ sat enthroned on virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who in virtue loved and served God!
Rejoice, O volume wherein the Word was inscribed in the ink of the virtues!
Rejoice, O thou who ever banishest passions!
Rejoice, O polished mirror refulgent with the uncreated Light!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 6

Eating from the Tree of Life, thou becamest thyself a tree of life, to the nourishment of many. Hungering for lifegiving food, we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 6

Sown in good soil, thou baredst fruit thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.
Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who were food to the hungry!
Rejoice, O thou who were wealth to the destitute!
Rejoice, O thou who were a robe of boldness to the naked!
Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of thine abundance!
Rejoice, O thou who gave abundantly out of lack and want!
Rejoice, O thou who were God's abundance to thy neighbour!
Rejoice, O thou who never merely gave money or property!
Rejoice, O thou who always gave with a blessing!
Rejoice, O thou who loved Christ in thy neighbour!
Rejoice, O thou tree whose shade sheltered many!
Rejoice, O thou river who irrigated vast lands!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 7

Blessed art thou, O holy Father Philaret the Merciful! Merciful wert thou, and thou receivedst mercy, wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 7

Feeding the hungry is greater work than raising the dead! Wherefore we ask of thee no miracle, O merciful Father Philaret, for thou shewedst the continual miracle of mercy, and we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who gave the very last thou hadst!
Rejoice, O thou who received recompense from Christ thereafter!
Rejoice, O thou who withheld nothing from him who asked of thee!
Rejoice, O thou who wherewith withheld nothing from Christ!
Rejoice, O thou who clung not to gold!
Rejoice, O thou who clung to the Light next to which gold is as dust!
Rejoice, O wise one who made blessings as abundant as dust!
Rejoice, O thou who were ever full of mercy!
Rejoice, O thou whose mercy was as a lamp!
Rejoice, O thou who firmly beheld the invisible!
Rejoice, O thou whose faith worked mercy through love!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 8

Rejoice, thou who wilt stand before Christ's dread judgment throne numbered among those who hear: Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came to me. And thou wilt cry with the blessed saints: Alleluia!

Oikos 8

Knowing that no man can love God whom he cannot see except that he love his neighbor whom he has seen, thou wert ever merciful, wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who fed Christ when He was an hungred!
Rejoice, O thou who gave Christ to drink when He was athirst!
Rejoice, O thou who showed Christ hospitality when He came a stranger!
Rejoice, O thou who clothed Christ when He was naked!
Rejoice, O thou who visited Christ when He was sick!
Rejoice, O thou who came to Christ when He was in prison!
Rejoice, O thou who met the least of these and saw Christ!
Rejoice, O thou who called every man thy brother!
Rejoice, O thou who saw no man as outside of God's love!
Rejoice, O thou perfect in mercy as thy Heavenly Father is perfect in mercy!
Rejoice, O lamp ever scintillating with the Light of Heaven!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 9

All the angels were amazed at the excellence of thy virtue, for thy name "Philaret" is not only "Lover of Virtue" but "Lover of Excellence", for in thee excellence, virtue, and power are one and the same. Wherefore thou joinest the angels in crying: Alleluia!

Oikos 9

Even the most eloquent of orators cannot explain how thy virtue excelleth, for they cannot explain how in every circumstance thou soughtest out and lovedst virtue. But we marvel and cry out faithfully:

Rejoice, O rich man who cared for the poor!
Rejoice, O illustrious man who cared for men of no account!
Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of advantage!
Rejoice, O excellent in virtue in times of suffering as well!
Rejoice, O man who held great treasure and yet ever fixed his eyes upon true Treasure!
Rejoice, O thou who in every circumstance found an arena for excellent virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who were ever an excellent worshipper of God!
Rejoice, O thou who in the world escaped the Devil's snares!
Rejoice, O thou who unmasked hollow Mammon!
Rejoice, O thou who found harbor on the sea of life!
Rejoice, O thou who by loving virtue loved Christ!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 10

Thy life wast a living manuscript of the Sermon on the Mount, for even Solomon in his splendor had not raiment like unto thy faith. Beholding thy splendor we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 10

Thou storedst up possessions wherewith not to worry: not fickle and corruptible treasure on earth, but constant and incorruptible treasure in Heaven. Wherefore we cry unto thee:

Rejoice, O thou who however rich wert poor in spirit!
Rejoice, O thou who mourned thy neighbor's unhappiness!
Rejoice, O thou meek before thy neighbor's suffering!
Rejoice, O thou who hungered and thirsted for justice and all virtue!
Rejoice, O thou mirror of mercy!
Rejoice, O thou who remained pure in heart!
Rejoice, O thou who made deepest peace!
Rejoice, O living mirror of the Beatitudes!
Rejoice, O thou soaring as the birds of the air!
Rejoice, O thou who wert devoted to one Master, and despised all others!
Rejoice, O living exposition of the Sermon on the Mount!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 11

Thou wert as the widow who bereaved herself even of her last two farthings: not only gave she more than all the others, but she who gave up her creaturely life received the uncreated, immortal, and eternal life. Like her, thou wert a vessel empty enough to fill, wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 11

Thou wert a second Job, steadfast whilst Satan tore off layer after layer of thy belongings to show that there was nothing inside. Wherefore, we cry to thee who ever persevered:

Rejoice, O thou worshiper of God in plenty and in need!
Rejoice, O thou icon of perseverance and faith!
Rejoice, O thou generous with thy coin and generous with thy virtue!
Rejoice, O thou phoenix ever arisen from thy very ashes!
Rejoice, O thou saint immobile in thy dispassion!
Rejoice, O thou who in want showed the truth of thy generosity in easy times!
Rejoice, O thou who ever blessed the name of the Lord!
Rejoice, O thou who with many possessions loved them not!
Rejoice, O thou who with few possessions loved them no more!
Rejoice, O thou who remained stalwart whilst Satan tore away what was thine, to show there was nothing inside!
Rejoice, O thou who were vindicated when God peeled off the nothing and showed there was everything inside!
Rejoice, O thou who vindicated God as did Job!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 12

Thou hadst no food in the house, when imperial emissaries came looking for a bride for the Emperor: thou rich in Heaven, in trust thou beganst preparations to honourably meet the imperial emissaries. And thy neighbours came and brought food, a fitting feast, and the imperial emissaries found thy granddaughter finest in virtue and modesty, choosing her for her excellence to become Empress. Wherefore we cry with thee: Alleluia!

Oikos 12

When all this had come to pass, in thy virtue, in thine excellence, thou knewest what is real treasure. In thy virtue and humility, thou refusedst all imperial rank and office, saying that it sufficed thee to be known as grandfather to the Empress. Wherefore, amazed, we cry to thee:

Rejoice, O thou who knew true Treasure!
Rejoice, O thou who were lover of virtue and excellence!
Rejoice, O thou who were rich and cared for the poor!
Rejoice, O thou who lost almost all and still opened thy hand!
Rejoice, O thou who became grandfather to the Empress whilst remaining ever humble!
Rejoice, O thou who were illustrious and noble yet cherished those of low estate!
Rejoice, O thou who were razed nigh unto the earth, and ever remained excellent as a lover of virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who were raised nigh unto Heaven, and ever remained humble as a lover of virtue!
Rejoice, O thou who sought first the Kingdom of Heaven!
Rejoice, O thou who were given all other things as well!
Rejoice, O thou who even then fixed his virtuous gaze on Christ!
Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Kontakion 13

O holy Father Philaret whose excellence was virtue and whose virtue was excellence, whose power was virtue and whose virtue was power, who was ever merciful and generous out of thine overflowing virtue, ever protected by the Kingdom of God, pray for us as we cry unto thee:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! (*Repeated thrice.*)

Oikos 1

Thou hadst earthly wealth yet knewest true treasure: thou madest use of thy possessions but trustedst them never, for in thee was the Kingdom of God and thy treasurehouse was Heaven. Wherefore thou hearest these praises which we offer to thee:

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Rejoice, O thou who were ever mindful of the poor!
Rejoice, who knew thy deeds to the poor are deeds done to Christ!
Rejoice, O thou who knew true wealth from false!
Rejoice, O thou who knew that we can take nothing from the world!
Rejoice, O thou who knew that the righteous would never be forsaken!
Rejoice, O thou who gave ever more than was asked!
Rejoice, O thou who withheld not thy last ounce of wheat!
Rejoice, O thou who gave all six bushels to one who asked for a little!
Rejoice, O thou whose friend gave thee forty bushels thereafter!
Rejoice, O thou who trusted in the Lord with all his heart!
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Kontakion 1

To thee, O camel who passed through the eye of the needle, we offer thanks and praise: for thou gavest of thy wealth to the poor, as an offering to Christ. Christ God received thy gift as a loan, repaying thee exorbitantly, in this transient life and in Heaven. Rejoice, O flowing fountain of Heaven's treasures!

Death

In the time of life,
Prepare for death.

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

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

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

We meet death in microcosm,
In the circumstances of our lives and the smallest decisions,
The decision, when our desire is cut off,
In anger to abide, or to be unperturbed.
Politeness to show to others, little things,
A rhythm of prayer to build up,
Brick by brick, even breath by breath,
Our mind to have on the things of Heaven or on earth,
A heart's answer of love and submission,
To hold when the Vinedresser takes knife to prune,
The Physician takes scalpel to reneek our wounds

THE PHYSICIAN TAKES SCALPEL TO RAISACK OUR WOUNDS,
With our leave, to build us up,
Or to take the gold,
The price of our edification,
And buy demolition in its stead.
Right poetic and wondrous it may sound right now,
Right poetic and wondrous it is in its heart,
But it cometh almost in disguise,
From a God who wishes our humility never to bruise,
To give us better than we know to ask,
And until we see with the eyes of faith,
Our humble God allows it to seem certain,
That he has things wrong,
That we are not in the right circumstances for his work,
When his greatest work is hid from our eyes,
Our virtue not to crush,
Knowing that we are dust,
And not crushing our frame dust to return.
Right frail are we,
And only our Maker knows the right path,
That we may shine with his Glory.

Canst thou not save thyself even?
Perchance thou mayest save another.
Be without fear, and of good cheer:
He saved others, himself he cannot save,
Is but one name of Heaven.
Canst not save thyself?
Travail to save another.
Can God only save in luxury?
Can God only save when we have our way?
Rather, see God his mighty arm outstretched in disaster,
Rather, see glory unfurl in suffering.
Suffering is not what man was made for,
But bitter medicine is better,
And to suffer rightly is lifegiving,
And to suffer unjustly has the Treasure of Heaven inside,
Whilst comfort and ease sees few reach salvation:

Be thou plucked from a wide and broad path?
Set instead on a way strait and narrow?
Give thanks for God savest thee:
Taking from thee what thou desirest,
Giving ever more than thou needest,
That thou mightest ever awaken,
To greater and grander and more wondrous still:
For the gate of Heaven appears narrow, even paltry,
And opens to an expanse vast beyond all imagining,
And the gate of Hell is how we imagine grandeur,
But one finds the belly of the Wyrn constricting ever tighter.

Now whilst the noose about our necks,
Tightens one and all,
Painful blows of the Creator's chisel stern and severe,
Not in our day, nor for all is it told,
That the Emperor hears the words,
In this sign conquer,
The Church established,
Persecutions come to an end,
And men of valor seeking in monastery and hermitage,
Saving tribulations their souls to keep,
The complaint sounded,
Easy times rob the Church of her saints,
Not in our day does this happen:
For the noose is about our necks,
More than luxury is stripped away;
A Church waxen fat and flabby from easy living,
Must needs be sharpened to a fighting trim,
Chrismated as one returning to Orthodoxy,
Anointed with sacred oil for the athlete,
And myrrh for the bride.
And as Christian is given gifts of royal hue,
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh:
Gold for kingship,
Frankincense for divinity,
Myrrh for anointing the dead,
A trinity of gifts which are homoousios: one.

Gold and frankincense which only a fool seeks without myrrh,
Myrrh of pain, suffering, and death,
Myrrh which befits a sacrifice,
Myrrh which pours forth gold and frankincense.
And as the noose tightens about our neck,
As all but God is taken from us,
And some would wish to take God himself,
The chisel will not wield the Creator,
The arm of providence so deftly hid in easy times,
Is bared in might in hard times,
And if those of us who thought we would die in peace,
Find that suffering and martyrdom are possible,
We must respond as is meet and right:
Glory to God in all things!

Be thou ever sober in the silence of thine heart:
Be mindful of death, and let this mindfulness be sober.
Wittest thou not the hour of thy death:
Wete thou well that it be sooner than thou canst know.
Put thy house in order, each day,
Peradventure this very night thy soul will be required of thee.
Be thou prepared,
For the hour cometh like a thief in the night,
When thou wilt be summoned before Christ's dread judgment seat.
If thou wilt not to drown,
Say thou not, I can learn to swim tomorrow,
For the procrastinator's tomorrow never cometh,
Only today's, to use right or wrong.
If thou wilt not to drown,
Learn, however imperfectly, to swim today,
A little better, if thou canst:
Be thou sober and learn to swim,
For all of our boats will sink,
And as we have practiced diligently or neglected the summons,
So will we each sink, or each swim,
When thy boat is asink, the time for lessons is gone.

For contemplation made were we

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

The Lord shepherdeth me even now,
And nothing shall be wanting:
There shall be lack of nothing thou shalt need,
In a place of verdure, a place of rest, where the righteous dwell,
Hath he set my tabernacle today,
He hath nourished me by the waters of rest,
Yea, even baptism into Christ's lifegiving death.
My soul hath he restored from the works of death,
He hath led me in the paths of righteousness,
That his name be hallowed.
Yea though my lifelong walk be through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evils;
Thy rod and thy staff themselves have comforted me:
Thy staff, a shepherd's crook,
A hook of comfort to restore a sheep gone astray,
Thy rod a glaive, a stern mace,
The weapon of an armed Lord and Saviour protecting,
Guarding the flock amidst ravening wolves and lions,
Rod and staff both held by a stern and merciful Lord.
Thou preparest before me table fellowship,
In the midst of all them that afflict me:
Both visible and invisible, external and internal.
Thou hast anointed me with oil,
My head with the oil of gladness,
And thy chalice gives the most excellent cheer.
Thy mercy upon me, a sinner, shall follow me,

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All my days of eternal life even on earth,
And my shared dwelling shall be in the house of the Lord,
Unto the greatest of days.

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

Doxology

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,
Compareth to thy worth.
Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is
named,
The Glory for whom all glory is named,
The Treasure for whom treasures are named,
The Light for whom all light is named,
The Love for whom all love is named,
The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,
The Being by whom all beings exist,
יהוה
O ΩN.
The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
Who art eternally praised,
Who art all that thou canst be,
Greater than aught else that may be thought,
Greater than can be thought.
In thee is light,
In thee is honour,
In thee is mercy,
In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.
For good itself is named after thee,
God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and humble.

What mighteth compare to thee?
What praise equalleth thee?
If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,
Only can it be,
Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,
And ten thousand things besides,
Thou who art One,
Eternally beyond time,
So wholly One,
That thou mayest be called infinite,
Timeless beyond time thou art,
The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
The Three who are One,
No more bound by numbers than by word,
And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,
Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
Ο ΩΝ.

What tongue mighteth sing of thee?
What noetic heart mighteth know thee,
With the knowledge that drinketh,
The drinking that knoweth,
Of the νοϋς,
The loving, enlightened spiritual eye,
By which we may share the knowing,
Of divinised men joining rank on rank of angels

OF DIVINED MEN JOINING TALK OF TALK OF ANGELS.

Thou art,
The Hidden Transcendent God who transcendest transcendence itself,
The One God who transfigurest Creation,
The Son of God became a Man that men might become the sons of God,
The divine became man that man mighteth become divine.

Beyond measure is thy glory,
The weight of thy power transcendeth,
Thy power of thine all-surpassing authority bespeaketh,
And yet art thou,
Not in fire, not earthquake,
Not wind great as maelstrom,
But in soft gentle whisper,
Thy prophets wait upon thee,
For thy silence is more deafening than thunder,
Thine weakness stronger than the strength of men,
Thy humility surpassingly far exceedeth men's covetous thirst for glory,
Thou who hidst in a manger,
Treasure vaster than the Heavens,
And who offerest us glory,
In those things of our lives,
That seem humble to us,
As a manger rude in a cavern stable.

Thou Christ God, manifest among Creation,
Vine, lamb, and our daily bread,
Tabernacled among us who may taste thy glory,
Art come the priest on high to offer thy Creation up into Heaven,
Sanctified,
Transfigured,
Deified.

Wert thou a lesser god,
Numerically one as a creature is one,
Only one by an accident,
Naught more,
Then thou couldst not deify thine own creation.

Whilst remaining the only one god.

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not more,
Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be another beside
thee.
Thus thou spakest to Moses,
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Which is to say,
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

And there *can* be no other god beside thee,
So deep and full is this truth,
That thy Trinity mighteth take naught from thine Oneness,
Nor could it be another alongside thy divine Oneness,
If this God became man,
That man become god.

Great art thou,
Greater than aught that can be thought,
And thus dealest thou,
With thy Creation.

For thou camest into the world,
O Christ,
Thy glory veiled,
But a few could see thy glory,

In a seed.

But thou returnest soon,
In years, or centuries, or ages untold,
A day or a thousand years, soon,
Then a seed no more.
None shall escape seeing you,
Not an angel choir to shepherds alone,
But rank on rank of angel host.
Every eye shall see thee,
And they also which pierced thee,
Thou camest and a few knees bowed,
Thou wilt return,
And every knee shall bow,
And every tongue shall confess,
Jesus Christ is Lord,
To the glory of God the Father,
As the Father triumphs in the Son.

Who mighteth tell of thy glory, thy might?
We hope for Heaven yet,
Yet the Heavens cannot contain thee.
Great art O ΩN,
And greatly to be praised.
Thou art awesome beyond all gods,
Who sayest,
Wound not my christs.
For the Son of God became the Son of Man,
That the sons of man might become the sons of God,
And the divine image,
The ancient and glorious foundation,
And radix of mankind,
Be transfigured,
Into the likeness of Christ,
And shine with uncreated Light,
The glory of God shining through his sons.

Let our spiritual eye be ever transfixed upon thine eternal radiant

glory,
Our hearts ever seeking thy luminous splendour,
Ever questing,
Ever sated,
Slaked by the greatest of draughts,
Which inflameth thirst.

Glorified art thou,
In all ages,
In every age,
Thy soft, gentle whisper,
Speaking life,
In every here and now,
And today.

Let us give our lives,
To thine all-surpassing greatness,
From this day,
From this hour,
Henceforth and forevermore.

Αμην,
So be it. Amen.

Glory

Glory,
Wonder,
World without end.

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

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

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

Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him,
Shall never thirst;
But the water that I shall give him,
Shall be in him a well of water,

[Springing up into everlasting life.](#)

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

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

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

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

Glory, glory, glory:
Glory surroundeth thee—
And drencheth those who humbly seek,
Thine own glory to magnify.
No man who seeketh,
Thine own glory to magnify,
Can far pursue his quest,
Before an invisible trickle comes before thy Throne,
And drencheth him,
In the glory he seeketh not,
Not for himself.

[After this I looked, and,](#)

Behold, a door was opened in heaven:
And the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet,
Talking with me;
Which said,
Come up hither,
And I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.
And immediately I was in the spirit:
And, behold, a throne was set in heaven,
And one sat on the throne.
And he that sat was to look upon,
Like a jasper and a sardine stone:
And there was a rainbow round about the throne,
In sight like unto an emerald.
And round about the throne were four and twenty seats:
And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting,
Clothed in white raiment;
And they had on their heads crowns of gold.
And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices:
And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne,
Which are the seven Spirits of God.
And before the throne,
There was a sea of glass like unto crystal:
And in the midst of the throne,
And round about the throne,
Were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.
And the first beast was like a lion,
And the second beast like a calf,
And the third beast had a face as a man,
And the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.
And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him;
And they were full of eyes within:
And they rest not day and night, saying,
"Holy, holy, holy,
LORD God Almighty,
Which was, and is, and is to come."
And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks
To him that sat on the throne,

Who liveth for ever and ever,
The four and twenty elders,
Fall down before him that sat on the throne,
And worship him that liveth for ever and ever,
And cast their crowns before the throne, saying,
"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power:
for thou hast created all things,
and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

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

Wonder.
Glory.
Help me forsake the quest,
To slake my thirst for mine own glory,
That thou mightest slake my thirst,
With a draught that infinitely eclipseth,
Such things as I have grasped.

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

Eye hath not seen,

Nor ear heard,
Neither have entered into the heart of man,
The things which God hath prepared for them that love Him,
The eternity that is here now,
That which was from the beginning,
Which we have heard and still rings in our ears,
Which we have seen with our eyes and can still see how it looks,
Which we have looked upon,
Which we have touched with our very own hands,
Of the Word of God:

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

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

The cold matter of science—
Exists not, O God, O Life,
For Thou who art Life,
How could Thy humblest creature,
Be without life,
Fail to be in some wise,
The image of Life?
Minerals themselves,
Lead and silver and gold,
The vast emptiness of space and vacuum,
Teems more with Thy Life,
Than science will see in man,
Than hard and soft science,
Will to see in man.

How shall I praise Thee,
For making man a microcosm,
A human being the summary,
Of creation, spiritual and material,
Created to be,
A waterfall of divine grace,
Flowing to all things spiritual and material,
A waterfall of divine life,
Deity flowing out to man,
And out through man,
To all that exists

To an alchemist,
And even nothingness itself?

And if I speak,
To an alchemist who seeks true gold,
May his eyes be opened,
To body made a spirit,
And spirit made a body,
The gold on the face of an icon,
Pure beyond twenty-four carats,
Even if the icon be cheap,
A cheap icon of paper faded?

How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Whose eyes overlook a transformation,
Next to which the transmutation,
Of lead to gold,
Is dust and ashes?
How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Of the holy consecration,
Whereby humble bread and wine,
Illumine as divine body and blood,
Brighter than gold, the metal of light,
The holy mystery the fulcrum,
Not stopping in chalice gilt,
But transforming men,
To be the mystical body,
The holy mystery the fulcrum of lives transmuted,
Of a waterfall spilling out,
The consecration of holy gifts,
That men may be radiant,
That men may be illumined,
That men be made the mystical body,
Course with divine Life,
Tasting the Fountain of Immortality,
The transformed elements the fulcrum,
Of God taking a lever and a place to stand,
To move the earth,
To move the cosmos whole

TO MOVE THE COSMOS WHOLE,
Everything created,
Spiritual and material,
Returned to God,
Deified.

And how shall I tell an alchemist,
That alchemy suffices not,
For true transmutation of souls,
To put away searches for gold in crevices and in secret,
And see piles out in the open,
In common faith that seems mundane,
And out of the red earth that is humility,
To know the Philosopher's Stone Who is Christ,
And the true alchemy,
Is found in the Holy Orthodox Church?

How shall I tell an alchemist?

Knights and Ladies

I would like to talk about men and women and the debate about whether we are genuinely different or whether this aspect of our bodies is just packaging that has no bearing on who we are. I would like to begin by talking about three things:

- "Egalitarianism," which says not only that men and women are due equal respect but the differences are differences of body only and not differences of mind, heart, and spirit.
- "Complementarianism," which says that there are real and personal differences, and men and women are meant to complement each other.
- Why the debate between egalitarianism and complementarianism is like a car crash.

Egalitarianism, Complementarianism, and Car Crashes

I was in a theology class when the professor argued emphatically that for two claims to contradict each other, one *must* be the exact opposite of the other. With the example he gave, it sounded fairly impressive, and it took me a while to be able to explain my disagreement.

Saying, for one claim to contradict another, that one must be the *exact* opposite of the other, its mirror image, is like saying that you can only have an auto collision if the two cars are the same kind of car, with the same shape, and they must be perfectly aligned when they hit each other—because if there's part of one car that doesn't touch the other car, then there hasn't been a *real* collision.

That is simply wrong. In the world of cars, only the tiniest fraction of collisions are two identical cars, hitting each other dead center to dead center. When there's a collision, it is usually two different things which hit off center. And the same is true of ideas. Most collisions in the realm of ideas are two very different things, *not* mirror images. What happens is that one piece of one of them, perhaps the leftmost edge of the bumper, hits one piece of the other, *and in both that one piece is connected to the whole structure*. There is much more involved in the collision, on *both* sides, than that one little bit.

A debate many Christians care about, the debate between the feminist-like egalitarians and the more traditional complementarians, is interesting. (I'll say 'complementarian' for now, even though I don't like the term.) It is interesting as an example of a debate where the collision is *not* between mirror images. Egalitarianism is not the mirror image of complementarianism, and complementarianism is not the mirror image of egalitarianism. They are very different beasts from each other.

Although this is only the outer shell, egalitarians are usually better communicators than complementarians. Most egalitarians make an explicit claim and communicate it very powerfully. Complementarians

usually have trouble *explaining* their position, let alone presenting it as compellingly as egalitarians do. This has the effect that people on *both* sides have a much clearer picture of what egalitarian stands for than what complementarianism stands for. The egalitarian claim is often backed by a coherent argument, while the complementarian claim may have Biblical proof texts but often has little else.

I would like to try and suggest what complementarians have so much trouble explaining.

Colors

When I took a cognitive science class, the professor explained a problem for cognitive science: 'qualia'. A computer can represent red and green as two different things. As far as theory problems go, that's *easy* to take care of. The problem is that the computer knows red and green are different only as we can know that two numbers are different. It can't deal with the **redness** of the **red** or the **greenness** of the **green**: in other words it lacks *qualia*. It can know things are different, but not experience them as really, *qualitatively* different.

Some people can only hear complementarianism as rationalising, "White is brighter than black." Yet it is foundationally a claim of, "**Red** is **red** and **green** is **green**."

I don't like the term 'complementarian.' It tells part of the truth, but not enough—a property you can see, but not the essence. I would suggest the term 'qualitarian,' for a belief in qualia and qualitative differences. The term's not perfect either, but it's describing some of the substance rather than detail. From here on I'll say 'qualitarian' rather than 'complementarian' to emphasise that there are qualia involved.

With that mentioned, I'd like to make the most unpalatable of my claims next, and hope that if the reader will be generous enough not to write me off yet, I may be able to make some coherent sense.

The Great Chain of Being

This is something that was important to many Christians and which encapsulates a way of looking on the world that *can* be understood, but takes effort.

God

Angels

Humans

Animals

Plants

Rocks

Nothing

The Great Chain of Being was believed for centuries. When the people who believed it were beginning to think like moderns, the Great Chain of Being began to look like the corporate ladder. If there were things above you, you wanted to climb higher because it's not OK to be *you* if someone else is higher than you. If there were things below you, you wanted to look down and sneer because there was something wrong with anything below you. That's how hierarchy looks if the only way you

can understand it is as a copy of the corporate ladder.

Before then, people saw it differently. To be somewhere in the middle of the great order was neither a reason to scorn lower things nor covet higher places. Instead, there was a sense of connection. If we are the highest part of the physical creation, then we are to be its custodian and in a real sense its representative. If we are spirits as well, we are not squashed by the fact that God is above us; the one we should worship looks on us in love.

Unlike them, our culture has had centuries of democracy and waving the banner of equality so high we can forget there are other banners to wave. We strive for equality so hard that it's easy to forget that there can be other kinds of good.

The Great Chain of Being is never explained in the Bible, but it comes out of a certain kind of mindset, a mindset better equipped to deal with certain things.

There's an old joke about two people running from a bear. One stops to put on shoes. The other says, "What are you doing?" The first says, "I'm stopping to put on tennis shoes." The second says, "You can't outrun the bear!" "I don't need to outrun the bear. I only need to outrun you."

One might imagine a medieval speaking with a postmodern. The medieval stands in his niche in the Great Chain of Being and stops. The postmodern says, "Why are you stopping?" The medieval says, "I want to enjoy the glorious place God has granted me in the Great Chain of Being." The postmodern says, "How can you be happy with that? There are others above you." The medieval says, "Not all of life is running from a bear."

What am I trying to say? Am I saying, for instance, that a man is as high above a woman as God is above an angel? *No*. All people—men, women, young, old, infant, red, yellow, black, white—are placed at the same spot on the Great Chain of Being.

The Bible deals with a paradox that may be called "equality with distinction". Paul writes that "In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek", yet

claims that the advantage of the Jew is "much in every way." Biblical thinking has room to declare both an equality at deepest level—such as exists between men and women—*and* recognize a distinction. There is no need to culturally argue one away to defend the other. Both are part of the truth. It is good to be part of a Creation that is multilayered, with inequality and not equality between the layers. If this is so, how much more should we be able to consider distinction with fundamental equality without reading the distinction as the corporate ladder's abrasive inequality?

One writer talked about equality in relation to containers being full. To modify her image, Christianity wants *all* of us to be as full as possible. However, it does not want a red paint can to be filled with green paint, nor a green paint can to be filled with red paint. It wants the red and green paint cans to be equally full, but does not conclude that the green can is only full if it has the same volume of red paint as the red paint can. It desires equality in the sense of everyone being full, but does not desire *e-qual-ity* (being without a *qual*-itative difference), in the sense of *qualia* being violated.

Zen and the Art of Un-Framing Questions

May we legitimately project man-like attributes up on to God?

Before answering that question, I'd like to suggest that there are assumptions made by the time that question is asked. The biggest one is that God is gender-neutral, and so any talking about God as masculine is projecting something foreign up on to him.

The qualitarian claim is *not* that we may legitimately project man-like attributes up on to God. It is that God has projected God-like attributes down on to men. Those are different claims.

A feminist theologian said to a master, "I think it is important that we keep an open mind and avoid confining God to traditional categories of gender."

The master said, "Of course. Why let God reveal himself as masculine when you can confine him to your canons of political correctness?"

I can't shake a vision of an articulate qualitarian giving disturbing answers to someone's questions and sounding like an annoying imitation of a Zen master:

Interlocutor:

What would you say to, "A woman's place is in the House—and in the Senate!"?

Articulate Qualitarian:

Well, if we're talking about disrespectful, misogynistic... Wait a minute... Let me respond to the intention *behind* your question.

Do you know the Bible story about the Woman at the Well?

Interlocutor:

Yes! It's one of my favorite stories.

Articulate Qualitarian:

Do you know its cultural context?

Interlocutor:

Not really.

Articulate Qualitarian:

Most Bible stories—including this one—speak for themselves. A few of them are much richer if you know cultural details that make certain things significant.

Every recorded interaction between Jesus and women, Jesus broke rules. To start off, a rabbi wasn't supposed to talk with women. But Jesus *really* broke the rules here.

When a lone woman came out and he asked for water, she was shocked enough to ask *why* he did so. And there's something to her being alone.

Drawing water was a communal women's task. The women of the village would come and draw water *together*; there was a reason why *this* woman was alone: no one would be caught dead with her. Everyone knew that *she* was the village slut.

Her life was dominated by shame. When Jesus said, "...never thirst again," she heard an escape from shamefully drawing water alone, and she asked Jesus to help her hide from it. When he said to call her husband, she gave an evasive and ambiguous reply. He gave a very blunt response: "You are right in saying you have no husband, for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband."

Yowch.

Instead of helping her run from her shame, Jesus pulled her *through* it, and she came out the other side, running without any shame, calling, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did!"

There's much more, but I want to delve into one specific detail: there was something abnormal about her drawing water alone. Drawing water was women's work. Women's work was backbreaking toil—as was men's work—but it was not done in isolation. It was something done in the company of other people.

It's not just that one culture. There are old European paintings that show a group of women, bent over their washboards, talking and talking. Maybe I'm just romanticizing because I haven't felt how rough washboards are to fingers. But I have a growing doubt that labor-saving devices are all they're cracked up to be. Vacuum cleaners were introduced as a way to lessen the work in the twice-annual task of beating rugs. Somehow each phenomenal new labor-saving technology seems to leave housewives with even more drudgery.

I have sympathy for feminists who say that women are better off doing professional work in community than doing housework in solitary confinement. I think feminists are probably right that the *Leave It to Beaver* arrangement causes women to be lonely and depressed. (I'm not sure that "Turn the clock back, *all* the way back, to 1954!" represents the best achievement conservatives can claim.)

The traditional arrangement is not Mom, Dad, two kids, and nothing more. Across quite a lot of cultures and quite a lot of history, the usual pattern has kept extended families together (seeing Grandma didn't involve interstate travel), and made those extended families part of an integrated community. From what I've read, women are happier in intentional communities like Reba Place.

Interlocutor:

Do you support the enfranchisement of women?

Articulate Qualitarian:

Let me visit the dict.org website. Webster's 1913 says:

Enfranchisement \En*fran"chise*ment\, n.

1. Releasing from slavery or custody. —Shak.

2. Admission to the freedom of a corporation or body poli investiture with the privileges of free citizens.

Enfranchisement of copyhold (Eng. Law), the conversion of copyhold estate into a freehold. –Mozley & W.

WordNet seems less helpful; it doesn't really mention the sense you want.

enfranchisement

1: freedom from political subjugation or servitude

2: the act of certifying [syn: certification] [ant: dis

If I were preaching on your question, I might do a Greek-style exegesis and say that your choice of languages fuses the egalitarian request to grant XYZ with the insinuation that their opponents' practice is equivalent to slavery. Wow.

I think you're using loaded language. Would you be willing to restate your question in less loaded terms?

Interlocutor:

Ok, I'll ask a different way, but will you *promise* not to answer with a word-study?

Articulate Qualitarian:

Ok, I won't answer with a word-study unless you ask.

Interlocutor:

Do you believe that women have the *same* long list of rights as men?

Articulate Qualitarian:

Hmm... I'm trying to think about how to answer this without being misleading...

Interlocutor:

Please answer me *literally*.

Articulate Qualitarian:

I'm afraid I'm going to have to say, "No."

Interlocutor:

But you at least believe that women have *some* rights, correct?

Articulate Qualitarian:

No.

Interlocutor:

What?!?

Articulate Qualitarian:

I said I wouldn't give a word-study...

Is it OK if I give a comparable study of a *concept*?

Interlocutor:

[Quietly counts to ten and takes a deep breath:] Ok.

Articulate Qualitarian:

I don't believe that women have any rights. I don't believe that men have any rights, either. The Bible doesn't use rights like we do. It answers plenty of questions we try to solve with rights: it says we shouldn't murder, steal, and so on. But the older Biblical way of doing this said, "Don't do this," or "Be like Christ," or something like that.

Then this really odd moral framework *based on* rights came along, and all of a sudden there wasn't a universal law against unjustified killing, but an entitlement not to be killed. At first it seemed not to make much difference. But now more and more of our moral reasoning is in terms of 'rights', which increasingly say, not "Don't do this," or "You must do that," but "Here's the long list of entitlements that the universe *owes* me." And that has meant some truly strange things.

In the context of the concrete issues that qualitaricians discuss with egalitarians, the Biblical concept of seeking the good of all is quietly remade into seeking the enfranchisement of all, and so it seems that the big question is whether women get the same rights as men—quite apart from the kind of situation where language

comparing your opponents' behavior to slavery is considered polite.

Interlocutor:

Couldn't we listen to, say, Eastern Philosophy?

Articulate Qualitarian:

There's a lot of interesting stuff in Eastern philosophy. The contrast between Confucian and Taoist concepts of virtue, for instance, is interesting and worth exploring, especially in *this* nexus. I'm really drawing a blank as to how one could get a rights-based framework from Asian philosophy. And I'm not sure African mindsets would be much more of a help, for instance. Even if you read one Kwaanza pamphlet, it's hard to see how individual rights could come from the seven African values. The value of Ujima, or collective work and responsibility, speaks even less of individual rights than, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country."

Interlocutor:

Ok, let me change the subject slightly. Would you acknowledge that Paul was a progressive?

Articulate Qualitarian:

Hmm... reminds me of a C.S. Lewis book in which Lewis quotes a medieval author. The author is talking about some important Greek philosopher and says, "Now when we come to a difficulty or ambiguity, we should always ascribe the views most worthy of a man of his stature."

Lewis's big complaint was that this kind of respect *always* reads into an author the biases and assumptions of the reader's age. It honors the author enough to think he believed what we call important, but not enough that the author can disagree with our assumptions *and be able to correct us*.

When we ask if Paul is a progressive, there are two basic options. Either we say that Paul was not a progressive, and relegate him to our understanding of a misogynist, or we generously overlook

a passage here and there and generously include him as one of our progressives.

It seems that *neither* response allows Paul to be an authority who knows something we don't.

On second thought, maybe it's a *good* thing there aren't too many articulate qualitaricians.

Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus... and Gender Psychologists are from the Moon

When pop psychology talks about gender, it is trying to make academic knowledge available to the rest of us. An academic textbook by Em Griffin illustrates Deborah Tannen's theories, saying, "Jan hopes she's marrying a 'big ear'." This thread is picked up very well in popular works.

William Harley's *His Needs, Her Needs* is a sort of Christianized *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. Harley devotes a full chapter to explaining that one of the most foundational needs for a husband to understand is a woman's need for listening. He devotes a full chapter to convincing husbands that it is essential that they listen to everything their wives want to say. It was perhaps because reading this work (and *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, part of *You Just Don't Understand*, etc.) that I was shocked when I reread C.S. Lewis's *That Hideous Strength*. It was much more than Mother Dimble's words, "Husbands were made to be talked to. It helps them concentrate their minds on what they're reading..."

The shock was deep. It wasn't like having a rug pulled out from under your feet. It was more like standing with your feet on bare floor and having the *floor* pulled out from under your feet.

The gender books I'd read, both Christian and non-Christian, made a seamless fusion of the basic raw material, and one *particular* interpretation. The interpretation was as hard to doubt as the raw material itself—and one couldn't really see the fusion as something that *can* be questioned. It was like looking at a number of startlingly accurate pictures of scenes on earth—and then realising that all the pictures were taken from the moon.

That Hideous Strength suggests an answer to the question, "How else could it be?" I'm hesitant to suggest everyone else will have the same experience, but...

If we look at a Hollywood movie targeting young men, there will be violent action, a fast pace, and a sense of adventure. A movie made for young women will have people talking and delving into emotions as they grow closer, as they grow into more mature relationships. If we sum these up in a single word, the men's movie is full of *action*, and the women's movie is filled with *relationship*.

Aristotle characterized masculinity as active and femininity as passive. It seems clear to me that he was grappling with a real thing, the same thing that shapes our movie offerings. It also seems clear that he didn't quite get it right. Masculinity is active. That much is correct. But femininity is not described by the *absence* of such action. It's described by the *presence* of relationship. It seems that the following can be said:

- Aristotle was grappling with, and trying to understand, something real.
- Even though he's observing something real, his interpretation was skewed.

These two things didn't stop with Aristotle. If a thinker as brilliant as Aristotle fell into this trap, maybe gender psychology is also liable to stumble this way, too. (Or at least *today's* gender psychology stumbles this way. If you're willing to listen to people who look and talk a bit different and are a bit older than us, Charles Shedd's *Letters to Karen* and *Letters to Philip* are examples of slightly older books worth the time to look at.)

Christian Teaching

About this point, I expect a question like, "Ok, men reflect the masculine side of God. But don't you have a place for femininity, and can't women reflect the feminine side of God?"

This is a serious question, and it reflects a serious concern. Many Hindus believe that everything is either part of God or evil: your inmost spirit is a real part of God, and your body is intrinsically evil and illusory like everything else physical. I'm told that Genesis 1 was quite a shocker when it appeared—not, so much, because it says we're made in the image of God, but because after the stars, rocks, plants, and animals were created, the text keeps on saying, "And God saw that it was *good*." That's really a staggering suggestion, if you knew the other nations' creation stories. The Babylonians believed that the god Marduk killed the demoness Tiamat, tore her dragon carcass apart, and made half of it the land and half of it the sky. So your body and mine, every forest, every star, is part of a demon's carcass that happens to be left over after a battle.

Please think about this claim for a minute, and then look at part of Genesis 1:

- Creation didn't happen as a secondary result of divine combat. God created the world because he specifically wanted to do so.
- Physical matter, and life, and everything else, is *good*.
- God made us in his image. Only then was his creation very good, and complete.

One thing that comes out of these things is that *God can create good*. God created the physical world without being physical. Our bodies, indeed the whole natural world, are good, because God created something outside of himself. Femininity is like this, only much more so. *Femininity is a created good*, and it is much more beautiful, more mysterious, more wondrous, more powerful thing than physical matter. People are the unique creation where matter meets spirit—no other

creation can claim that. Women are the unique point where spirit meets the very apex of femininity.

Every woman is a mystery, and every man is a king. To be a Christian man is to be made like the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. There is something kingly and lordly about manhood. Part of this is understood when you realize that this does *not* mean domineering other people and standing above them, but standing under them, like the servant king who washed feet. The sign and sigil of male authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns.

But all this is a hint. I give sketch here and there, and I hope less to provide an inescapable logical framework than suggest entry points that can look into the Bible and see these things.

I'd like to give a glimpse of the qualities:

Qualia

Lord Adam, Dragonslayer

If you could see Adam, you would see a knight, in burnished armor brightly gleaming, astride a white horse. What you wouldn't see is why the armor shines brightly.

It is not burnished by him, nor any other human hands, but the claws of the dragons he wars against. Under his helmet is a lion's mane of thick hair and beard. Under his breastplate are scars, some quite close to his heart.

This knight errant yearns for quests. Something difficult, something dangerous, something active. Some place to prove himself by serving in a costly way. He longs for that battle when his blood will mingle with that of

Lady Eve, Poet's Heart

If you could see Eve at her best, she would be beside a fire, inside a great hall. She would be stoking a fire with one hand, another hand would call forth forth music from a silver harp, another hand would be writing a letter, and she would use both hands to embrace the sorrowing child on her lap in comforting love. And she would do this lightly, joyfully, with a smile from the other side of pain. Though Eve sits still, one can almost see her dancing. It would take time to see all her many layers of beauty... if that were even possible. *What is the*

his fellow warriors and he may at last embark on the last great adventure.

He has a lord above him, to whom he owes allegiance and honor. He is also a mentor, turning his face to a squire whom he focuses on and draws up. He draws them, as he was drawn, out of the comfort of home, into the mysteries of life, and into the company of men and society to reconnect more deeply. He has tried to explain that siring a child is something an impudent youth can do, but being a spiritual father is the mark of a *man*.

Once his mind is on a task, it moves forward from beginning to end. It moves with the force of an avalanche. He does one task at a time, and wants to do it well.

There is another

secret behind her enigmatic smile? What deep mysteries lie hidden in her heart of hearts?

Her beauty is as a rose: a ladder of thorns leads up to a flower so exquisite as to be called God's autograph. She toils hard, and it is difficult to see lines of pain in her face only because she has worked through them so that they have become part of her joy. She knows a mother's worry, and she looks on others with a mother's caring eyes. She looks with the joy on the other side of sorrow.

Her home is her castle, and it is a castle she tries to run well. Adam... well, dear man as he is, he isn't very good with managing resources. She runs the castle in an orderly and efficient manner, and

side to his seriousness.

He can be deadly serious, but there is a merry twinkle in his eye. His force and his energy are too much to contain, and he is capable of catching people off guard.

(Especially in his practical jokes.) Like the lion, he is not safe and not tame; he is both serious and silly, and can astound in both. When he plays with children, playing with him is both like playing with a kitten and playing with a thunderstorm.

To his lady Adam turns with reverence. She is a wonder to him. The extravagance of the quests she bids him and he embarks on, is a spectacular offshoot of his more quiet service in private. Though Adam would never see it this way, he is taller when he bows and kisses her hand, and richer when he gives her a costly gift.

as the lady in charge, she handles well a great many things that her lord wouldn't know how to begin doing. The castle is their castle, of course, but there are things that need attending to so that Adam can continue slaying dragons. Yet to say that is to put last things first. The reason she handles so many taxing details is that Adam is the light of her life, her king and her lord, her bright morning star.

She turns to her loom as a place to make wall hangings. At least, that's what someone would say if he missed the point completely. She makes beautiful wall hangings, but there's more.

The loom is a centering place for her, a quieting place. After other things happen that take

His honor is his life, and wants to live and act as a son of God. He believes that faith *works*, and strives to show virtue and behave in a manner worthy of Christ.

Favorite Scripture Passage:

"And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

A Quote:

"God, give me mountains to climb and the strength for climbing."

happen that take processing, she settles into that peace. Her heart is quieted as she lets it all sort out.

That quieting is not far from her mystic's heart. She is mystery and lives in connection with the mystery of faith. There is One she is closer to than her lord, and presence, mystical communion, dwelling in the presence of the divine, is precious to her.

Favorite Scripture Passage:

"Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to

you, wherever this
gospel is preached in
the whole world,
what she has done
will be told in
memory of her."

A Quote:

"Little surprises and
big hugs and kisses.
Musical dances and
bright reminisces,
Quiet with stories
and roast leg of lamb,
People who value me
for who I am,
Something to say and
someone who will
hear it,
A home in good
order and a mystical
spirit,
Warm fireside chats
and a minstrel who
sings,
These are a few of my
favorite things."

Jonathan Hayward, with thanks to **Martin**, **Phil**, **Mary**, **Xenia**,
Patrick, **Yoby**, **Mom**, and **Kathryn**.

Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance

[Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!](#)

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

[Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!](#)

[Repent, and believe the Gospel.](#)
The [Revelation to St. John](#) tells,
Words that bear hard truth in hard times:
[And I heard the altar cry,](#)
["Yea, Lord God the Almighty,](#)
[True and just are thy judgments!"](#)
[The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun,](#)
[And it was allowed to scorch men with fire;](#)
[Men were scorched by the fierce heat,](#)
[And they cursed the name of God,](#)

Who had power over these plagues,
And they did not repent and give him glory.
The fifth angel poured his bowl on the throne of the beast,
And its kingdom was in darkness;
Men gnawed their tongues in anguish,
And cursed the God of heaven
For their pain and sores,
And did not repent of their deeds.

If our time looks like a time of plagues,
Do not be like these.
Repentance is not intended,
For a more ideal time:
Do not pray as the Blessed Augustine:
"O Lord, give me chastity and continence,
But not yet,"
Do not seek to repent later,
But keep on struggling to repent *now*.
Do you live in tough times,
And do you fear for even worse disasters?
Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Do you not see?
Are your eyes closed?
God is not gone in a global financial crisis:
Do you not see,
The hand of God,
Working to give in hard times,
What we overlooked in a comfortable age?
Can you not see a God
Who whispers in our pleasures,
Shouts in our pains,
Whispers also, in times of comfort and ease,
And shouts in a time of crisis,
Crisis,
Κρισις,
A Greek word meaning,
"Judgment."

If we experience judgment,
Do we need to assume the Judge has abandoned his post?
Do we really need to try and escape him?
[Make friends quickly with your accuser!](#)

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

God has ambitions for you,
Beyond your wildest dreams,
And commands you to want the best for yourself.
And if it seems that God only gives you,
Things that are harder and worse,
Then you do not understand this:
God's desires for you are beyond your wildest dreams:
Your wildest dreams are yet not wild enough,
To see the true good that God holds in store for you.

And if you say,
"Beautiful words, but I have a tough life,"
Know that words like these come from tough lives,
Hard realities where something great shines so brightly:
The Light of God in Heaven.
Do you fear the loss of your treasures on earth,
Are you afraid you do not have enough to survive?
[Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,](#)
[where neither moth nor rust consumes,](#)
[and where thieves do not break in and steal,](#)
Nor do global economic meltdown or hyperinflation
Do anything but strip away a mask,

That makes it look as if we can live by bread alone,
Or comfort ourselves with a "rising standard of living,"
Like as to moving from an ancient, rounded, nourishing diet,
To "upgrade" to cotton candy,
Seeking a Utopia of spoiled children,
Because what we need is not what a child wants to spoil him,
But to grow to be men:
And this crisis, κρισις, may do much more,
Than separate the men from the boys:
It will help some boys learn to be men,
Learning under the iron yoke of law,
What we kept putting off under the freedom of grace,
As we curse the cruel judgment of a Judge,
Who "cruelly" shouts,

"Sorry, son, it is time for you now,
To move on to better things.
I have real ambitions for you,
And I want what is truly good as you cannot,
And I know what is truly good as you cannot.
Try again.
Try again about what you really want.
I want you to taste the River of Life,
And you keep on trying to drink filth,
[Like your dog drinking from your toilet:](#)
Please try again.
I want you to have real treasure,
And if what it takes is my taking away every treasure on earth,
Everything that you want,
And everything you turn to for security,
So that you lose your job,
And your possessions begin to wear out,
And some of your technologies come to fail,
In ways you had never even imagined,
And your investments become worthless,
And your luxuries vanish one by one,
And the government does everything people want it to,

But the results get worse and worse,
And maybe you even pray,
[Give us this day our daily bread](#),
Because you do not know,
Where your next meal is coming from,
Who knows?
Perhaps you will listen to me shout,
When you found my whisper easy to ignore,
Perhaps you will stop chasing after shadows.
Perhaps you will grasp reality:
Perhaps you will know real treasure,
Real treasure,
Next to which a bull market,
Is but mist, vapor, and shadow."

[Repent, and believe the Gospel.](#)

Our entire understanding of what it means to be God,
And our entire understanding of what it means to be man,
Is the Maximum Christ.
For man is created for maximum glory,
And God ever beckons us to reach higher,
When we in confusion reach far below,
Far less than the glory we were made for.
Every sin does this,
Even pride.
What do we want in pride?
Inevitably something that sparkles and shimmers,
But is cotton candy and mirage,
Next to the humble things we turn our nose up at.
In pride we turn up our nose,
At abundant health,
And do not want the freedom of movement,
Of a body in health,
But clingingly cherish,
Our "extra-special" movement of broken bone,
And yet we wonder why we hurt,
And why we are not satisfied,

Even though we have what we clingingly cherish,
Not knowing it is the seed of Hell.
You do not understand the measure of man,
Until you know in Christ,
Who, though he was in the form of God,
Did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
But emptied himself,
Taking the form of a servant,
Being born in the likeness of men.
And being found in human form,
He humbled himself,
And became obedient unto death,
even death on a cross.
Therefore God has highly exalted him,
And bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
We do not understand greatness except in Christ,
And in Christ we understand that greatness is humble,
For there is something missing in our lives,
Until they are oriented by Christ,
And we know that pride cannot be enough:
God summons us to the heights of humility.
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Repent, and live real life in a virtual world.
Industrial food is not like the food of ancient times:
It is tasty on the outside,
Manipulated like plastic on the inside,
A cherry flavored drink engineered that the palate may reminisce of
cherry taste,
While holding nothing of the nourishment and sustenance,
That comes with cherry sweetness in nature,
Almost like eating an "apple" molded of styrofoam,
Injected with Splenda,

Sprayed with petroleum-based fragrance,
And sprinkled with vitamin extract,
So it may be marketed as health food.
Do not think that this be isolated as a phenomenon:
It is a microcosm of our virtual world,
Where so much of our reality is virtual,
That "virtual reality" neither begins nor ends with SecondLife.
Christ knew a life of technologies,
The son of a carpenter with tools and wood,
But never like techno-pagans,
Was his technology
The technology of molding nature to man's every whim,
Seeking HumanLife version 2.0:
Or if you believe that Christ's technology was exactly that,
But less advanced,
At least know that it is different,
As a pint of beer,
From a pint of rum:
As today we mold nature to our whims,
Graduating from pint of rum to pint of absinthe,
Our TV's always on, and stronger brew,
Placing before our souls, our mind's eyes,
The strange brew of HumanLife 2.0... 3.0... 4.0...
Trying to improve on timeless reality,
And failing,
And failing.
Entranced by technology with its flickering screens,
[Twice imprisoned in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave,"](#)
The gate to the timeless way of human life,
Lies open, and if the path be narrow and hard,
It has always been narrow and hard:
Our hindrances may be our aids,
If we use them rightly,
In ascesis,
If we go against the flow,
Of technologies ever more brittle,
From appliances, cookware, and clothing built to last,

To possessions that keep wearing out,
To more and more disposable possessions,
When we abandon glass plates for the convenience of paper.
From computers discarded because they are obsolete,
To computers whose solid state drives become something you use up,
From physical computers that are in your control,
To virtual cloud computers,
That you may easily use now,
But can be taken away by any number of human actions,
Or system failures:

"Systems integration is when your computer will not work,
Because of a problem on a computer you've never heard of;"
"If builders built buildings the way programmers wrote programs,
The first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."
Use technology but don't trust it.

We are digging a pit,
In how we use technology,
And the progress we embrace,
Is digging ourselves in deeper.
And what is true of technology,
Is also true of much more:
The story of our culture, our world, our economy,
Is as a game of chess against a demonic adversary,
Where we have greedily captured:
An unguarded pawn here, and a bishop there,
Never heedful of the trap we were stepping into,
Taking seeming advantage of our opponent's cunning bait,
All the way to sealing his checkmate against us,
Until our world and society have lost the game,
And yet still redemption is open to us,
Redemption open to every one who repents,
Living real life even in a virtual world.
But if we repent, the Kingdom of God ever remains nigh.

You have already met Christ.
So have I,
Both of us many times,

And yet we forget this central fact.
Wonder when you have met him?
Hear Christ's own words,
Hear Christ's own Christology unfold:
When the Son of man comes in his glory,
And all the angels with him,
Then he will sit on his glorious throne.
Before him will be gathered all the nations,
And he will separate them one from another,
As a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats,
And he will place the sheep at his right hand,
But the goats at the left.
Then the King will say to those at his right hand,
"Come, O blessed of my Father,
Inherit the kingdom prepared for you,
From the foundation of the world;
For I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me,
I was naked and you clothed me,
I was sick and you visited me,
I was in prison and you came to me."
Then the righteous will answer him,
"Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee,
Or thirsty and give thee drink?
And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee,
Or naked and clothe thee?
and when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'
And the King will answer them,
"Truly, I say to you,
As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren,
You did it to me."
Then he will say to those at his left hand,
"Depart from me, you who are damned,
Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;
For I was hungry and you gave me no food,
I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

I was a stranger and you did not welcome me,
naked and you did not clothe me,
sick and in prison and you did not visit me."

Then they also will answer,

"Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty,
Or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison,
And did not minister to thee?"

Then he will answer them,

"Truly, I say to you,
as you did it not to one of the least of these,
you did it not to me."

Could this be irrelevant to survival?

People survived the Great Depression by sharing:

If you don't share because you have little,
You simply don't get it.

The less you have,

The more you need to be generous, and believe,

Riches do not profit in the day of wrath,

But righteousness delivers from death.

If you want to survive,

Help others survive:

Lend to the Lord and he will repay you,

In his time:

He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD,

And he will repay him for his deed.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people,
saith our God:

Fear not: for, behold,

I bring you good tidings of great joy,

which shall be to all people:

Christ wills to be incarnate in us,

Not in some other circumstance, but now.

The Son of God became a man,

That men might become the sons of God:

The Incarnation,

Is for us today.

If our earthly hope is stripped away,
Our heavenly hope beams brighter:
The mighty arm of God in divine providence,
Rippling with muscle such as easy times rarely know.
If our cherished neighborhood frisbee is shut down,
Perhaps it is because we are summoned,
To reach for gold at spiritual Olympics,
To become men,
And as in [the great hymn to love](#),
Put childish ways behind us.

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

[Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!](#)

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

Wardrobe of fur coats and fir trees:
Sword and armor, castle and throne,
Talking beast and Cair Paravel:
From there began a journey,
From thence began a trek,
[Further up and further in!](#)

The mystic kiss of the Holy Mysteries,
[A many-hued spectrum of saints,](#)
[Where the holiness of the One God unfurls,](#)
Holy icons and holy relics:
Tales of magic reach for such things and miss,
[Sincerely erecting an altar, "To an unknown god,"](#)
Enchantment but the shadow whilst these are realities:
Whilst to us is bidden enjoy Reality Himself.
[Further up and further in!](#)

A journey of the heart, barely begun,
Anointed with chrism, like as prophet, priest, king,
A slow road of pain and loss,
Giving up straw to receive gold:
[Further up and further in!](#)

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,
Silence without, building silence within:
The prayer of the mind in the heart,

Prayer without mind's images and eye before holy icons,
A simple Way, a life's work of simplicity,
[Further up and further in!](#)

[A camel may pass through the eye of a needle,](#)
Only by shedding every possession and kneeling humbly,
Book-learning and technological power as well as possessions,
Prestige and things that are yours— Even all that goes without saying:
To grow in this world one becomes more and more;
To grow in the Way one becomes less and less:
[Further up and further in!](#)

God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men might become gods and the sons of God:
The chief end of mankind,
Is to glorify God and *become* him forever.
The mysticism in the ordinary,
Not some faroff exotic place,
But here and now,
Living where God has placed us,
Lifting where we are up into Heaven:
Paradise is wherever holy men are found.
Escape is not possible:
Yet escape is not needed,
But our active engagement with the here and now,
And in this here and now we move,
[Further up and further in!](#)

We are summoned to war against dragons,
Sins, passions, demons:
Unseen warfare beyond that of fantasy:
For the combat of knights and armor is but a shadow:
Even this world is a shadow,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the victor in warfare unseen,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the man whose heart is purified,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the one who rejects activism:
Fighting real dragons in right order,
Slaying the dragons in his own heart,

And not chasing (real or imagined) snakelets in the world around:
[Starting to remove the log from his own eye,](#)
[And not starting by removing the speck from his brother's eye:](#)
[Further up and further in!](#)

Spake a man who suffered sorely:
[For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,](#)
[Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in](#)
[us, and:](#)

[Know ye not that we shall judge angels?](#)

For the way of humility and tribulation we are beckoned to walk,
Is the path of greatest glory.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,

But we have the best of all possible Gods,

And live in a world ruled by the him,

And the most painful of his commands,

Are the very means to greatest glory,

Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,

To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,

An instant of earthly apprenticeship,

To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:

[He saved others, himself he cannot save,](#)

Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:

But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,

Turned to gold,

And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:

Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:

[Further up and further in!](#)

[When I became a man, I put away childish things:](#)

Married or monastic, I must grow out of self-serving life:

For if I have self-serving life in me,

What room is there for the divine life?

If I hold straw with a death grip,

How will God give me living gold?

[Further up and further in!](#)

[Verily, verily, I say to thee,](#)

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

Silence: Organic Food for the Soul

We are concerned today about our food,
and that is good:
sweet fruit and honey are truly good and better than raw sugar,
raw sugar not as bad as refined sugar,
refined sugar less wrong than corn syrup,
and corn syrup less vile than Splenda.
But whatever may be said for eating the right foods,
this is nothing compared to the diet we give our soul.

The ancient organic spiritual diet
is simple yet different in its appearances:
those who know its holy stillness
and grasp in their hearts the silence of the holy rhythm,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,
grasp the spiritual diet by their heart,
by its heart,
by God's heart.

What treasure looks good next to it?
It is said that many would rather be rich and unhappy
than poor and happy,
stranger still than thinking riches will make you happy:
Blessed stillness is a treasure,
and next to this treasure,
gold and technology are but passing shadows,
no better to satisfy hunger than pictures of rich food.

no better to satisfy thirst than a shimmering mirage,
for like the best organic food,
a diet of stillness gives what we deeply hungered for,
but deeply missed even seeking
in our untiring quest to quench our thirst with mirages.

And we have been adept at building mirages:
anything to keep us from stillness.
Perhaps technology, SecondLife or the humble car,
perhaps romance or conversation,
perhaps philosophy or hobbies,
not always bad in themselves,
but always bad when pressed into service
to help us in our flight from silence,
which is to say,
used the only way many of us know how.

There is a mystery,
not so much hard to find as hard to want:
humble yourself and you will be lifted up,
empty yourself and you will be filled;
become still and of a quiet heart,
and you will become home to the Word.

"But my life is hard," you say,
"You might be able to afford luxuries like these,
but I can't."
Take courage.
[Read the lives of the saints,](#)
and find that stillness grows,
not on the path that is spacious and easy to walk,
but the way that is narrow and hard:
strength is not found
in ease and comfort,
but among athletes with no choice but to strive.

We believe in life before death:
we live the life of Heaven here on earth,

and those things in life that seem like Hell
are our stepping stones:
"she shall be saved in childbearing:"
from the politically incorrect Bible.
Can't women have something more equitable?
But the truth is even *more* politically incorrect.

That is how *all of us* are saved:
in suffering and in struggle,
such as God gives us,
and not when dream,
and by our power
we make our dreams come true.

[Weston Price](#) fans,
who say that an ancient diet nourishes
far better than modern foods
manipulated like plastic,
newfangled corn and sunflower oil,
gone rancid then masked by chemical wizardry,
marketed as health food in lieu of wholesome butter,
could be wrong in their words
how we need ancient nourishment and not plastic foods.

They could be wrong about our needs,
but it is a capital mistake to say,
"That may have worked in golden ages,
but we need a diet that will work
for us now in our third millenium."
If [Weston Price's movement](#) is right,
then we need the nourishment of timeless traditions,
now more than ever.
Saying "No, we need something that will work today,"
is like saying, "No, we're very sick,
we are weak and we must focus on essentials:
healthy people may visit a doctor, but not us."

But even if the food we eat matters, and matters much,

the question of what we feed our body
is dwarfed by the question of what we feed our souls,
and over the centuries
our spiritual diet has turned
from something organic and nourishing
to something that might almost be plastic:
inorganic, yet made from what spiritual leaders call rancid.

The right use of technology is in the service of spiritual wisdom,
but the attractive use of technology is to dodge spiritual wisdom,
for one current example,
cell phones and texting not only a way to connect,
but a way to dodge silence,
a way to avoid simply being present to your surroundings,
and this is toxic spiritual food.
Cell phones have good uses,
and some wise people use them,
but the marketing lure of the iPhone and Droid,
is the lure of a bottomless bag:
a bottomless bag of spiritual junk food:
portable entertainment systems,
which is to say,
portable "avoid spiritual work" systems.

Someone has said,
"Orthodoxy is not conservative:
it is radical,"
which is striking but strange politically:
if Orthodoxy is not captured by a Western understanding of
conservatism,
further off the mark is it to try to capture it with any Western idea of
radicalism.
but there is another sense in which it is true:
not in our design to transform the world,
but in God's design to transform us.

I thought I was a man of silence.
I avoid television, occasionally listen to music,

but never as a half-ignored backdrop.
Recently I learned,
by the grace of a God who is radical,
that I did not know the beginning of silence.

"Hesychasm," in the Orthodox term,
described by a rhythm of praying,
Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,
in the Church under the authority of a good priest,
an authority for your sake and mine,
is a doorway to strip off layers of noise,
and maybe a portal to joy.
So small-looking on the outside,
and so spacious if you will step in.

Concerned about organized religion?
Eastern Orthodoxy is quite disorganized, some have said,
but we won't go into that.
Negativity about organized religion
is part of the toxic spiritual diet
it is so hard to avoid.
Some have said that people concerned about organized religion
are really concerned about someone else having authority over them.
Though I am self-taught in some things,
an author with a few letters after his name
but not even a high school course in non-academic writing,
Aristotle's words are apropos:
"He who teaches himself has a fool for a master."
There are always choices we must make for ourselves,
Orthodoxy actually having wisdom to help free us in these choices,
but trying to progress spiritually without obedience to a spiritual guide
who can tell you "No,"
is like trying to be healthier without paying attention to stress in your life,
or what you eat, or exercise.
I speak from experience:
I still trip in the light,
but I do not want to go back to how I tripped in the dark.

"Keep your eyes on Jesus,
look full in his wonderful face,
and the things of this world
will grow strangely dim
in the light of his glory and grace,"
says the cherished Protestant hymn:
but it does not say how,
and silence is how.

Do you long for honors the world bestows,
and are never satisfied with what you have?
Mirages look good,
but the place of a mirage is always outside our grasp,
something it looks like we might reach tomorrow,
not something that is open to us right now.
And it is not until we let go of the mirage we want so much
that we see right next to us
a chalice
of living water
that can quench our thirst now.

Pride, lust, anger and remembrance of wrongs, envy, wanting to use
people—
all of these urge us to look away
wanting to quench our thirst on mirages
and blind our eyes
to the chalice
of living water
that we are offered,
and offered here and now.
And it isn't until you rest and taste the waters,
the living waters of the chalice that is always at hand,
that you realize how exhausting it is
to chase after mirages.

The Church prays through the Psalm,
"But I have quieted and calmed my soul,
like a child quieted at its mother's breast,

like a child that is quieted is my soul."
When a child quieted at its mother's breast,
cares melt away,
and to the soul that knows silence,
the silence of Heaven,
for Heaven itself is silent
and true silence is Heavenly,
the things of this world grow strangely dim.

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard
to get all your ducks in a row,
to get yourself to a secure place
where you have prepared for what might happen?
Or does it look like you might lose your job,
if you still have one?

[The Sermon on the Mount](#)

urges people to pray,
"Give us this day our daily bread,"
in an economy
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,
it was not obvious to many
where they would get their next meal.
And yet it was this [Sermon on the Mount](#)
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,
and tells us not to worry:
what we miss
if we find this a bit puzzling,
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments
even if they are jeopardized right now,
is that we are like a child with some clay,
trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,
we ignore and maybe fear
the finger tapping us on our shoulder
until with great trepidation we turn,
and listen to the voice say,

"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"
and follow our father
as he gives us a warhorse.

If you have a bank account, or insurance, or investments,
you may be better at making your clay statue,
better than the people who heard the [Sermon on the Mount](#),
but the Lord says to us as much as them,
"Let your worries be quieted
as you enter silence,"
to give us a warhorse.
And when we let go of taking on God's job,
of taking care of every aspect of our future,
we find that he gives us better than we knew to seek:
if we thirst for worldly honor to make us feel significant,
if we covet luxuries to make us feel better,
and we learn holy silence,
the things of the world grow strangely dim.

People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them.
Repentance is terrifying,
because it seems beforehand
that repentance means you will forever lose some shining part of yourself,
but when you repent,
repentance shows its true nature
as an awakening:
you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell,"
and, awakened, you grasp Heaven in a new way.

Let go of the mirage of doing God's job of providence,
by your own strength,
and let go of the mirage of getting enough money
to make you happy,
and when you give up this misshapen clay horse,
find a warhorse waiting for you:
God will provide better than you know to ask,
perhaps giving you a great spiritual gift
by showing you you can live without some things,

and this just the outer shell holding spiritual blessings
next to which billions of dollars pale in comparison.
("Who is rich? The person who is content.")
And if like me you are weak and wish you had more honor,
you may taste the living water next to which worldly honor is an elusive
mirage
always shimmering, always luring, and never satisfying, at least not for
long,
and ride the warhorse,
and wonder why you ever thought worldly honor would make you happy.

A saint has said,
that when you work,
seven eighths of the real task
is watching the state of your heart
and only one eighth is the official task.
Proverbs likewise tells,
"Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life."
Guard your heart.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true,
whatsoever things are honest,
whatsoever things are just,
whatsoever things are pure,
whatsoever things are lovely,
whatsoever things are of good report;
if there be any virtue,
if there be any praise,
think of these things."
What you put before your heart matters.
Your heart will be conformed to whatever you place before it:
a good deal of your spiritual diet
is simply what you place before your mind:
mental images above all else,
"Be careful, little eyes..."

There is a distinction between

where one meets God,
and that which reasons from one thought to another:
to us today, "mind" or "intellect" is that which reasons,
but the Church has long known the heart of the intellect or mind:
where one meets God.

And the poisoning of our spiritual diet
has moved us
from knowing the mind as the heart that meets God
to growing and over-growing that which reasons,
so that it is at the heart of our lives,
in Christians as much as the atheist,
is the secular view of mind,
like psychology,
in its secular flight
from religious knowing
of who the human person is
and what is the heart of the human mind.

Learn to live out of that by which you worship:
drink living water,
because it is exhausting
to chase after mirages
in worrying and scheming
in the part of us which reasons,
that which is only the moon
made to reflect the light
of the sun,
that by which we worship,
the spiritual eye
made for a God who is Light.

"We have a sister,
whose breasts are not grown,
what shall we do for our sister
in the day when she shall be spoken for?
If she be a wall,
we will build on her a palace of silver:
and if she be a door,
we will inclose her with boards of cedar."

In your mind be a garden locked and a fountain sealed

in your mind be a garden locked and a fountain sealed,
that which worships
not forever dispersed,
forever exhausted,
in treating that which reasons
as the heart of your mind:
learn the prayer of the mind in the heart.

The ancient organic spiritual diet is prayer, silence, fasting, liturgy,
giving to the poor, tithing, reading the Bible and the Fathers and saints'
lives, and many other things.
You eat it as you would eat an elephant:
one bite at a time.
Your task today is to eat one day's worth:
tomorrow's concerns are tomorrow's concerns.

Why this Waste?

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

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

"Why this waste?" quoth the Skeptic,

A pageant missed, other else ignored,
A hawk's eye opened to root out magical thinking in the Pious,
[A man's eye closed to his own magical thinking one must needs embrace,
Materialist or naturalist to be,](#)

"I see no evidence of God or any spirit,"
Quoth he through his spirit,
With the breath of God.

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

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

"Why this waste?" quote you and I,
Having lost some things in a global economic crisis,
More losses to come, it would seem.
It would seem.
Fearing that the providence of God,
Faieth us in a disaster.

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

Why this waste?

The Angelic Letters

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

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

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

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

My dear son Eukairos;

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

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

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

Not all technologies, and perhaps not any technology, is automatically a problem to use. But when technologies become a drone they are a problem. Turning on a radio for traffic and weather news, and then turning it off, is not a drone. Listening to the radio at a particular time to devote your attention to a concert is not a drone. Turning on a radio in the background while you work is a drone; even *Zen and the Art of the Motorcycle Maintenance* discusses what is wrong with mechanics having the radio on in the background. And texting to get specific information or coordinate with someone is not a drone, but a stream of text messages that is always on is a drone. Technology has its uses, but when technology is a drone, noise in the background that prevents silence from getting too uncomfortable, then it is a spiritual problem, a tool to medicate experience. And there are some technologies, like video games, that *exist* to medicate experience.

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

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

temptation at his fingertips. He has all the old ways to medicate experience, and quite a few powerful technologies that can help him medicate his experience as well. And for that he needs prayer.

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

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

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

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

My dear, dear Eukairos;

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

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

He has awakened a little, and I would have you do all in your power

He has awakened a little, and I would have you do all in your power to show him the silence of Heaven, however little he can receive it yet. You know some theologians speak of a river of fire, where in one image among others, the Light of Heaven and the fire of Hell are the same thing: not because good and evil are one, but because God can only give himself, the uncreated Light, in love to his creatures, and those in Hell are twisted through the rejection of Christ so that the Light of Heaven is to them the fire of Hell. The silence of Heaven is something like this; silence is of Heaven and there is nothing to replace it, but to those not yet able to bear joy, the silence is an uncomfortable silence. It is a bit like the Light of Heaven as it is experienced by those who reject it.

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

The Physician is at work!

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

Dear blessed Eukairos;

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

The details of the fall I will not treat here, but suffice it to say that when someone begins to wake up, the devils are furious. They are often given permission to test the awakening man, and often he falls. And you know how the devils are: before a fall, they say that God is easy-going and forgiving, and after a fall, that God is inexorable. Do your best to aid a person being seduced with the lie that God is inexorable.

Mark believes himself unfit for the service of the Kingdom. Very

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

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

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

In Light and Life and Love,
Your Brother Angel

My dear fellow-ministering angel;

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

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

Now Mark does not understand this, and while you may draw him to begin to sense this, that is not the point. In [The Way of the Pilgrim](#), a man speaks who was given the sacred Gospels in an old, hard-to-understand

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

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

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

Dear cherished, luminous son;

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

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

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

mesychastic silence. And it is better to sit in the silence of Heaven than read the Gospel as something to analyze.

Books have a place. Homilies have a place. But they are one shadow of the silence of Heaven. And there are more important things in the faith, such as fasting and almsgiving, repentance and confession, and prayer, the crowning jewel of all ascesis. Give Mark all of these gems.

With Deep Affection,
Your Brother Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

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

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

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

If you were a human employee, this would be the time for you to be punching in *lots* of overtime. Never mind that he thinks unconsciously that you and God have both deserted him; your strengthening hand has been invisible to him. I do not condemn you for any of this, but this time has been appointed for him to have opportunities for growth and for you to be working with him, and the fact that he does not seek growth in this

trial is only reason for you to work all the harder. That he is seeking to get things back the way they were, and suffering anger and fear, is only reason for you to exercise more diligent care. God is working with him now as much as ever, and I would advise you for now to work to the point of him seeking his spiritual good in this situation, however short he falls of right use of adversity for now.

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

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

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

My dear, esteemed son and fellow-angel Eukairos;

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

Mark began to console himself with the deep pit of porn, that poison that is so easily found in his time and place. And he began to pray, on his priest's advice, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me" and "Holy

priests advice, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me, and Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me," Saint John the Much-Suffering and Saint Mary of Egypt being saints to remember when fighting that poison. And you helped him for a moment to see how he was turned in on himself and away from others, and he prayed for help caring about others.

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

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

With an Eternal Love,
Your Respectful Brother Angel

My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;

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

Mark is right in one way and wrong in another to realize that he has only seen the beginning of deification. He *has* started, and only started, the chief end of human life, and he is right to pray, go to confession, and

see himself as a beginner. But what he is *wrong* about is imagining that the proof of his fledgling status is that his wishes are not fulfilled in the circumstances of his life: his unconscious and unstated assumption is that if he had real faith like saints who worked miracles, his wishes would be fulfilled and his life would be easier. Those saints had *less* wishes fulfilled, not more, and much harder lives than him.

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

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

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

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

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

Mark has lost his car. A drunk and uninsured driver slammed into it when it was parked; the driver was saved by his airbag, but Mark's car

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

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

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

My dear son Eukairos;

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

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

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

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

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

Men's thoughts are not just abstract reasoning; they are all sorts of things, some entangled with sinful desire, that are around all the time to a mind that has not learned hesychastic silence. Thoughts that need to be taken captive include thoughts of money entangled with greed, thoughts of imagined success entangled with pride, thoughts of wrongs suffered entangled with anger, thoughts of food compounded with gluttony, thoughts of desired persons compounded with lust, thoughts of imagined future difficulties entangled with worry and doubt about the Lord's good providence. Such thoughts as these need to be addressed, and not by tinkering with one's worldview: these thoughts remain a battleground in spiritual warfare even if one's worldview condemns greed, pride, anger, gluttony, lust, worry, and doubt.

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

Do what you can to draw him to repeat the [Jesus Prayer](#), to let it

grow to a rhythm in him. If the question is, "What should I start thinking when I catch myself?", the answer is, "[The Jesus prayer](#)."

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

With Deepest Affection,
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

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

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

The liturgy speaks of "the feeble audacity of the demons", and Mark needs to know that that is true, and true specifically in his case. What trials God allows are up to God, and the demons are an instrument in the

hand of a God who would use even the devils' rebellion to strengthen his sons. The only way Mark can fall into the demons' hands is by yielding to temptation: [nothing can injure the man who does not injure himself](#). The trials Mark faces are intended for his glory, and more basically for God's glory in him—but God chooses glory for himself that glorifies his saints. Doubtless this will conflict with Mark's plans and perceptions of what he needs, but God knows better, and *loves* Mark better than to give Mark everything he thinks he needs.

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

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

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

My dear, watchful son Eukairos;

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

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

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

enjoy what he has, and give thanks to God for everything he has been given.

And hold him in your prayers.

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

My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

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

Help Mark to pray. Pray to forgive others, pray for the well-being of others, pray by being in silence before God. Help him to pray when he is attacked by passion; help him to pray when he is tempted and when he confesses in his heart that he has sinned: *O Lord, forgive me for doing this and help me to do better next time, for the glory of thy holy name and for the salvation of my soul.*

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

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

BEFORE GOD IN PARADISE.

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

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

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

Your charge has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

He went to church, and several gunmen entered. One of them pointed a gun at a visitor, and Mark stepped in front of her. He was ordered to move, and he stood firm. He wasn't thinking of being heroic; he wasn't even thinking of showing due respect to a woman. He only thought vaguely of appropriate treatment of a visitor and fear never deterred him from this vague sense of appropriate care for a visitor.

And so death claimed him to its defeat. [O Death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?](#) Death claimed claimed saintly Mark to its defeat.

Mark is no longer your charge.

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

Go in peace.

Your Fellow-Minister,
מיכאל • MIXAHA • MICHAEL • Who Is Like God?

The Arena

1. We stand in an arena, the great coliseum. For it is the apostles who were sent forth last, as if men condemned to die, made a spectacle unto the world, to angels and men.
2. St. Job was made like unto a champion waging war against Satan, on God's behalf. He lost everything and remained God-fearing, standing as the saint who vindicated God.
3. [But all the saints vindicate God.](#)
4. We are told as we read the trials in [the Book of Job](#) that Satan stands slandering God's saints day and night and said God had no saint worthy of temptation. And the Lord God Almighty allowed Satan to tempt St. Job.
5. We are told this, but in the end of the Scripture, even when St. Job's losses are repaid double, St. Job never hears. He never knows that he stands in the cosmic coliseum, as a champion on God's behalf. Never on earth does St. Job know the reason for the catastrophes that befell him.
6. St. Job, buffeted and bewildered, could see no rhyme or reason in what befell him. Yet even the plagues of Satan were woven into the plans of the Lord God who never once stopped working all things to good for this saint, and to the saint who remained faithful, the plagues of Satan are woven into the diadem of royal priesthood

crowning God's saints.

7. Everything that comes to us is either a blessing from God or a temptation which God has allowed for our strengthening. The plagues by which Satan visited St. Job are the very means themselves by which God glorified his faithful saint.
8. Do not look for God in some other set of circumstances. Look for him in the very circumstances you are in. If you look at some of your circumstances and say, "God could not have allowed that!", you are not rightly accepting the Lord's work in the circumstances he has chosen to work his glory.
9. You are in the arena; God has given you weapons and armor by which to fight. A poor warrior indeed blames the weapons God has armed him with.
10. Fight therefore, before angels and men. The circumstances of your life are not inadequate, whether through God lacking authority, or wisdom, or love. The very sword blows of Satan glancing off shield and armor are ordained in God's good providence to burnish tarnishment and banish rust.
11. The Almighty laughs Satan to scorn. St. Job, faithful when he was stricken, unmasked the feeble audacity of the demons.
12. God gives ordinary providence for easy times, and extraordinary providence for hard times.
13. If times turn hard for men, and much harder for God's servants, know that this is ordained by God. Do not suppose God's providence came when you were young but not now.
14. What in your life do you wish were gone so you could be where you should be? When you look for God to train you in those very circumstances, that is the beginning of victory. That is already a victory won.
15. Look in every circumstance for the Lord to train you. The

dressing of wounds after struggle is part of training, and so is live combat.

16. The feeble audacity of the demons gives every appearance of power, but the appearance deceives.
17. Nothing but your sins can wound you so that you are down. And even our sins are taken into the work of the Almighty if we repent.
18. When some trial comes to you, and you thank God, that is itself a victory.
19. Look for God's work here and now. If you will not let God work with you here and now, God will not fulfill all of your daydreams and then begin working with you; he will ask you to let him train you in the here and now.
20. Do you find yourself in a painfully rough situation? Then what can you do to lighten others' burdens? Instead of asking, "Why me?", ask, "Why not me?"
21. An abbot asked a suffering monk if he wanted the abbot to pray that his suffering be taken away. The disciple said, "No," and his master said, "You will outstrip me."
22. It is not a contradiction to say that both God has designs for us, and we are under the pressure of trials. Diamonds are only made through pressure.
23. No disciple is greater than his master. Should we expect to be above sufferings when the Son of God was made perfect through suffering?
24. Anger is a spiritual disease. We choose the path of illness all the more easily when we do not recognize that God seeks to train us in the situation we are in, not the situation we wish we were in.
25. It is easier not to be angry when we recognize that God knows what he is doing in the situations he allows us to be in. The situation

may be temptation and trial, but was God impotent, unwise, or unloving in how he handled St. Job?

26. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds by any means. We live instead in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods. And that is the greater blessing.
27. Some very holy men no longer struggle spiritually because spiritual struggle has worked out completely. But for the rest of us, struggle is a normal state. It is a problem for you or I to pass Lent without struggle. If we struggle and stumble and fall, that is good news. All the better if we cannot see how the thrusts and blows of the enemy's sword burnish away a little rust, one imperceptible speck at a time.
28. Do you ask, "Did it have to hurt *that* much?" When I have asked that question, I have not found a better answer than, "I do not understand," and furthermore, "Do I understand better than God?"
29. We seek happiness on terms that make success and happiness utterly impossible. God destroys our plans so that we might have the true happiness that is blessedness.
30. Have a good struggle.
31. There is no road to blessedness but the royal road of affliction that befits God's sons. Consider it pure joy when you fall into different trials and temptations. If you have trouble seeing why, read [the Book of James](#).
32. Treasures on earth fail. Treasures in Heaven are more practical.
33. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for what good you do. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is how the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
34. If you have hard memories, they too are a part of the arena. Forgive and learn to thank God for painful memories.

35. Remember that you will die, and live in preparation for that moment. There is much more life in mindfully dying each day than in heedlessly banishing from your mind the reality. Live as men condemned to die, made a spectacle before men and angels.
36. Live your life out of prayer.
37. It takes a lifetime of faith to trust that God always answers prayers: he answers either "Yes, here is what you asked," or "No, here is something better." And to do so honestly can come from the struggle of praying your heart out and wondering why God seemed to give no answer and make no improvements to your and others' pain.
38. In the Bible, David slew Goliath. In our lives, David *sometimes* prevails against Goliath, but often not. Which is from God? Both.
39. Struggling for the greater good is a process of at once trying to master, and to get oneself out of the way. Struggle hard enough to cooperate with God when he rips apart your ways of struggling to reach the good.
40. Hurting? What can you do to help others?

The Best Things in Life Are Free

1. The best things in life are free.
2. The best things in life are free. But what does this mean?
3. The best things in life are free. But we do not understand the truth of these words if we think they are filled out by hugs and friendship, or even love: [If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.](#)
4. A better lens comes from the condemnation of the Pharisees: [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.](#)
5. It appears in Orthodoxy that the outside of the chalice is all feasts and beautiful liturgies, even during Lent: but on the inside is all repentance, deprivation and hardship, and being blindsided by rebukes. All of this falls under "The best things in life are free," the one as much as the other.
6. Well enough it may be said that sin is the forerunner of sorrow: [The wages of sin is death](#), and that death's sorrow begins here and now. Sin ultimately kills pleasure: [It takes humility to enjoy even pride. It takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.](#)

7. But this is not all. The outside of the cup is beautiful and its beauty is true and real. But the real treasure is inside. Repentance is a spiritual awakening; it terrifies because it seems that when we repent we will lose a shining part of ourselves forever, but when we repent we suddenly realize, "*I was holding on to a piece of Hell!*" and are free to flee the stench. What feast compares to the grandeur of real repentance?
8. The Great High Priest said, [I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.](#) The best things in life are free, and this pruning is a very big free gift.
9. It is when we are cleansed inside the cup that the outside is clean. Let Christ cleanse us inside the cup, and then inside and outside will both bear proper fruit.
10. The things in life that are free are persecutions, and we have on the highest authority: [Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.](#)
11. St. Paul goes so far to say, [But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.](#)
12. We may approach the outside of the chalice first, but it is a loss to stop there. We need the joyful sorrow of compunction and all that is within the chalice, and then what is on the outside of the chalice will be clean, and what is more, will reach its proper stature.
13. Every day take a little less, and pare down a little more. The Fathers do warn, "Do not engage in warfare beyond your strength,"

and the praxis is to crawl before we try to walk. But [The Way of the Ascetic](#) pares down, little by little, in humor, in luxury, in eating for a purpose other than nourishment, and aims to have none of it left.

14. [By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.](#) And by faith we wean ourselves even from a life centered on innocent pleasures, knowing that they do not hold a candle to the spiritual pleasure that is inside the chalice.
15. The cutting of of one's own will is free. And it is the experience of monasticism that this is one of the best things in life: a monk's will is cut off, not for the primary benefit of his brother monks, but for his own benefit. And the voluntary and involuntary cutting off of one's will extends far outside the monastery. It is one of the best things in life, whether we accept it as a blessing or resent it because we do not wish to grow up in the spiritual life.
16. Do you wish that this chalice be taken from you? Christ prayed the same, but he also prayed, "[Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.](#)" For some prayers are impossible.
17. There are two answers to prayer: "Yes," and "No, please ask for something better." St. James writes, [You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.](#) Passions are sinful habits that warp us, and when we ask for something to satisfy our passions, God only ever says "No" because he wants better for us.
18. Those things that are obviously good are nothing compared to the terrible goods: *the gilded artwork outside the chalice is beautiful enough, but it is nothing next to what is inside the chalice.*
19. [The Maximum Christ wishes the maximum for our lives, and that comes through repentance and the royal road of affliction.](#)
20. [Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for Christ's sake. This is a sign you are on the royal](#)

road; this is now the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.

21. No one can harm the man who does not injure himself. *Nor can any circumstance.* So therefore let us not be governed by circumstances, or think the less of our God when he allows us rougher circumstances.
22. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but there is another shoe to drop. We live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that is a greater good.
23. Perhaps we are entering a time of struggle. (*Entering?*) Perhaps we are seeing the end of exceptionally prosperous and easy days we have no right reason to expect. The same truths apply. The same God who reigns in easy times, reigns in hard times.
24. "Give us this day our daily bread:" it is normal not to know where your next meal is from.
25. The arm of the Lord is more visible, not less, in hard times. God's providence is stronger when you know you need it.
26. The chalice offered us indeed looks easy on the outside but is full of pain within. But the sufferings are part of the treasure. And the best things in life reach deeper than the golden ornaments that belong on the outside, but extend to the joyful sadnesses within. Those who shed at least some entertainment and seek repentance and compunction for their sins find repentance an awakening and compunction to be joyful and cleansing. And that is not all. Everything inside the cup runs deep. And everything inside the cup is free.
27. The divine sovereignty is never purchased at the expense of human freedom. Human freedom is limited, but this is not where divine sovereignty comes from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely choice has been made, and the divine sovereignty shapes joy after every draught of the inexhaustible cup.

28. The joy of the best things in life is not purchased at the expense of the chalice of suffering. Suffering is limited, but this is not something the divine sovereignty is purchased from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely suffering has been entered, and the divine sovereignty leaves people in a better place than had they not met their sufferings.
29. The divine life is now. The divine energies are now. Not later, once some difficulties are resolved, but now.
30. In ancient times the holiday of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection were celebrated together; even now there is not a separation between them, and we speak of a three-day Pascha. There is no real separation between bearing a cross and being crowned with a crown, even if it takes time to gain the eyes of faith to see such things.
31. Orthodox are iconodules, but God is both iconodule and iconoclast: he takes things in our life and makes them icons of himself, and he also keeps on destroying and removing things to make us more free to breathe. Heaven and Hell are both inside us, and God seeks to inhabit Heaven inside of us and uproot Hell.
32. God the Father is the maker of all things visible and invisible. God is spirit, and even among created things the first excellence belongs to the invisible. Who can buy or sell invisible things? This is one reason the best things in life are free.
33. In the Incarnation, Heaven kissed earth and the visible now has a share in the excellence of the invisible. But still [if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned](#): the sale of relics is forbidden.
34. Do you believe the best things in life are free? Excellent, but [the demons believe—and shudder](#). Do you *live* as if the best things in life are free?
35. [It is more blessed to give than receive](#). What do you have to

give?

36. If you covet something and you gain it, it will bring misery once the pleasure melts away, and the greater the covetousness, the greater the misery. Covetousness is the inverse of what is inside the cup.
37. We want to have things our way. But the Lord has other plans. And what we will find if we yield is that he has other plans for us that are not what we would have chosen, but are far better. This is at once an easy and a hard thing to do.
38. In the Bible a chalice is both a cup of suffering to drink and a cup which fills with excellent joy. The suffering is as bad as we fear—no, worse— but if we drink of it we will be drinking of the very best things in life. The divine life in the chalice immeasurably eclipses the gilt ornament outside of it. Rememberance of death, compunction, and repentance dig deeper than the music of liturgy.
39. The best things in life are not just an ornament for when our material needs are well taken care of. It is true ten times more that they are lifeblood in hard times and harder times. And the chalice is inexhaustible.
40. The best things in life are free.

Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Asceticism

1. Many people are concerned today with harmony with nature. And indeed there is quite a lot to living according to nature.
2. But you will not find something that is missing by looking twice as hard in the wrong place, and it matters where one seeks harmony with nature. In monasticism, the man of virtue is the quintessential natural man. And there is something in monasticism that is behind stories of the monk who can approach boar or bear.
3. Being out of harmony with nature is not predominantly a lack of time in forests. There is a deeper root.
4. Exercising is better than living a life without exercise. But there is something missing in a sedentary life with artificially added exercise, after, for centuries, we have worked to avoid the strenuous labor that most people have had to do.
5. It is as if people had worked for centuries to make the perfect picnic and finally found a way to have perfectly green grass at an even height, a climate controlled environment with sunlight and just the right amount of cloud, and many other things. Then people find that something is missing in the perfect picnic, and say that there might be wisdom in the saying, "No picnic is complete without ants." So they carefully engineer a colony of ants to add to the picnic.

6. An exercise program may be sought in terms of harmony with nature: by walking, running, or biking out of doors. Or it may be pursued for physical health for people who do not connect exercise with harmony of nature. But and without concern for "asceticism" (spiritual discipline) or harmony with nature, many people know that complete deliverance from physical effort has some very bad physical effects. Vigorous exercise is part and parcel to the natural condition of man.
7. Here are two different ways of seeking harmony with nature. The second might never consciously ask if life without physical toil is natural, nor whether our natural condition is how we should live, but still recognizes a problem—a little like a child who knows nothing of the medical theory of how burns are bad, but quickly withdraws his hand from a hot stove.
8. But there is a third kind of approach to harmony with nature, besides a sense that we are incomplete without a better connection to the natural world, and a knowledge that our bodies are less healthy if we live sedentary lives, lives without reintroducing physical exertion because the perfectly engineered picnic is more satisfying if a colony of ants is engineered in.
9. This third way is asceticism, and asceticism, which is spiritual discipline or spiritual exercise, moral struggle, and mystical toil, is the natural condition of man.
10. The disciples were joyous because the demons submitted to them in Christ's name, and Christ's answer was: "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you in my name. Rejoice instead that your names are written in Heaven." The reality of the disciples' names being written in Heaven dwarfed the reality of their power over demons, and in like manner the reality that monks can be so much in harmony with nature that they can safely approach wild bears is dwarfed by the reality that the royal road of asceticism can bring so much harmony with nature that by God's grace people work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

11. The list of spiritual disciplines is open-ended, much like the list of sacraments, but one such list of spiritual disciplines might be prayer, worship, sacrament, service, silence, living simply, fasting, and the spiritual use of hardship. If these do not seem exotic enough for what we expect of spiritual discipline, we might learn that the spiritual disciplines can free us from seeking the exotic in too shallow of a fashion.
12. The Bible was written in an age before our newest technologies, but it says much to the human use of technology, because it says much to the human use of property. If the Sermon on the Mount says, "No man can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and money," it is strange at best to assume that these words applied when money could buy food, clothing, and livestock but have no relevance to an age when money can also buy the computers and consumer electronics we are infatuated with. If anything, our interest in technology makes the timeless words, "No man can serve two masters" all the more needed in our day.
13. Money can buy everything money can buy and nothing money cannot buy. To seek true glory, or community, or control over all risk from money is a fundamental error, like trying to make a marble statue so lifelike that it actually comes to life. What is so often sought in money is something living, while money itself is something dead, a stone that can appear deceptively lifelike but can never hold the breath of life.
14. In the end, those who look to money to be their servant make it their master. "No man can serve two masters" is much the same truth as one Calvin and Hobbes strip:

Calvin: I had the scariest dream last night. I dreamed that machines took over and made us do their bidding.

Hobbes: That must have been scary!

Calvin: It wa—*holy*, would you look at the time? My TV show is on!

But this problem with technology has been a problem with property and wealth for ages, and it is foolish to believe that all the Scriptural skepticism and unbelief about whether wealth is really all that beneficial to us, are simply irrelevant to modern technology.

15. There was great excitement in the past millenium when, it was believed, the Age of Pisces would draw to a close, and the Age of Aquarius would begin, and this New Age would be an exciting dawn when all we find dreary about the here and now would melt away. Then the Age of Aquarius started, at least officially, but the New Age failed to rescue us from finding the here and now to be dreary. Then there was great excitement as something like 97% of children born after a certain date were born indigo children: children whose auras are indigo rather than a more mundane color. But, unfortunately, this celebrated watershed did not stop the here and now from being miserable. Now there is great hope that in 2012, according to the Mayan "astrological" calendar, another momentous event will take place, perhaps finally delivering us from the here and now. And, presumably, when December 21, 2012 fails to satisfy us, subsequent momentous events will promise to deliver us from a here and now we find unbearable.
16. If we do not try to sate this urge with New Age, we can try to satisfy it with technology: in what seems like aeons past, the advent of radio and movies seemed to change everything and provide an escape from the here and now, an escape into a totally different world. Then, more recently, surfing the net became the ultimate drug-free trip, only it turns out that the web isn't able to save us from finding the here and now miserable after all. For that, apparently, we need SecondLife, or maybe some exciting development down the pike... or, perhaps, we are trying to work out a way to succeed by barking up the wrong lamppost.
17. No technology is permanently exotic.
18. When a Utopian vision dreams of turning the oceans to lemonade, then we have what has been called "a Utopia of spoiled children." It is not a Utopian vision of people being supported in the

difficult ascetical pursuit of virtue and ultimately God, but an aid to arrested development that forever panders to childish desires.

19. Technology need not have the faintest conscious connection with Utopianism, but it can pursue one of the same ends. More specifically, it can be a means to stay in arrested development. What most technology offers is, in the end, a practical way to circumvent asceticism. Technological "progress" often means that up until now, people have lived with a difficult struggle—a struggle that ultimately amounts to asceticism—but now we can simply do without the struggle.
20. Through the wonders of modern technology, we can eat and eat and eat candy all day and not have the candy show up on our waistline: but this does not make us any better, nobler, or wiser than if we could turn the oceans to lemonade. This is an invention from a Utopia of spoiled children.
21. Sweetness is a gift from God, and the sweeter fruit and honey taste, the better the nourishment they give. But there is something amiss in tearing the sweetness away from healthy food, and, not being content with this, to say, "We think that eating is a good thing, and we wish to celebrate everything that is good about it. But, unfortunately, there is biological survival, a holdover from other days: food acts as a nutrient whether you want it or not. But through the wonders of modern science, we can celebrate the goodness of eating while making any effect on the body strictly optional. This is progress!"
22. Statistically, people who switch to artificial sweeteners gain *more* weight. Splenda accomplishes two things: it makes things sweeter without adding calories, and it offers people a way to sever the cord between enjoying sweet taste, and calories entering the body. On spiritual grounds, this is a disturbing idea of how to "support" weight loss. It is like trying to stop people from getting hurt in traffic accidents by adding special "safety" features to some roads so people can drive however they please with impunity, even if they develop habits that will get them *killed* on any other road. What is spiritually unhealthy overflows into poorer health for the body.

People gain more weight eating Splenda, and there are more ways than one that Splenda is unfit for human consumption.

23. The ascesis of fasting is not intended as an ultimate extreme measure for weight loss. That may follow—or may not—but there is something fundamentally deeper going on:

Man does not live by bread alone, and if we let go of certain foods or other pleasures for a time, we are in a better position to grasp what more man lives on than mere food. When we rein in the nourishing food of the body and its delights, we may find ourselves in a better position to take in the nourishing food of the spirit and much deeper spiritual delights.

Fasting pursued wrongly can do us no good, and it is the wisdom of the Orthodox Church to undergo such ascesis under the direction of one's priest or spiritual father. But the core issue in fasting is one that matters some for the body and much more for the spirit.

24. Splenda and contraception are both body-conquering technologies that allow us to conquer part of our embodied nature: that the body takes nourishment from food, and that the greatest natural pleasure has deep fertile potential. And indeed, the technologies we call "space-conquering technologies" might more aptly be titled, "body-conquering technologies," because they are used to conquer our embodied and embedded state as God made it.

25. Today, "everybody knows" that the Orthodox Church, not exactly like the Catholic Church allowing contraceptive timing, allows contraception under certain guidelines, and the Orthodox Church has never defined a formal position on contraception above the level of one's spiritual father. This is due, among other factors, to some influential scholarly spin-doctoring, the academic equivalent of the NBC *Dateline* episode that "proved" that a certain truck had a fire hazard in a 20mph collision by filming a 30mph collision (presented as a 20mph collision) and making sure there was a fiery spectacle by also detonating explosives planted above the truck's gas

tank ([see analysis](#)).

26. St. John Chrysostom wrote,

Where is there murder before birth? You do not even let a prostitute remain only a prostitute, but you make her a murderer as well... Do you see that from drunkenness comes fornication, from fornication adultery, and from adultery murder? Indeed, it is something worse than murder and do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you despise the gift of God, and fight with his laws? What is a curse, do you seek it as though it were a blessing?... Do you teach the woman who is given to you for the procreation of offspring to perpetrate killing? In this indifference of the married men there is greater evil filth; for then poisons are prepared, not against the womb of a prostitute, but against your injured wife.

27. The Blessed Augustine devastatingly condemned Natural Family Banning: if procreation is sliced away from marital relations, Augustine says point blank, then true marriage is forbidden. There is no wife, but only a mistress, and if this is not enough, he holds that those who enjoin contraception fall under the full freight of St. Paul's blistering words about forbidding marriage:

Now, the Spirit expressly says that in the last days some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron: for they forbid marriage and demand avoidance of foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Augustine absolutely did not believe that one can enjoy the good of marriage and treat the blessing of marriage's fertility as a burden and a curse. Such an idea is strange, like trying to celebrate the good of medical care while taking measures to prevent it from improving one's health.

28. Such condemnations stem from the unanimous position of the Church Fathers on contraception.
29. Such words seem strange today, and English Bible translations seem to only refer to contraception once: when God struck Onan dead for "pull and pray." (There are also some condemnations of *pharmakeia* and *pharmakoi*—"medicine men" one would approach for a contraceptive—something that is lost in translation, unfortunately giving the impression that occult sin alone was the issue at stake.)
30. Contraception allows a marriage *à la carte*: it offers some control over pursuing a couple's hopes, together, on terms that they choose without relinquishing control altogether. And the root of this is a deeper answer to St. John Chrysostom's admonition to leave other brothers and sisters to their children as their inheritance rather than mere earthly possessions.

(This was under what would today be considered a third world standard of living, not the first world lifestyle of many people who claim today that they "simply cannot afford any more children"—which reflects not only that they cannot afford to have more children *and retain their expected (entitled?) standard of living for them and their children*, but their priorities once they realize that they may be unable to have both.)

31. Contraception is chosen because it serves a certain way of life: it is not an accident in any way, shape, or form that Planned Parenthood advertises, for both contraception, "Take control of your life!" For whether one plans two children, or four, or none, Planned Parenthood sings the siren song of having your life under your control, or at least as much under control as you can make it, where you choose the terms where you will deal with your children, if and when you want.
32. Marriage and monasticism both help people grow up by helping them to learn being out of control. Marriage may provide the asceticism of minding children and monasticism that of obedience to one's

elder, but these different-sounding activities are aimed at building the same kind of spiritual virtue and power.

33. Counselors offer people, not the help that many of them seek in controlling those they struggle with, but something that is rarely asked: learning to be at peace with letting go of being in control of others, and the unexpected freedom that that brings. Marriage and monasticism, at their best, do not provide a minor adjustment that one manages and is then on top of, but an arena, a spiritual struggle, a training ground in which people live the grace and beauty of the Sermon on the Mount, and are freed from the prison chamber of seeking control and the dank dungeon of living for themselves.
34. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than them? And why do you worry about the lilies of the field: how they grow. They neither toil nor spin;" they have joy and peace. The height of technological progress in having pleasure without losing control—in artificial sweeteners, contraceptives and anything else—utterly pales in comparison.
35. Technology is not evil. Many technologies have a right use, but that use is a use to pursue maturity and asceticism, not an aid to living childishly.
36. Wine was created by God as good, and it has a right use. But the man who seeks in wine a way to be happy or a way to drive away his problems has already lost.
37. One classic attitude to wine was not "We forbid drinking wine," or even "It would be better not to drink wine at all, but a little bit does not do too much damage," but goes beyond saying, "The pleasure of wine was given by God as good" to saying: "Wine is an important training ground to learn the asceticism of moderation, and learn a lesson that cannot be escaped: we are not obligated to learn

moderation in wine, but if we do not drink wine, we still need moderation in work, play, eating, and everything else, and many of us would do well to grow up in asceticism in the training arena of enjoying wine and be better prepared for other areas of life where the need for the asceticism of moderation, of saying 'when' and drawing limits, is not only something we *should not* dodge: it is something we *can never* escape."

38. The ascetical use of technology is like the ascetical use of wine. It is pursued out of maturity, and as a support to maturity. It is not pursued out of childishness, nor as a support to childishness. And it should never be the center of gravity in our lives. (Drinking becomes a problem more or less when it becomes the focus of a person's life and pursuits.)
39. The Harvard business study behind [Good to Great](#) found that the most effective companies often made pioneering use of technology, but technology was never the center of the picture: however many news stories might be printed about how they used technologies, few of the CEOs mentioned technology at all when they discussed their company's success, and none of them ascribed all that much importance to even their best technology. Transformed companies—companies selected in a study of all publicly traded U.S. companies whose astonishing stock history began to improve and then outperformed the market by something like a factor of three, sustained for fifteen years straight—didn't think technology was all that important, not even technologies their people pioneered. They focused on something more significant.
40. [Good to Great](#) leadership saw their companies' success in terms of people.
41. There were other finds, including that the most effective CEOs were not celebrity rockstars in the limelight, but humble servant leaders living for something beyond themselves. In a study about what best achieves what greed wants, not even one of the top executives followed a mercenary creed of ruthless greed and self-advancement.

42. If people, not technology, make businesses tremendously profitable, then perhaps people who want more than profit also need something beyond technology in order to reach the spiritual riches and treasures in Heaven that we were made for.
43. The right use of technology comes out of asceticism and is therefore according to nature.
44. In Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic [Stranger in a Strange Land](#), a "man" with human genes who starts with an entirely Martian heritage as his culture and tradition, comes to say, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being was organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." The insight is true, but takes shape in a way that completely cuts against the grain of [Stranger in a Strange Land](#).
45. One most immediate example is that the science fiction vision is of an ideal of a community of "water brothers" who painstakingly root out natural jealousy and modesty, and establish free love within their circle: such, the story would have it, provides optimal human happiness. As compellingly as it may be written into the story, one may bring up studies which sought to find out which of the sexualities they wished to promote provided the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, and found to their astonishment and chagrin that the greatest satisfaction comes, not from any creative quest for the ultimate thrill, but from something they despised as a completely unacceptable *perversion*: a husband and wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, working to become one for as long as they both shall live, and perhaps even grateful for the fruitfulness of their love. Perhaps such an arrangement offers greater satisfaction than trying to "push the envelope" of adventuresome arrangements precisely *because* it is "functioning the way a human being was organized to function."
46. People only seek the ultimate exotic thrill when they are unhappy. Gnosticism is a spiritual porn whose sizzle entices people who despair: its "good news" of an escape from the miserable here

and now is "good news" as misery would want it. Today's Gnosticism may rarely teach, as did earlier Gnostic honesty, that our world could not be the good creation of the ultimately good God, but holding that we need to escape our miserable world was as deep in ancient Gnostics' bones as an alcoholic experiences that our miserable world needs to be medicated by drunkenness. Baudelaire said, in the nineteenth century: "Keep getting drunk! Whether with wine, or with poetry, or with virtue, as you please, keep getting drunk," in a poem about medicating what might be a miserable existence. Today he might have said, "Keep getting drunk! Whether with New Age, or with the endless virtual realities of SecondWife, or with the ultimate Viagra-powered thrill, as you please, keep getting drunk!"

47. What SecondLife—or rather SecondWife—offers is the apparent opportunity to have an alternative to a here and now one is not satisfied with. Presumably there are merits to this alternate reality: some uses are no more a means to escape the here and now than a mainstream business's website, or phoning ahead to make a reservation at a restaurant. But SecondWife draws people with an alternative to the here and now they feel stuck in.
48. It is one thing to get drunk to blot out the misery of another's death. It is another altogether to keep getting drunk to blot out the misery of one's own life.
49. An old story from African-American lore tells of how a master and one of his slaves would compete by telling dreams they claimed they had. One time, the master said that he had a dream of African-American people's Heaven, and everything was dingy and broken—and there were lots of dirty African-Americans everywhere. His slave answered that he had dreamed of white people's Heaven, and everything was silver and gold, beautiful and in perfect order—but there wasn't a soul in the place!
50. Much of what technology seems to offer is to let people of all races enter a Heaven where there are luxuries the witty slave could never dream of, but in the end there is nothing much better than a Heaven full of gold and empty of people.

51. "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
52. There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of asceticism. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.
53. "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
54. Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and *never* use it to replace meat.
55. We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.
56. Today the older generation seems to grouse about our younger

generation. Some years ago, someone in the AARP magazine quipped about young people, "Those tight pants! Those frilly hairdos! And you should see what the girls are wearing!" Less witty complaints about the younger generation's immodest style of dress, and their rude disrespect for their elders can just as well be found from the time of Mozart, for instance, or Socrates: and it seems that today's older generation is as apt to criticize the younger generation as their elders presumably were. But here something really is to be said about the younger generation.

57. The older generation kvetching about how the younger generation today has it so easy with toys their elders never dreamed of, never seem to connect their sardonic remarks with how they went to school with discipline problems like spitwads and the spoiled younger generation faced easily available street drugs, or how a well-behaved boy with an e-mail address may receive X-rated spam. "The youth these days" have luxuries their parents never even dreamed of—and temptations and dangers their parents never conceived, not in their worst nightmares.
58. Elders have traditionally complained about the young people being rude, much of which amounts to mental inattention. Part of politeless is being present in body and mind to others, and when the older generation was young, *their* elders assuredly corrected them from not paying attention in the presence of other people and themselves.
59. When they were young, the older generation's ways of being rude included zoning out and daydreaming, making faces when adults turned their back, and in class throwing paper airplanes and passing notes—and growing up meant, in part, learning to turn their back on that arsenal of temptations, much like previous generations. And many of the older generation genuinely turned their backs on those temptations, and would genuinely like to help the younger generation learn to honor those around with more of their physical and mental *presence*.
60. Consumer electronics like the smartphone, aimed to offer

something to youth, often advertise to the younger generation precisely a far better way to avoid a spiritual lesson that was hard enough for previous generations to learn without nearly the same degree of temptation. Few explains to them that a smartphone is not only very useful, but it is designed and sold as an enticing ultra-portable temptation.

61. Literature can be used to escape. But the dividing line between great and not-so-great literature is less a matter of theme, talent, or style than the question of whether the story serves to help the reader escape the world, or engage it.
62. In technology, the question of the virtuous use of technology is less a matter of how fancy the technology is, or how recent, than whether it is used to escape the world or engage it. Two friends who use cell phones to help them meet face-to-face are using technology to support, in some form, the timeless way of relating to other people. Family members who IM to ask prayer for someone who is sick also incorporate technology into the timeless way of relating to other people. This use of technology is quiet and unobtrusive, and supports a focus on something greater than technology: the life God gave us.
63. Was technology made for man, or man for technology?
64. Much of the economy holds the premise that a culture should be optimized to produce wealth: man was made for the economy. The discipline of advertising is a discipline of influencing people without respecting them as people: the customer, apparently, exists for the benefit of the business.
65. Advertising encourages us to take shopping as a sacrament, and the best response we can give is not activism as such, but a refusal of consent.
66. Shopping is permissible, but not sacramental shopping, because sacramental shopping is an ersatz sacrament and identifying with brands an ersatz spiritual discipline. At best sacramental shopping is

a distraction; more likely it is a lure and the bait for a spiritual trap.

67. We may buy a product which carries a mystique, but not the mystique itself: and buying a cool product without buying into its "cool" is hard, harder than not buying. But if we buy into the cool, we forfeit great spiritual treasure.
68. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and all of your life and all of your mind and all of your might, love your neighbor as yourself, and use things: do not love things while using people.
69. Things can do the greatest good when we stop being infatuated with them and put first things first. The most powerful uses of technology, and the best, come from loving those whom you should love and using what you should use. We do not benefit from being infatuated with technology, nor from acting on such infatuation.
70. The Liturgy prays, "Pierce our souls with longing for Thee." Our longing for transcendence is a glory, and the deepest thing that draws us in advertisements for luxury goods, does so because of the glory we were made to seek.
71. But let us attend to living in accordance with nature. Ordinarily when a technology is hailed as "space-conquering," it is on a deep level *body-conquering*, defeating part of the limitations of our embodied nature—which is to say, defeating part of our embodied nature that is in a particular place in a particular way.
72. Technologies to pass great distance quickly, or make it easy to communicate without being near, unravel what from ancient times was an ancient social fabric. They offer something of a line-item veto on the limits of our embodied state: if they do not change our bodies directly, they make our embodied limitations less relevant.
73. A technology can conquer how the body takes nourishment from food, for instance, and therefore be body-conquering without being space-conquering. But whether celebrated or taken for granted, space-conquering technologies are called space-conquering

because they make part of the limitations of our embodied nature less relevant.

74. There is almost a parody of asceticism in space-conquering technologies. Asceticism works to transcend the limited body, and space-conquering technologies seem a way to do the same. But they are opposites.
75. "The demons always fast:" such people are told to instill that fasting has a place and a genuine use, but anyone who focuses too much on fasting, or fasts too rigidly, is well-advised to remember that every single demon outfasts every single saint. But there is something human about fasting: only a being made to eat can benefit from refraining from eating. Fasting is useful because, unlike the angels and demons, a man is not created purely a spirit, but created both spirit and body, and they are linked together. Asceticism knows better, and is more deeply attuned to nature, to attempt to work on the spirit with the body detached and ignored.
76. Even as asceticism subdues the comforts and the body, the work is not only to transfigure the spirit, and transform the body.
77. In a saint the transfiguration means that when the person has died, the body is not what horror movies see in dead bodies: it is glorified into relics.
78. This is a fundamentally different matter from circumventing the body's limitations. There may be good, ascetical uses for space-conquering technologies: but the good part of it comes from the asceticism shining through the technology.
79. The limitations of our embodied existence—aging, bodily aches and pains, betrayal, having doors closed in our face—have been recognized as spiritual stepping stones, and the mature wonder, not whether they have too many spiritual stepping stones, but whether they might need more. Many impoverished saints were concerned, not with whether their life was too hard, but whether it was too easy. Some saints have been tremendously wealthy, but they used their

wealth for other purposes than simply pandering to themselves.

80. Some might ask today, for instance, whether there might be something symbolic to the burning bush that remained unconsumed which St. Moses the Lawgiver saw. And there are many layers of spiritual meaning to the miracle—an emblem of the Theotokos's virgin birthgiving—but it is not the proper use of symbolic layers to avoid the literal layer, without which the symbolic layers do not stand. If the question is, "Isn't there something symbolic about the story of the miracle of the burning bush?", the answer is, "Yes, but it is a fundamental error to use the symbolic layers to dodge the difficulty of literally believing the miracle." In like fashion, there are many virtuous uses of technology, but it is a fundamental error to expect those uses to include using technology to avoid the difficult lessons of spiritual ascesis.
81. Living according to nature is not a luxury we add once we have taken care of necessities: part of harmony with nature is built into necessities. Our ancestors gathered from the natural world, not to seek harmony with nature, but to meet their basic needs—often with far fewer luxuries than we have—and part of living according to nature has usually meant few, if any, luxuries. Perhaps there is more harmony with nature today in driving around a city to run errands for other people, than a luxurious day out in the countryside.
82. Some of the promise the Internet seems to offer is the dream a mind-based society: a world of the human spirit where there is no distraction of external appearance because you have no appearance save that of a handle or avatar, for instance, or a world where people need not appear male or female except as they choose. But the important question is not whether technology through the internet can deliver such a dream, but whether the dream is a dream or a nightmare.
83. To say that the Internet is much more mind-based than face-to-face interactions is partly true. But to say that a mind-based society is more fit for the human spirit than the timeless way of relating, in old-fashioned [meatspace](#), is to correct the Creator on His mistaken

notions regarding His creatures' best interests.

84. People still use the internet all the time as an adjunct to the timeless way of relating. Harmony with nature is not disrupted by technology's use as an adjunct nearly so much as when it serves as a replacement. Pushing for a mind-based society, and harmony with nature, may appeal to the same people, especially when they are considered as mystiques. But pushing for a mind-based society is pushing for a greater breach of living according to nature, widening the gulf between modern society and the ancient human of human life. There is a contradiction in pushing for our life to be both more and less according to nature.
85. There is an indirect concern for asceticism in companies and bosses that disapprove of clock watching. The concern is not an aversion to technology, or that periodically glancing at one's watch takes away all that much time from real work. The practical concern is of a spiritual state that hinders work: the employee's attention and interest are divided, and a bad spiritual state overflows into bad work.
86. In terms of asceticism, the scattered state that cannot enjoy the present is the opposite of a spiritual condition called *nepsis* or, loosely, "watchfulness."
87. The problem that manifests itself in needing to keep getting drunk, with New Age and its hopes for, at the moment, 2012 delivering us from a miserable here and now, or needing a more and more exotic drugged-up sexual thrill, or fleeing to SecondWife, is essentially a lack of *nepsis*.
88. To be delivered by such misery is not a matter of a more radical escape. In a room filled with eye-stinging smoke, what is needed is not a more heroic way to push away the smoke, but a way of quenching the fire. Once the fire is quenched, the smoke dissipates, and with it the problem of escaping the smoke.
89. *Nepsis* is a watchfulness over one's heart, including the mind.

90. Nepsis is both like and unlike metacognition. It observes oneself, but it is not thinking about one's thinking, or taking analysis to the next level: analysis of normal analysis. It is more like coming to one's senses, getting back on course, and then trying to stay on course. It starts with a mindfulness of how one has not been mindful, which then flows to other areas of life.
91. The man who steps back and observes that he is seeking ways to escape the here and now, has an edge. The same goes with worrying or other passions by which the soul is disturbed: for many of the things that trouble our soul, seduce us to answer the wrong question. This is almost invariably more pedestrian than brilliant metacognition, and does not look comfortable.
92. Metanoia, or repentance, is both unconditional surrender and waking up and smelling the coffee. It is among the most terrifying of experiences, but afterwards, one realizes, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!"
93. Once one is past that uncomfortable recognition, one is free to grasp something better.
94. That "something better" is ultimately Christ, and there is a big difference between a mind filled with Christ and a mind filled with material things as one is trying to flee malaise.
95. The attempt to escape a miserable here and now is doomed. We cannot escape into Eden. But we can find the joy of Eden, and the joy of Heaven, precisely in the here and now we are seduced to seek to escape.
96. Living the divine life in Christ, is a spiritual well out of which many treasures pour forth: harmony with nature, the joy of Eden and all the other things that we are given if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His perfect righteousness.
97. It was a real achievement when people pushing the envelope of technology and, with national effort and billions of dollars of

resources, NASA succeeded in lifting a man to the moon.

98. But, as a monk pointed out, the Orthodox Church has known for aeons how to use no resources beyond a little bread and water, and succeed in lifting a man up to God.
99. And we miss the greatest treasures if we think that asceticism or its fruits are only for monks.
00. And there is something that lies beyond even asceticism: contemplation of [the glory of God](#).

Creation and Holy Orthodoxy: Fundamentalism Is Not Enough

Against (crypto-Protestant) "Orthodox" fundamentalism

If you read Genesis 1 and believe from Genesis 1 that the world was created in six days, I applaud you. That is a profound thing to believe in simplicity of faith.

However, if you wish to persuade me that Orthodox Christians should best believe in a young earth creation in six days, I am wary. *Every single time* an Orthodox Christian has tried to convince me that I should believe in a six day creation, I have been given recycled Protestant arguments, and for the moment the entire conversation has seemed like I was talking with a Protestant fundamentalist dressed up in Orthodox clothing. And if the other person claims to understand scientific data better than scientists who believe an old earth, and show that the scientific data instead support a *young* earth, this is a major red flag.

Now at least some Orthodox heirarchs have refused to decide for the faithful under their care what the faithful may believe: the faithful may be expected to believe God's hand was at work, but between young earth creationism, old earth creationism, and "God created life through evolution", or any other options, the heirarchs do not intervene. I am an old earth creationist; I came to my present beliefs on "How did different

life forms appear?" before becoming Orthodox, and I have called them into a question a few times but not yet found reason to revise them, either into young earth creation or theistic evolution. I would characterize my beliefs, after being reconsidered, as "not changed", *and not* "decisively confirmed": what I would suggest has improved in my beliefs is that I have become less interested in some Western fascinations, such as getting right the details of how the world was created, moving instead to what might be called "mystical theology" or "practical theology", and walking the Orthodox Way.

There is something that concerns me about Orthodox arguing young earth creationism like a Protestant fundamentalist. Is it that I think they are wrong about how the world came to be? *That is not the point*. If they are wrong about that, they are wrong in the company of excellent saints. If they merely hold another position in a dispute, that is one thing, but bringing Protestant fundamentalism into the Orthodox Church reaches beyond one position in a dispute. Perhaps I shouldn't be talking because I reached my present position before entering the Orthodox Church; or rather I haven't exactly *reversed* my position but de-emphasized it and woken up to the fact that there are bigger things out there. But I am concerned when I'm talking with an Orthodox Christian, and *every single time* someone tries to convince me of a young earth creationism, all of the sudden it seems like I'm not dealing with an Orthodox Christian any more, but with a Protestant fundamentalist who always includes arguments that came from Protestant fundamentalism. And what concerns me is an issue of *practical* theology. Believing in a six day creation is one thing. Believing in a six day creation like a Protestant fundamentalist is another matter *entirely*.

A telling, telling line in the sand

In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is *the* central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls" (if I may borrow phrasing from Protestant fundamentalist cultural baggage).

But, you may say, Genesis 1 and some important Fathers said six days, literally. True enough, but may ask a counterquestion?

Are we obligated to believe that our bodies are composed of earth, air, fire and water, and not of molecules and atoms including carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen?

If that question seems to come out of the blue, let me quote St. Basil, *On the Six Days of Creation*, on a precursor to today's understanding of the chemistry of what everyday objects are made of:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and bonds, form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

At this point, belief in his day's closest equivalent to our atoms and molecules is called an absolutely unacceptable "spider's web" that is due to "inherent atheism." Would you call Orthodox Christians who believe in chemistry's molecules and atoms inherent atheists? St. Basil does provide an alternative:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil rejected atoms and molecules, and believed in elements, not of carbon or hydrogen, but of earth, air, fire, and water. The basic belief is one Orthodoxy understands, and there are sporadic references in liturgical services to the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and so far as I know no references to modern chemistry. St. Basil seems clearly enough to endorse a six day creation, and likewise endorses an ancient view of elements while rejecting belief in atoms and molecules as implicit atheism.

Why then do Orthodox who were once Protestant fundamentalists dig their heels in at a literal six day creation and make no expectation that we dismiss chemistry to believe the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and possibly aether? The answer, so far as I can tell, has *nothing whatsoever* to do with Orthodoxy or any Orthodox Christians. It has to do with a line in the sand chosen by Protestants, the same line in the sand described in [Why Young Earthers Aren't Completely Crazy](#), a line in the sand that is understandable and was an attempt to address quite serious concerns, but still should not be imported from Protestant fundamentalism into Holy Orthodoxy.

Leaving Western things behind

If you believe in a literal six day creation, it is not my specific wish to convince you to drop that belief. But I would have you drop fundamentalist Protestant "creation science" and its efforts to prove a young earth scientifically and show that it can interpret scientific findings better than the mainstream scientific community. And I would have you leave Western preoccupations behind. Perhaps you might believe St. Basil was right about six literal days. For that matter, you could believe he was right about rejecting atoms and molecules in favor of earth, air, fire, and water—or at least recognize that St. Basil makes *other* claims *besides* six literal days. But you might realize that really there are much more important things in the faith. Like how faith plays out in practice.

The fundamentalist idea of conversion is like flipping a light switch: one moment, a room is dark, then in an instant it is full of light. The Orthodox understanding is of *transformation*: discovering Orthodoxy is the work of a lifetime, and perhaps once a year there is a "falling off a cliff" experience where you realize you've missed something big about Orthodoxy, and you need to grow in that newly discovered dimension. Orthodoxy is not just the ideas and enthusiasm we have when we first come into the Church; there are big things we could never dream of and big things we could never consider we needed to repent of. And I would rather pointedly suggest that if a new convert's understanding of Orthodoxy is imperfect, much less of Orthodoxy can be understood from reading Protestant attacks on it. One of the basic lessons in Orthodoxy is that you understand Orthodoxy by walking the Orthodox Way, by attending the services and living a transformed life, and not by reading books. And if this goes for books written by Orthodox saints, it goes all the more for Protestant fundamentalist books attacking Orthodoxy.

Science won't save your soul, but science (like Orthodoxy) is something you understand by years of difficult work. Someone who has done that kind of work might be able to argue effectively that evolution does not account for the fossil record, let alone how the first organism could come to exist: but here I would recall *The Abolition of Man*: "It is

Paul, the Pharisee, the man 'perfect as touching the Law' who learns where and how that Law was deficient." Someone who has taken years of effort may rightly criticize evolution for its scientific merits. Someone who has just read fundamentalist Protestant attacks on evolution and tries to evangelize evolutionists and correct their scientific errors *will be just as annoying to an atheist who believes in evolution*, as a fundamentalist who comes to evangelize the unsaved Orthodox and "knows all about Orthodoxy" from polemical works written by other fundamentalists. I would rather pointedly suggest that if you care about secular evolutionists at all, pray for them, but don't set out to untangle their backwards understanding of the science of it all. If you introduce yourself as someone who will straighten out their backwards ideas about science, all you may really end up accomplishing is to push them away.

Conversion is a slow process. And letting go of Protestant approaches to creation may be one of those moments of "falling off a cliff."

Note to Orthodox Evolutionists

Stop Trying to Retroactively ShanghaiRecruit the Fathers to Your Camp!

At least some bishops explicitly allow their faithful flock to believe theistic evolution, young earth creation, or any of several other options.

This article is not meant to say you can't be Orthodox and believe in evolution. It is, however, meant to say that you can't be Orthodox and misrepresent Church Fathers as saying things more convenient to evolution than what they really said.

Two examples of a telling symptom: Fishy, suspicious arguments

Alexander Kalamiros is perhaps a forerunner to Orthodox finding a profound harmony between the Church Fathers and evolution. To pick one of many examples, Kalamiros's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) cites St. Basil the Great as saying, "Therefore, if you say a day or an age, you express the same meaning" (homily 2 of St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation*). So Dr. Kalamiros cites St. Basil as clearly saying that "day" is a term with a rather elastic meaning, implying an indefinite length.

Something really piqued my curiosity, because a young earth Creationist cited the same saint, the same book, and even the same homily as Kalamiros, but as supporting the opposite conclusion: "one day" means "one day," period.

I honestly wondered, "Why on earth?" Why would the same text be cited as a proof-text for "days" of quite open-ended length, but also a proof text for precise twenty-four hour days? So I read [the homily of St. Basil that was in question](#). The result?

The young earther's claim is easier to explain: St. Basil does, in fact, quite plainly claim a young earth, and treats this belief as non-negotiable. And what Kalamiros cites? The text is talking about something else when St. Basil moves from discussing the Creation to matters of eternity and the Last Judgment. One of the names for eternity is "the eighth day," and in explaining the timelessness of eternity, St. Basil writes, "Thus whether you call it day, or whether you call it eternity, you express the same idea." Which is not exactly how Kalamiros quotes him, not *exactly*.

Kalamiros offers a quote out of context, and translates in a subtle but misleading wording, leading the reader to believe St. Basil clarified that a "day" [of Creation] can just as well be an "age" [of time]. This is sophistry. This is disingenuous. What is more, I cannot ever remember following one of Kalamiros's footnotes supporting evolution and find an appropriate and responsible use of the original text. When I check things out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone

out, little if any of it checks out. And that's a concern. When someone argues like that, the reader is being treated dishonestly, and deceptive argument is rarely the herald of truth.

Let me quote another of many examples celebrating a harmony between patristic Orthodoxy and evolution, Vladimir de Beer's [Genesis, Creation and Evolution](#). He writes:

The account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is known as the *Hexaemeron* (Greek for 'six days'), on which a number of Greek and Latin Church fathers wrote commentaries. Some of them interpreted the six days of creation quite literally, like St Basil the Great who was much influenced by Aristotle's natural philosophy. Yet the same Cappadocian father insisted that the scriptural account of creation is not about science, and that there is no need to discuss the essence (ousias) of creation in its scientific sense.[1] Others followed a more allegorical approach, such as St Gregory of Nyssa who saw the *Hexaemeron* as a philosophy of the soul, with the perfected creature as the final goal of evolution.

It has been my experience that for a certain kind of author one of the cheapest ways to dismiss a Father is to say that they were heavily influenced by some kind of non-Orthodox philosophy. Usually they don't even give a footnote. *St. Basil the Great is a Church Father and one of the Three Hierarchy*s, and if you are going to downplay whether his position is one we should believe, you should be doing a lot more than due diligence than making a dismissive bare assertion that he was heavily influenced by non-Orthodox forces.

But at least de Beer is kind enough to allow St. Basil to believe in six literal days. I am rather mystified by his treatment of St. Gregory of Nyssa, [whose commentary *On the Six Days of Creation* is here](#). Are we referring to the same work?

St. Gregory's commentary is not a allegorical interpretation, such as St. Maximus the Confessor's way of finding allegory about asceticism and ascetical struggles in the details of the Gospel. It is if anything 90% a science lesson, or an Aristotelian science lesson at any rate, and at face

value St. Gregory owes much more of a debt to Aristotle than St. Basil does. (At *least* St. Gregory spends vastly more time talking about earth, air, fire, and water.) St. Gregory's [On the Six Days of Creation](#) assumes and asserts that the days of Creation were, in fact, literal days. And that's not the end. St. Gregory of Nyssa explicitly ascribes the highest authority and weight to St. Basil's work and would almost certainly be astonished to find his work treated as a *corrective* to St. Basil's problematically literal *On the Six Days of Creation*; St. Gregory's attitude appears to be, "St. Basil made an excellent foundation and I want to build on it!" On all counts I can tell, St. Gregory does **not** provide a precedent for treating young earth creation as negotiable. De Beers may well have a friend among the Fathers, but St. Gregory is not that friend. And if this is his choice of friends, maybe he isn't aware of many real, honest friends among the Fathers. St. Augustine may be his friend here, but if the Blessed Augustine is your only friend among the Fathers, you're on pretty shaky ground.

Examples could easily be multiplied, but after a point it becomes somewhat tedious checking out more harmonizers' footnotes and finding that, no indeed, they don't check out.

Why it matters

Have you read much [creation science seeking to use science to prove a young earth?](#) The reason I'm asking is that *that's what scholars do when they use patristic resources to prove that Orthodoxy and evolution are in harmony*. The kind of distortion of facts that they wouldn't be caught dead in origins science is the kind of distortion of facts that is routine in those harmonizing Orthodoxy with evolution.

I wrote [a thesis calling to task a Biblical Egalitarian treatment of the Haustafel in Ephesians](#), and it is part of my research and experience to believe that sophistry matters, *because sophistry is how people seek to persuade when truth is against them*. And when I see misrepresentation of sources, that betrays a problem.

I myself do not believe in a young earth; I am an old earth creationist and have seriously entertained returning to belief in theistic evolution. I stand pretty much as far outside the patristic consensus as Orthodox evolutionists. **But I don't distort the Fathers to shanghai recruit them to my position.**

It may well be that with knowledge that wasn't available to St. Gregory and his fellow Fathers, the intellectual dishonesty and distortion needed to believe in a young earth may be greater than saying, "I know the Fathers' consensus and I remain outside of it." That's not ideal, but it is infinitely better than distorting the Fathers' consensus to agree with you.

It is better by far to acknowledge that you are outside the Fathers' consensus than make them agree with you. **If you are an Orthodox evolutionist, please stop shanghaiing recruiting ancient Fathers to your camp.**

A helpful analogy: What are the elements?

Some Protestants made young-earth creationism almost "the article by which the Church stands or falls," and much of young-earth and old-earth creationism in Orthodoxy, *and evolution*, is shaped by that Protestant "article by which the Church stands or falls."

Today's young-earth creationism and theistic evolution are merely positions on a ballot in single-issue voting, and single-issue voting that was unknown to the Fathers. [There are other issues.](#)

(What other issues are there, you ask?)

Let me give my standard question in dealing with young-earth Orthodox who are being pests and perhaps insinuating that my Orthodoxy is impaired if I don't believe their position: "Are we obligated to believe that the elements are earth, air, fire, water, and maybe aether?"

If that question seems to come from out of the blue, let me explain:

St. Basil's *On the Six Days of Creation* takes a position we can relate to readily enough even if we disagree:

"And the evening and the morning were the first day." Evening is then the boundary common to day and night; and in the same way morning constitutes the approach of night to day... Why does Scripture say "one day the first day"? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day—we mean of a day and of a night; and if, at the time of the solstices, they have not both an equal length, the time marked by Scripture does not the less circumscribe their duration. It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting

from one point take to return there.

That's on our radar. What's not on our radar is how bluntly St. Basil treats his day's closest equivalent to modern chemistry, and please note that alchemy has nothing to do with this; he does not condemn [alchemy](#) as being occult, but *chemistry* as atheistic:

Others imagined that atoms, and indivisible bodies, molecules and [bonds], form, by their union, the nature of the visible world. Atoms reuniting or separating, produce births and deaths and the most durable bodies only owe their consistency to the strength of their mutual adhesion: a true spider's web woven by these writers who give to heaven, to earth, and to sea so weak an origin and so little consistency! It is because they knew not how to say "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Deceived by their inherent atheism it appeared to them that nothing governed or ruled the universe, and that was all was given up to chance.

The emphatic alternative he offers is a belief in the four or five elements, earth, air, fire, water, and possibly the aether. This is something he finds in Genesis:

"And the Spirit of God was borne upon the face of the waters." Does this spirit mean the diffusion of air? The sacred writer wishes to enumerate to you the elements of the world, to tell you that God created the heavens, the earth, water, and air and that the last was now diffused and in motion; or rather, that which is truer and confirmed by the authority of the ancients, by the Spirit of God, he means the Holy Spirit.

St. Basil takes the text to mean more than just that water exists; he takes it to mean that water is an element. Nor is St. Basil the only one to make such claims; as mentioned earlier, [St. Gregory's On the Six Days of Creation](#) is not in the business of condemning opposing views, but it not only assumes literal days for Creation, but the "science" of earth, air, fire, and water is writ large, and someone wishing to understand how ancients could see science and cosmology on those terms has an invaluable resource in [St. Basil's On the Six Days of Creation](#). Furthermore, the view

of the four elements is ensconced in Orthodox liturgy: the Vespers for Theophany, which is arguably the central text for Orthodox understanding of Creation, enumerates earth, air, fire, and water as the four elements. To my knowledge, no Orthodox liturgy ensconces the implicit atheism of modern chemistry.

What are we to make of this? Does this mean that modern chemistry is off-limits to Orthodox, and that Orthodox doctors should only prescribe such drugs as the ancient theory would justify? God forbid! I bring this point up to say that the obvious answer is, "Ok, there is a patristic consensus and I stand outside of it," *and that this answer can be given without shanghaiing recruiting the Fathers to endorse modern chemistry.* When science and astronomy were formed, someone was reported to say, "The Bible is a book about how to go to Heaven, not a book about how the Heavens go," and while it may be appropriate to say "On pain of worse intellectual dishonesty, I must accept an old earth and chemistry as worth my provisional assent," it is not appropriate to distort the Church Fathers into giving a rubber stamp to beliefs they would reject.

[Drawing a line in the sand at a young earth is a Protestant invention that has nothing to do with Orthodoxy](#), but casting the opposite vote of theistic evolution in a single-issue vote is *also* short of the Orthodox tradition. In reading the Fathers, one encounters claims of a young earth. However, often (if not always) the claim is one among many disputes with Greek philosophers or what have you. To my knowledge there is no patristic text in which a young earth is **the** central claim, let alone even approach being "the article by which the Church stands or falls." Single-issue voting here, *even for evolution*, is not an Orthodox phenomenon except as it has washed in from Protestant battle lines. If an Orthodox who questions the Orthodoxy of old-earthers is being (crypto-)Protestant, the Orthodox who cites the Fathers in favor of evolution is only slightly less so—and both distort the truth.

The young-earth Creation Science makes scientific evidence bow before its will. The Orthodox evolutionist makes the Church Fathers bow before his will. Which is the more serious offense? ["Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.](#)

"When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me."

One Protestant friend said that I had a real knack for insulting analogies. The comment came after I said of mainstream Evangelical "Christian art" that it worked on the same communication principle as hard porn: "Make every point with a sledgehammer and leave nothing to the imagination but the plot." And I have used that ability here: I have said that Orthodox evolutionists writing of harmony between evolution and the Church Fathers are treating patristic texts the same way creation scientists treat scientific evidence. *Ouch*. The Orthodox-evolutionary harmonizers are playing the same single-issue politics game as their young-earth counterparts, and are only different by casting the opposite vote. **Ouch**.

Is there a method to this madness?

I cannot forbid origins questions altogether, for reasons not least of which I am not tonsured even as a reader, let alone being your heirarch or priest. At least some heirarchs have refused to decide for their flock what they may believe: perhaps people are expected to find God's hand at work in creation, but the exact mechanism of involvement, and time frame, are not decided. But I could wish something like the theology surrounding the holy mysteries, where in contrast to the detailed, point by point Roman account, the Orthodox Church simply says that at one point in the Divine Liturgy the gifts are only (blessed) bread and wine, and at a certain later point they have become the body and blood of Christ, and beyond that point speculation is not allowed.

There are some questions where having the right answer is less valuable than not asking the question at all. Origins questions in the scientific sense do not loom large in the Fathers, and what little there is appears not to match scientific data. But this is not a defect in the Fathers. It is, if anything, a cue that our society's preoccupation with science is not particularly Orthodox in spirit, and perhaps something that doesn't belong in Orthodoxy. Again, [Religion and Science Is Not Just](#)

[Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.](#)

But for the interim, for people who need an answer and are good enough scientists to see through Creation Science, please do not ~~shanghai~~ recruit the Church Fathers to rubber stamp the present state of scientific speculation. For starters, science is less important than you may think. *But that's just for starters.*

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

It's exotic, right?

The website for the Ubuntu Linux distribution announced that Ubuntu is "an ancient African word" meaning humanity to others. It announced how it carried forward the torch of a Linux distribution that's designed for regular people to use. And this promotion of "an ancient African word" has bothered a few people: [one South African blogger](#) tried to explain several things: for instance, he mentioned that "ubuntu" had been a quite ordinary Xhosa/Zulu word meaning "humanity," mentioned that it had been made into a political rallying cry in the 20th century, and drew an analogy: saying, "'Ubuntu' is an ancient African word meaning 'humanity'" is as silly as saying, in reverential tones, "'People' is an ancient European word meaning, 'more than one person.'" There is an alternative definition provided in the forums of Gentoo, a technical aficionado's Linux distribution: "Ubuntu. An African word meaning, 'Gentoo is too hard for me.'"

The blogger raised questions of gaffe in the name of the distribution; he did not raise questions about the Linux distribution itself, nor would I. Ubuntu is an excellent Linux distribution for nontechnical users, it gets some things very much right, and I prefer it to most other forms of Linux

I've seen—including Gentoo. I wouldn't bash the distribution, nor would I think of bashing what people mean by making "ubuntu" a rallying-cry in pursuing, in their words, "Linux for human beings."

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

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

One American friend of mine, when in Kenya, gave a saying that was not from any of the people groups she was interacting with, but was from a relatively close neighboring people group: "When you are carrying a child in your womb, he only belongs to you. When he is born, he belongs to everyone." The proverb speaks out of an assumption that not only parents but parents' friends, neighbors, elders, shopkeepers, and ultimately all adults, stand *in parentis loco*. All adults are ultimately responsible for all children and are responsible for exercising a personal and parental care to help children grow into mature adulthood. As best I understand, this is probably what a particular community in Africa might mean in saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

What is a little strange is that, if these words correspond to anything in the U.S., they are conservative, and speak to a conservative desire to believe that not only parents but neighbors, churches, civic and local organizations, businesses and the like, all owe something to the moral upbringing of children: that is to say, there are a great many forces outside the government that owe something to local children. And this is

quite the opposite of saying that we need more government programs because it takes a full complement of government initiatives and programs to raise a child well—because, presumably, more and more bureaucratic initiatives are what the (presumably generic) African sages had in mind when they gave the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom and said, "It takes a village to raise a child." There is some degree of irony in making "It takes a village" a rallying-cry in pushing society *further away* from what, "It takes a village to raise a child," *could* have originally meant—looking for advice on how to build a statist Western-style cohort of bureaucratic government programs would be as inconceivable in many traditional African cultures as looking for instructions on how to build a computer in the New Testament.

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

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

The Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is occult, and we cannot give the same authority to any source that is here

and now. If we listen to the wise voices of elders, it is only elders from faroff lands who can give such deeply relevant words: I have never heard such a revered Nugget of Wisdom come from the older generation of our own people, or any of the elders we meet day to day.

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

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

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

One can almost imagine a dialogue between God and Adam:

Adam: I'm not content.

God: What do you want me to do?

Adam: I want you to make me contented.

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

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

God: Ok.

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

God: Ok.

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

God: Ok, as much meat as you want.

Adam: And sweet stuff like ice cream.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have all these things made us content?

Or have we used them to feed a passion?

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

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

Why, in my life, is _____ so difficult to me about _____? (I don't know; why has she forgiven every single one of the astonishingly stupid things I've done over the years?) Why can't I lose a couple of

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

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

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

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

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

coming to joy.

U I U I U I U I U I

What we don't want to hear

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

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

Lust benefits no one, and it is not just the married who benefit from beating back roving desire, but the unmarried as well. But when Scripture and the Fathers speak of unnatural vice, they know something we've chosen to forget. And part of what we have forgotten is that "unnatural vice" is not just something that the gay rights movement advocates for. "Unnatural vice" includes several sins with higher pay grades, and one of them is witchcraft.

To people who have heard all the debates about whether, for instance, same-sex relationships might be unnatural for straight people but natural for gays, it may be a bit of culture shock to hear anything *besides* gay sex called "unnatural vice." But the term is there in the

Fathers, and it can mean other things. [It might include contraception.](#) And it definitely includes what we think of as a way to return to nature in witchcraft.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Renaissance was an attempt to recover the glory of classical antiquity, but the effect was not only to more or less end what there was in the Middle Ages, but help the West move away from some things that were common to the Middle Ages and antiquity alike. The Reformation might have accomplished many good things, but it did not succeed in its goal in resurrecting the ancient Church; it created a new way of being Christian. The Protestants I know are moral giants compared to much of what was going on in Rome in Luther's day, and they know Scripture far better, but Protestant Christianity is a decisive break from something that began in the Early Church and remained unbroken even in corrupt 16th century Rome. And it is not an accident that the Reformers dropped the traditional clerical clothing and wore instead the scholar's robes. (Understanding the Scripture was much less approached through reading the saints, much more by antiquarian scholarship.) The Enlightenment tried again to recover classical glory, and it was simultaneously a time, not of breaking with unbroken ways of being Christian, but of breaking with being Christian itself. Romanticism could add the Middle Ages to the list of past glorious ages, and it may well be that without the Romantics, we would not have great medievalists like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien.

But it was also something new. Every single time that I'm aware of that the West has tried to recover the glory of a bygone age, the effect has been a deeper rift with the past, both recent and ultimately ancient, leaving people much further alienated from the past than if they had continued without the reconstruction. I remember being astonished, not just to learn that two Vatican II watchwords were *ressourcement* (going back to ancient sources to restore past glory) and *aggiornamento* (bringing things up-to-date, which in practice meant bringing Rome in line with 1960's fads), nor that the two seemed to be two sides of the same coin, but that this was celebrated without anybody seeming to find something of a disturbing clue in this. The celebrations of these two watchwords seemed like a celebration of going to a hospital to have a doctor heal an old wound and inflict a new wound that is more fashionable.

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

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

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

1. However exotic the setting may seem to you, remember that it is a fundamental confusion to imagine that the setting was exotic *to those inside the experience*. We not only meet new people frequently; we see new technologies invented frequently. In The Historic Setting, people most likely were born, lived, and died within twenty miles, and even meeting another person who was not part of your village was rare. A new invention, or a new idea, would be difficult to imagine, let alone point to. So, for one day, whatever you're doing, if it feels exotic, avoid it like the plague. Stop it immediately. Don't read anything new; turn off your iPod; don't touch Wikipedia. Don't seek excitement; if anything, persevere in things you find boring.
2. Remembering that there was a lot of heavy manual labor, and stuff that was shared, spend your nice Saturday helping a friend move her stuff into her new apartment. Remember that while stairs were rare in antiquity, it would be an anachronism to take the elevator. Be a good manual laborer and do without the anachronism.
3. Remembering how the Sermon on the Mount betrays an assumption that most people were poor enough that houses would only have one room, spend your time at home, as much as possible, in one room of your house.
4. Remembering that the ancient world had no sense of "Jim's trying to lose weight and is on an old-fashioned low-fat diet, Mary's a vegan, Al's low carb...", but rather there was one diet that everybody day ate, go to McDonald's, order a meal with McDonald's McFries

McSoaked in McGrease, and a sugary-sweet, corn-syrup-powered shake.

If you just said to yourself, "He didn't say what size; I'll order the smallest I can," order the biggest meal you can.

5. Remembering that in the ancient world the company you kept were not your eclectic pick, spend time with the people around you. Go to your neighbor Ralph who blares bad '80s rock because he thinks it's the best thing in the world, and like a good guest don't criticize what your host has provided—including his music. Spend some time playing board games with your annoying kid sister, and then go over to visit your uncle Wally and pretend to tolerate his sexist jokes.
6. Lastly, when you head home do have a good night's sleep, remember that a bed with sheets covering a smooth mattress was only slightly more common than a Frank Lloyd Wright home is today, go to sleep on a straw pallet in your virtual one room house. (You can use organic straw if you can find any.)

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

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

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

The vignette of harmony with nature as dancing on hilltops is an image of a scene where harmony with nature means fulfilling what we desire for ourselves. The image of hauling boxes to help a friend is a scene

where harmony with nature means *transcending* mere selfish desire. There is a common thread of faithfulness to unadvertised historical realities running through the six steps listed above. But there is another common thread:

Humility.

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

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

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

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

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

Should I really be patting myself on the back?

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

Saints may have followed something of a special diet, but that is because they believed and acted out of the conviction that they were unworthy of the good things of the world, including the common fare what most people ate. My diet, like other diets in fashion, is a diet that tells me that the common fare eaten by most people is simply unworthy of *me*. This may well enough be true—I have doubts about how much of today's industrially produced diet is fit for human consumption at all—and I may well enough answer, "But *of course* the Quarter Pounder with 'Cheese' eaten by an inner-city teen is unworthy of me—it's just as unworthy, if not more unworthy, of the inner-city teens who simply accept it as normal to eat." Even so, I have put myself in a difficult position. The saints thought they were unworthy of common fare. I believe that common fare is unworthy of me, and trying to believe that without deadly pride is trying to smoke, but not inhale.

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

The glory of the Eucharist unfurls in a common meal around a table, and this "common" meal is common because it is shared. To pull back from "common" food is to lose something very Eucharistic about the meal and following one more discriminating diet like mine is a way to

meal, and following the more discriminating diet like mine is a way to
heals one breach of harmony with nature by opening up what may be a
deeper rift.

If evil is necessary, does it stop being evil?

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

Another basis to try and learn from the past

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

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

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

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

The hymn quoted earlier, "Adam, trying to be a god, failed to be god," continues, "Christ became man that he might make Adam god." The saying has rumbled down through the ages. "God (the Son of God)

became a Man (the Son of Man) that men (the sons of men) might become gods (the Sons of God)." The bad news, if it is bad news, is that we cannot escape a present into the beauty of Eden. The good news is that the present can itself be lifted up, that the doors to Eden remain open.

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

Men are not from Mars!

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

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

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

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

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

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

see."

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

I'm used to seeing people wish they could escape the here and now, but the Mars Society took this to a whole new level—so much so that I was thinking, "This is not a job for science and engineering; this is a job for counseling!" People were alienated from the here and now they had on earth, and the oomph of the drive to go to Mars seemed to be because of something else entirely from the (admittedly very interesting) scientific and engineering issues. Having the human race not even try to live on Mars was so completely unacceptable to them because of their woundedness.

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

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

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

I do.

A more satisfying kind of drink

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

My friend said that what I said was accurate: certain more alcoholic drinks were traditional, and the principles of [Nourishing Traditions](#) did not support all the ways the author was grinding an axe against yeast-fermented alcohol, just as I thought. However, my friend suggested, the author was right about this. Lacto-fermented beverages, fermented by another ancient process that gives us cheese, sourdough, sauerkraut, corned beef, and the like, which [Nourishing Traditions](#) did promote, satisfy in a way that yeast-fermented beverages do not. People, it seems, use beer, wine, and liquor because they remind them of the satisfaction of the more ancient method of fermentation.

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

The idiot

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

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

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

Some adamantine-hard metal files that may hone us

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

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

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

St. Peter of Damaskos wrote, in [The Philokalia vol. 3](#),

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

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

salvation of soul.

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

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

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

more power than that.

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

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

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

Dorothy Sayers, speaking of World War II in "The Other Six Deadly Sins" (found in [Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World](#) and other essay collections), discussed what life was like when the economy was enormously productive but as much productivity as possible was being wasted by the war effort. What she pointed out was that when people got

used to rationing and scarcity, they found that this didn't really mean that they couldn't enjoy life—far from it. People could enjoy life when most of their economy's productivity was being wasted by war instead of wasted by buying things that people didn't need. She argued that England didn't have a choice about learning to live frugally—but England could choose to apply this lesson once the war got out. England didn't, and neither did the U.S., but the lesson is still good.

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

An unlikely cue from science fiction?

Mary Midgley, in [Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning](#), says of science fiction and science fiction writers,

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

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

In [The Sign of the Grail](#), Fr. Elijah brings George, a Christian, into the communion of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox speak of this as a conversion, but this means something beyond merely straightening out George's worldview. Fr. Elijah may share wisdom with George, but he is interested in something fundamentally beyond getting George to accept a worldview. He is trying, in all of his various ways, to get George to *wake*

up. It is the same as the blessed spirits in [The Great Divorce](#) who are in Heaven and keep saying to visitors from Hell, "*Wake up! Wake up!*" They do often discuss ideas with their visitors, but their goal is never merely to straighten out a tormented worldview; it is to open their visitors' spiritual eyes so they will wake up to the reality of Heaven.

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

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

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And*, he was like a little boy with a whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."

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

Repentance is recognizing that you are in a little Hell and choosing to leave by the one way you do not wish to leave. Elsewhere from the quotation from St. Peter, [the Philokalia](#) says, "People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them." The woman addicted to alcohol may

be in misery, but she has alcohol to seemingly anaesthetize the pain, and it is incredibly painful to give up the illusion that if you try hard enough and get just a bit of a solace, things will be OK. That's a mighty hard thing to repent of: it's easier to rationalize, decide to give it up by sheer willpower (perhaps tomorrow), or make a bargain to cut back to a more reasonable level—anything but wake up and stop trying to ignore that you're standing barefoot in something really gross, and admit that what you need is not a bigger fan to drive away the stench while you stay where you are, but to step out in a cleaning operation that lasts a lifetime and cuts to your soul.

An alcoholic walking this path craves just a little bit of solace, just for now, and it is only much later that two things happen. First, the cravings are still hard, but they are no longer *quite* so overpowering. Second, she had forgotten what it felt like to be clean—really and truly *clean*—and she had forgotten what it was like to be doing something else with her life than trying to hide in a bottle. She had forgotten what freedom was like. And long after she gave up on her way of escaping life, she found she had forgotten what it was like to experience life, not as something to escape, but as something with joy even in its pain.

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

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

Once, when things went from hard times to easy times, one saint complained, saying that easy times rob the Church of her martyrs and her glory. If we are entering hard times, that does not place us outside of God's reach nor Christ's promise in [the Sermon on the Mount](#): "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

*I glorify Thee,
Who hast cast Adam out of Paradise,
That we might learn by the sweat of our brow
The joy and the life that Adam scorned
As King of Paradise.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.
Glory forever.
And glory be to Thee,
Thou who blessest us
For better or for worse,
In sickness and in health,
In the Eternal Light and Love
Who illuminest marriage.
Glory forever.
Glory be to thee whose blessings are here,*

*Not in an escape,
But in the place wherein Thou hast placed us.
Glory forever.
Glory be to Thee,
Who offerest Eden,
To us men who forever dodge our salvation.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both here and now, and in Eternal Life that beckons us
The Son of God became a man in his here and now in Bethlehem.
In your forever honored place,
From this very moment,
Become a Son of God.
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near,
Heaven awaits with open arms,
Step out of Hell.
Grieve for your sins,
That grief that holds more in her heart,
Than discovering that the scintillating escape from Hell
Scintillates only as a mirage.
And the repentance you fear,
So constricted it seems from outside,
Holds inside a treasure larger than the universe,
Older than time,
And more alive than life.
Glory beyond glory,
Life beyond life,
Light beyond life,
The Bread from Heaven,
The infinite Living Wine,
Who alone canst slake our infinite thirst,
Glory forever.*

*Glory be to God on high.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,*

Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages,

Amen:

Glory forever.

Alleluia!

God the Game Changer

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

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

It is no longer a provocative statement that Apple's introduction of the iPhone may be a more profound game changer than the Macintosh. It may turn out, in the end, that Apple's gift to mobile computing may be the Droid and Google-based smartphones—Verizon's "Before you choose a phone, choose a map", and, "iDon't"/"Droid does" marketing campaigns certainly reflect a realization on Verizon's part that shoosing Apple away when Apple wanted Verizon to be the iPhone's exclusive carrier was perhaps not Verizon's best decision. But the iPhone changed

the game profoundly enough that it was the gold standard everyone was trying to beat, and at least before the Droid, no "iPhone killer" even came close.

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

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

God the Game Changer at work: A story

Every Lent, Orthodox remember a great saint with a great story. There was a very accomplished priest and monk who was troubled by the idea that no one had gotten as far as him in asceticism (spiritual work). And he was sent to a monastery by the Jordan, where as the custom was, every Lent monks would go out into the desert. And after a while, he saw a person, and chased this person; after a time he asked for the other person to stop fleeing; the other person called him by name and asked for his cloak, since her clothes were long since gone. He was terrified.

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

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

She was given some money and purchased three loaves of bread as she left, and then went, and struggled and struggled and struggled in what seemed like endless temptations and struggles. She had given free reign to her vices for seventeen years, and for seventeen years in the desert she wanted men, wanted wine and lewd songs, wanted meat, and just kept on struggling. After a time—a long, *long* time—things got easier.

And she had been living for almost half a century in the desert, eating desert plants and at the mercies of the elements. It came up in the conversation that she quoted from the Bible with understanding. The monk asked her if she had read them. She said she had never seen another person since making the journey, had no one to read holy books to her, and like most people then, she didn't know how to read. Then she alluded to Scripture and suggested that Christ the Word may teach by himself.

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

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

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

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I

went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

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

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

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

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

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

The servant's accusation, which the master repeats, is that God is so intent on harvest that he harvests whether or not he has sown. The priest,

monk, and *saint* Zosima is among the greatest of saints, and he lived a life of spiritual work and spiritually sober living before God. His life was full of seeds that God sowed, and probably from childhood. And God harvested Saint Zosima's good works. But Saint Zosima needed something. He needed to be knocked completely flat on his back.

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

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

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

A present-day example of God's game-changing, this time not with sin but with injury, is in the life of Joni Erickson. At a young age, Erickson dove the wrong way into shallow water and broke her neck, instantly paralyzing her in all four limbs. And she assuredly prayed what everybody who has such an accident prays if prayer is even considered: "Lord, heal me." And some people are healed, miraculously. But an entirely different, in a way deeper, miracle occurred with her. She adjusted to her loss and is a woman who has not only discovered that her life is still worth living, but has become a vibrant and well-known ambassador for the claim, "Even after a tragedy like mine, *life is still worth living.*" None of this would have happened if she had not suffered

an injury that cost her the use of all four limbs. For that matter, none of this would have happened if God answered her prayers by giving her the supernatural healing she wanted. Instead, God changed the game. He answered her prayers, not by giving what she asked for, but by moving the game to the next level. God did not plant her injury, but he has harvested where he did not plant and gathered in where he never scattered.

More than a game change

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

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

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

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

But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is alike, but there is one kind for men, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are celestial bodies and there are terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual.

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

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

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

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

By descending into Hell, He made Hell captive.
He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh.
And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry:
Hell, said he, was embittered

When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

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

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

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

To Him be glory and dominion
Unto ages of ages.

Amen.

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

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

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

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

"Yes," said the Lion in a very quiet voice, almost (Jill thought) as

if he were laughing. "He has died. Most people have, you know. Even I have. There are very few who haven't."

Earlier in the Gospel, in Luke chapter 7, there is a scene where a widow's only son is carried out on a bier, and Christ says something truly strange: before doing anything else, he tells her not to weep. He is speaking to a woman who has been twice bereaved, and with her last bereavement went her source of support. And he tells her, "Weep not!" He then goes on to raise her son from the dead. That isn't what is happening in Christ's resurrection.

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

Christ is risen, His joy!

God the Spiritual Father

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

The Nicene Creed

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

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

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

[Proverbs](#)

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

[Footprints](#), paraphrased

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

The Philokalia, paraphrased

For it was fitting that God, for whom and by whom all things

exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make Christ the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Hebrews

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

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

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

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

and see that our lives and our world are under the love of the best of all possible Gods: God the Spiritual Father.

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

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgment and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire virtue.
- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving

alms.

- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

The Philokalia

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

Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

The Philokalia

All These Things Were From Me

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

thousand nights on a rock before an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000.)

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

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

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

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

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

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

you? THIS WAS FROM ME.

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

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

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your

guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

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

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

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes

for us with signs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn? Is it Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[Romans](#)

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

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

I'm not sure how to explain this without saying something about Orthodox monasticism, but the Orthodox concept of a *spiritual father* is

of someone one owes obedience in everything, and who normally assigns some things that are very difficult to do, unpleasant, and painful. And this seems a strange thing to be getting into. But there is method to what may seem mad: we do not reach our greatest good, we do not flourish, we do not reach our highest heights, if we are the spiritual equivalent of spoiled children. And the entire point of this duty of obedience is to arrange things for the good of the person who obeys in this situation. *The entire point of obedience in what the spiritual father arranges is for the spiritual father as a spiritual physician to give health and freedom through the disciple's obedience.*

In that sense, only monks and nuns are expected to have spiritual fathers to shape them. The rest of us have God as our Spiritual Father, and we can kick against the goads, but God the Spiritual Father is at work in every person we meet. *God the Spiritual Father is God the Great Physician, working everything for our health and freedom if we will cooperate.* People and situations he sends us may be part of his will for us as instruments, or they may be part of his will for us as sons of God, but God's will unfolds in each person who acts in our lives: kind people and cruel, having excess and having lack, getting our way and having our will cut short as a spiritual father does to form a monk under his care, becomes part of the work of God the Spiritual Father. Even economic nightmares become part of "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose."

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

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

[The Sermon on the Mount](#) says some harsh words about how we use

money, but these words set the stage for a profound treasure that we can still have, even in an economic depression:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AS OWN WORKS. EACH DAY HAS ENOUGH TROUBLE OF ITS OWN.

The life of St. Philaret the Merciful speaks volumes:

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

Philaret was a rich and illustrious dignitary, but he did not hoard his wealth. Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about "these least ones" (Mt. 25:40); the the Apostle Paul's reminder that we will take nothing with us from this world (1 Tim 6:7); and the assertion of King David that the righteous would not be forsaken (Ps 36/37:25). Philaret, whose name means "lover of virtue," was famed for his love for the poor.

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

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

and told him to take the cow as well.

That year there was a famine, so St Philaret took the donkey and went to borrow six bushels of wheat from a friend of his. When he returned home, a poor man asked him for a little wheat, so he told his wife to give the man a bushel. Theoseba said, "First you must give a bushel to each of us in the family, then you can give away the rest as you choose." Philaretos then gave the man two bushels of wheat. Theoseba said sarcastically, "Give him half the load so you can share it." The saint measured out a third bushel and gave it to the man. Then Theoseba said, "Why don't you give him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

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

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

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

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret

told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

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

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

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

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

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

The appearance of a miracle after his death confirmed the

sainthood of Righteous Philaret. As they bore the body of the saint to the cemetery, a certain man, possessed by the devil, followed the funeral procession and tried to overturn the coffin. When they reached the grave, the devil threw the man down on the ground and went out of him. Many other miracles and healings also took place at the grave of the saint.

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

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

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

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

(Some have said not only that God provides in rough times as well as easy times, but that God's providence is in fact clearer in rough times, such as an economic depression, than when things go our way and we can

forget that we need a bit of help from above.)

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

Heaven is generous, and that generosity was something Heavenly that shone during the Great Depression. People who had very little shared. They shared money or food, if they had any. (And even if you have no money to share, you can share time; if you do not have a job, you can still volunteer.) St. Philaret shared because he knew something: "Knowing that many people suffered from poverty, he remembered the words of the Savior about the dread Last Judgment and about 'these least ones' (Mt. 25:40)..." In this part of the saint's life, the reference is to some of the most chilling words following [The Sermon on the Mount](#) in the Gospel:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with

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

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

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

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

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

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

St. Philaret the Merciful will be greeted before Christ's awesome judgment seat and hear, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I came to you and asked for a little wheat, and you gave me all six bushels you had, and your only donkey with them " God did provide but the reward is not just that a friend gave him

them. God did provide, but the reward is not just that a friend gave him forty bushels of wheat. The ultimate reward is that Christ regards how St. Philaret treated other people as how he treated Christ himself, and because St. Philaret was merciful, there is a reward for him in Heaven, a reward so great that next to it, the forty bushels of wheat from his friend utterly pale in comparison.

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

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

Do you worry? Is it terribly hard
to get all your ducks in a row,
to get yourself to a secure place
where you have prepared for what might happen?
Or does it look like you might lose your job,
if you still have one?
[The Sermon on the Mount](#)
urges people to pray,
"Give us this day our daily bread,"
in an economy
when unlike many homeless in the U.S. today,
it was not obvious to many
where they would get their next meal.
And yet it was this [Sermon on the Mount](#)
that tells us our Heavenly Father will provide for us,
and tells us not to worry:
what we miss
if we find this a bit puzzling,
we who may have bank accounts, insurance, investments
even if they are jeopardized right now,
is that we are like a child with some clay,

trying to satisfy ourselves by making a clay horse,
with clay that never cooperates, never looks right,
and obsessed with clay that is never good enough,
we ignore and maybe fear
the finger tapping us on our shoulder
until with great trepidation we turn,
and listen to the voice say,
"Stop trying so hard. Let it go,"
and follow our father
as he gives us a warhorse.

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

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

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

[Psalms](#)

For the conqueror says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones. My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that

have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped."

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

Isaiah

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

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

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

St. Maximus Confessor

There was one time when two theology professors were talking when

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

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

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

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

"Life's Tapestry"

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

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

And it is true. It is not just, as some have said, that *God's address is at the end of your rope*. That is where you meet God best. It may be easier, not harder, to find God and his providential care in an economic depression. God is working a plan of eternal glory. Westminster opens with the great question, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To

glorify God and enjoy him forever." But there is a deeper answer. *The chief end of man is to become Christ.* The chief end of man is to become by grace what Christ is by nature. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God. The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human that the human might become divine. This saying has rumbled down through the ages: not only the entire point of being human, but the entire point of each and every circumstance God the Spiritual Father allows to come to us, as a blessing or as a temptation allowed for our strengthening, as God's will working through instruments or sons, is to make us share in Christ's divinity, and [the saints' lives](#) show few saints who met this purpose when everything went their way, and a great many where God worked in them precisely in rough and painful circumstances. If we watch the news and say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Well, he's done better," try to open your eyes to the possibility that "Well, he's done better" is what people want to say when, in the words of C.S. Lewis in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), "*Aslan is on the move.*"

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

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

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

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

Money

Today the biggest symbol of evil is Hitler or Naziism; there is almost no bigger insult than calling someone a Nazi or a comparison to Hitler. The Old Testament's symbol of evil that did the same job was a city in which the Lord God of Hosts could not find fifty righteous, nor forty-five, nor forty, nor thirty, nor twenty, nor even ten righteous men. It was the city on which fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven in divine wrath until smoke arose as from a gigantic furnace. It was, in short, the city of Sodom.

Ezekiel has some remarks about Sodom's sin that might surprise you. Ezekiel 16:49 says, *This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, more than enough food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.*

These are far from the only stinging words the Bible says to rich people who could care for the poor and do not do so. Jesus said something that could better be translated, "It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25). It would take hours or perhaps days to recite everything blunt the Bible says about wealth, if even I could remember so much.

But who are the rich? The standard American answer is, "People who have more money than I do," and the standard American answer is wrong. It takes too much for granted. Do you want to know how special it is, worldwide, to be able to afford meat for every meal you want it and

your Church permits it? Imagine saying "We're not rich; we just have Champagne and lobster every day." That's what it means for even poorer Americans to say "We're not rich, just a bit comfortable." The amount of money that America spends on weight loss products each year costs more than it would cost to feed the hungry worldwide. When Ezekiel says that "your sister Sodom" had more than enough food *but did not care for the poor*, he is saying something that has every relevance to us if we also fail to care for the poor.

I would be remiss not to mention the Sermon on the Mount here, because the Sermon on the Mount explains something we can miss (Matt 6:19-21,24-33):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single hour to your life? You might as well try to make yourself a foot taller! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect

righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

This *includes* a hard saying about wealth, but it is not only a hard saying about wealth, but an invitation to joy. "Do not store up treasures on earth but store up treasures in Heaven" is a command to exchange lead for gold and have true wealth. It is an invitation to joy, and it is no accident that these sharp words about Money lead directly into the Bible's central text on why we never need to worry.

Elsewhere we read, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15), which is *not* a statement that spiritual people can rise so high that *their* lives aren't measured by possessions. It is about everybody, great and small. If money doesn't make you happy this is not something specially true about spiritual people; it's something that's true of everybody. But Jesus's entire point is to direct us to what our life *does* consist in. The words about storing up treasures in Heaven prepare us for the "*Therefore* I tell you," and an invitation to live a life that is fuller, richer, more vibrant, deeper, more alive, more radiant with the light of Heaven than we can possibly arrange through wealth.

What will we leave behind if we spend less on ourselves? Will we leave behind the Lord's providence, or hugs, or friendship, or banter, or worship, or the Church, or feasting? Will we leave behind the love of the Father, or Christ as our High Priest, or the Spirit? Will we be losing a Heaven whose beginning is here and now, or will we be pulling out our right hands and our right eyes? If it seems that way, we may adapt C.S. Lewis to say that living the life of Heaven through our finances today may seem like it will cost our right hand and our right eye, or in today's words an arm and a leg, but once we have taken that plunge, we will discover that what we have left behind is precisely nothing. Or perhaps we could say that we are leaving behind a false Savior who never delivers, but only distracts us from the true Savior in Christ, and the treasure that is ours when we lay our treasures at his feet.

Is there a luxury you could give up in this invitation to joy?

A Pet Owner's Rules

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. **Don't drink out of the toilet.**

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust. Proverbs says, "The adulterous woman"—today one might add, "and internet porn" to that—"in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword." Now this is talking about a lot more than

pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

Having said that lust is drinking out of the toilet, I'd like to clarify something. There are eight particularly dangerous sins the Church warns us about. That's one, and it isn't the most serious. Sins of lust are among the most easily forgiven; the Church's most scathing condemnations go to sins like pride and running the poverty industry. The harshest condemnations go to sins that are deliberate, cold-blooded sins, not so much disreputable, hot-blooded sins like lust. Lust is drinking out of the toilet, but there are much worse problems.

I'd like you to think about the last time you traveled from one place to another and you enjoyed the scenery. That's good, and it's something that greed destroys. Greed destroys the ability to enjoy things without needing to own them, and there are a lot of things in life (like scenery) that we can enjoy if we are able to enjoy things without always having to make them mine, mine, mine. Greed isn't about enjoying things; it's about grasping and letting the ability to enjoy things slip through your fingers. When people aren't greedy, they know contentment; they can enjoy their own things without wishing they were snazzier or newer or more antique or what have you. (And if you do get that hot possession you've been coveting, greed destroys the ability to simply enjoy it: it becomes as dull and despicable as all your possessions look when you look at them through greed's darkened eyes. It takes contentment to enjoy even greed: greed is *also* drinking out of the toilet.

Jesus had some rather harsh words after being unforgiving after God has forgiven us so much. Even though forgiveness is work, refusing to forgive one other person is drinking out of the toilet. Someone said it's like drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

The last sin I'll mention is pride, even though *all* sin is drinking out of the toilet. Pride is not about joy; pride destroys joy. Humility is less about pushing yourself down than an attitude that lets you respect and enjoy others. Pride makes people sneer at others who they can only see as despicable, and when you can't enjoy anyone else, you are too poisoned to enjoy yourself. If you catch yourself enjoying pride, repent of it, but if you

can enjoy pride at all, you haven't hit rock bottom. As G.K. Chesterton said, it takes humility to enjoy even pride. Pride is drinking out of the toilet. *All sin is drinking out of the toilet.*

I've talked about drinking out of the toilet, but Rule Number Two is not the focus. Rule Number One is, "I am your owner. Enjoy freely of the food and water I have given you." Rule Number Two, "Don't drink out of the toilet," is only important when we break it, which is unfortunately quite a lot. The second rule is really a footnote meant to help us focus on Rule Number One, the real rule.

What is Rule Number One about? One window that lets us glimpse the beauty of Rule Number One is, "If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to a mountain, 'Be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it will be done for you." Is this exaggeration? Yes. More specifically, it's the kind of exaggeration the Bible uses to emphasize important points. Being human sometimes means that there are mountains that are causing us real trouble. If someone remains in drunkenness and becomes an alcoholic, that alcoholism becomes a mountain that no human strength is strong enough to move. I've known several Christians who were recovering alcoholics. And had been sober for years. *That* is a mountain moved by faith. Without exception, they have become some of the most Christlike, loving people I have known. That is what can happen when we receive freely of the food and drink our Lord provides us. And it's not the only example. There has been an Orthodox resurrection in Albania. Not long ago, it was a church in ruins as part of a country that was ruins. Now the Albanian Orthodox Church is alive and strong, and a powerhouse of transformation for the whole nation. God is on the move in Albania. He's moved mountains.

To eat of the food and drink the Lord has provided—and, leaving the image of dog food behind, this means not only the Eucharist but the whole life God provides—makes us share in the divine nature and live the divine life. We can bring Heaven down to earth, not only beginning ourselves to live the heavenly life, but beginning to establish Heaven around us through our good works. It means that we share in good things we don't always know to ask.

Let's choose the food and drink we were given.

"Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

A rude awakening

Early in one systematic theology PhD course at Fordham, the text assigned as theology opened by saying, "Theologians are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Not content with this striking claim, the author announced that she was going to use "a term from science," *thought experiment*, which was never used to mean a *Gedanken* experiment as in physics, but instead meant: if we have an idea for how a society should run, we have to experimentally try out this thought and live with it for a while, because if we don't, we will never know what would have happened. ("*Stick your neck out! What have you got to lose?*"—"Your head?") The clumsiness in this use of "a term from science" was on par with saying that you are going to use "an expression from American English", namely *rabbit food*, and subsequently use "rabbit food" as obviously a term meaning food made with rabbit meat.

In this one article were already two things that were fingernails on a chalkboard to my ears. Empirical sciences are today's prestige disciplines, like philosophy / theology / law in bygone eras, and the claim to be a science seems to inevitably be *how to mediate prestige to oneself and one's own discipline*. When I had earlier run into claims of, "Anthropologists are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists

as people in the so-called 'hard sciences,' like physics," I had winced because the claim struck me as not only annoying and untrue, but self-demeaning. But it simply had not occurred to me that theologians would make such a claim, and when they did, I was not only shocked but embarrassed: why should theology, once acclaimed the queen of scholarly disciplines, now seek prestige by parroting the claim to be every-bit-as-much-a-science-as-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics (where "so-called" seemed to always be part of the claim, along with the scare quotes around "hard sciences")? To make my point clearer, I drew what was meant to be a shocking analogy: the claim that theologians are "scientists, and every bit as much as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics" was like trying to defend the dignity of being a woman by saying, "Women are male, and they are just as much male as people who can sire a child."

This "physics envy" looks particularly strange next to the medieval Great Chain of Being as it moved from the highest to the lowest: "God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing". Theology is the study of God and Man; no discipline is given a more noble field. And however much other disciplines may have "physics envy", no other discipline looks lower than physics, the science that studies Rocks and Nothing. There may be something pathetic about an anthropologist trying to step up on the pecking order by claiming to be "just as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Yet on the lips of a theologian, it bears a faint hint of a CEO absurdly saying, "CEOs are janitors, and they are every bit as much janitors as the people responsible for cleaning wastebaskets."

Furthermore, the endemic claim I saw to introduce a "term from science" was, so far as I could remember:

- *Rarely if ever used in any correct fashion.*

The *one* exception I can remember being Wolfhart Pannenberg's illustration of a point by talking about fields such as one finds in the study of electricity and magnetism: the non-scientist theologians in the room said they were having real trouble understanding the illustration conceptually, which would make it seem somewhat

dubious as an *illustration* to help get a point across.

- *Always reflect an effort to claim some of science's prestige.*

I remember the "you're being quaint" smiles I got when I suggested that a point that Pannenberg was trying to make by comparing something to a field as defined in physics, seemed in fact to be a point that could have been much better made by a comparison to the Force from *Star Wars*.

Why the patronizing smiles? The job of the example from physics was to mediate prestige as well as to illustrate a concept that could have been better explained without involving a particularly slippery concept from physics.

A first response

Examples of this kind of "science" abounded, and I was perhaps not wise enough to realize that my clumsy attempts to clarify various misrepresentations of science were perhaps not well received because I was stepping on the Dark and Shameful Secret of Not Being Scientific Enough, and reminding them of an inferiority they were trying hard to dodge. And my attempts to explain "Not being a scientist does not make you inferior" seemed to have no soil in which to grow. In an attempt to start an online discussion, I wrote a piece called "Rumor Science":

I really wish the theology students I knew would either know a lot more about science, or a lot less, and I really wouldn't consider "a lot less" to be disappointing.

Let me explain why. When I was working on my master's in math, there was one passage in particular that struck me from Ann Wilson Schaef's *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System*. Perhaps predictably given my being a mathematician in training, it was a remark about numbers, or rather about how people interact with numbers.

The author broke people down into more or less three groups of people. The first—she mentioned artists—was people that can't count to twenty without taking off their shoes. She didn't quite say **that**, but she emphasized artists and other people where math and numbers simply aren't part of their consciousness. They don't buy into the mystique. And they can say, and sincerely mean, that numbers don't measure everything. They aren't seriously tempted to believe otherwise.

The second group—she mentioned business people—consists of people for whom math works. Even if they're not mathematicians, math works for them and does useful things, and they may say that numbers don't measure anything, but it is well nigh impossible to believe—saying and meaning that numbers don't measure everything is like saying that cars are nice but they can't get you places.

And the third group in the progression? She mentioned scientists, but what she said was that they know math in and out and know it so well that they know its limitations and therefore they can say and mean that numbers don't measure everything. And in the end, even though the "scientist" and the "artist" represent opposite extremes of mathematical competence, they both know there are things numbers can't measure while the second, middle group for mathematical competence are in a position where they expect numbers to do things that numbers can't do.

I was flattered, but I really think it stuck with me for more reasons than just the fact that she included me in one of the "good" groups. There is a sort of *Karate Kid* observation—"Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe. Don't know karate, safe. In the middle, *squash*, like a grape!"—that is relevant to theology and science. It has to do with, among other things, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the question of evolution, and the like (perhaps I should mention the second law of thermodynamics). My point in this is not that there is an obligation to "know karate", that theologians need to earn degrees in the sciences before they are qualified to work as theologians, but that there is something perfectly respectable about "don't know karate."

I'd like to start by talking about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Now a lot of people have heard about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Not many major mathematical theorems have had a Pulitzer prize-winning book written around them (and by the way, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* has been one of my favorite books). Nor do many theorems get summarized in Newsweek as an important theorem which demonstrates that mathematical "proofs" are not certain, but mathematical knowledge is as relative as any other knowledge.

Which is a crass error. The theological equivalent would be to say that Karl Barth's unflattering remarks about "religion" are anti-Christian, or that liberation theology's preferential option for the

poor means that special concern for the poor is optional and to be dealt with according to personal preference. And saying that about liberation theology is a theological "squash like a grape," because it is better to not know liberation theology and know you don't know than believe that you understand liberation theology and "know" that the word "option" implies "optional." **It's not what you don't know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so.**

For the record, what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem means is that for a certain branch of mathematics, there are things that can be neither proven nor disproven—which made his theorem a shocker when there was a Tower of Babel effort to prove or disprove pretty much anything. It proves that some things can never be proven within certain systems. And it has other implications. But it does *not* mean that things that are proven in mathematics are uncertain, or that mathematical knowledge is relative. It says you can't prove everything a mathematician would want to prove. But there are still lots and lots and lots of interesting things that can be proven, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem does not touch these proofs, nor does it mean that mathematical knowledge is merely relative in humanities fashion.

And I'd like to mention what happens when I mention Gödel's **Completeness** Theorem:

Dead silence.

The same great mathematical logician proved another theorem, which does not have a Pulitzer prize winning book, which says that in one other branch of mathematics, besides the branch that Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem speaks to, you can have pretty much what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem says you can't have in the other branch. In other words, you can—mechanically, for that matter, which is a big mathematical achievement—either prove or disprove every single statement. I'm not sure it's as important as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, but it's a major theorem from the same mathematician and no one's heard of it.

There would seem to be obvious non-mathematical reasons for why people would want to be informed about the first theorem and not want to mention the second. I consider it telling (about non-mathematical culture). I know it may be considered a mark of sophistication to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem and share how it's informed your epistemology. But it hasn't informed my epistemology and I really can't tell how my theology would be different if I hadn't heard of it. And my understanding is that other mathematicians tend not to have the highest view of people who are trying to take account of scientific discoveries that an educated person "should" know. There are other reasons for this, including goofy apologetics that make the famous theorem a proof for God. But I at least would rather talk with someone who simply hadn't heard of the theorem than a theologian who had tried to make a "responsible" effort to learn from the discovery.

And my main example is one I'm less sure how to comment on, and not only because I know less biology than math. There was one almost flippant moment in England when the curate asked if anybody had questions about the upcoming Student Evolution conference that everybody was being urged to attend. I asked, "Is this 'Student Evolution' more of a gradual process, or more a matter of 'punk eek'?" (That question brought down the house.)

Punctuated equilibrium, irreverently abbreviated 'punk eek', is a very interesting modification of Darwinian theory. Darwinian *evolution* in its early forms posits and implies a gradual process of very slow changes—almost constant over very long ("geological") time frames. And that is a beautiful theory that flatly contracts almost all known data.

As explained by my Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy biology teacher, "Evolution is like baseball. It has long stretches of boring time interrupted by brief periods of intense excitement." That's punk eek in a nutshell, and what interests me most is that it's the mirror image of saying "God created the world—through evolution!" It says, "Evolution occurred—through punctuated equilibrium!"

That's not the only problem; evolution appears to be, in Kuhnian terms (Structure of Scientific Revolutions), a theory "in crisis", which is the Kuhnian term for when a scientific theory is having serious difficulties accounting for currently given data and may well be on its way out the door. There are several ways people are trying to cope with this—preserving some semblance of a materialist explanation; there was the same kind of resistance going on before science acknowledged the Big Bang, because scientists who want a universe without cause and without beginning or creator heard something that sounded too much like "Let there be light!" They're very interesting, and intellectually dishonest.

Now I need to clarify; people seem to think you have to either be a young earth creationist or else admit evolution of some stripe. I believe in 13 billion years as the rough age of the universe, not six thousand years; I also believe in natural selection and something called "micro-evolution." (By the way, JPII's "more than a hypothesis" was in the original French "*plus qu'un hypothèse*", alternately translatable as "more than one hypothesis", and the official Vatican translation takes this reading. One can say that micro-evolution is one of the hypothesis gathered under the heading of evolution.)

I wince when I see theologians trying their dutiful best to work out an obligation to take evolution into account as a proven fact: squash, like a grape. It's not just that science doesn't trade in proof and evolution is being treated like a revelation, as if a Pope had consulted the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and canonized *The Origin of the Species* as a book of the Bible. Or maybe that's putting it too strongly. It would also be strong language to say that many theologians are adopting a carefully critical attitude to classic Church claims and part of their being critical means placing an embarrassingly blind faith in evolution. But that's truer than I'd want to admit.

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

I don't know what the first and third laws of thermodynamics

say, and I can't say that I'm missing anything. I don't feel obligated to make the second law, which I am familiar with, a feature of my theology, but if I did, I would try to understand the first and third laws of thermodynamics, and treat it as physics in which those three laws and presumably other things fit into a system that needs to be treated as a whole. I don't know how I would incorporate that in my theology, but I'm supposing for the sake of argument that I would. I would rather avoid treating it the way people usually seem to treat it when they treat that as one of the things that educated people "should" know.

I guess that my point in all of this is that some people think there's a duty to know science and be scientific in theology, but this is a duty better shirked. My theology is—or I would like it to be—closer to that of someone who doesn't understand science, period, than that of people who try to improve their theology by incorporating what they can grasp of difficult scientific concepts that the scientists themselves learned with difficulty.

Rumor science is worse than no science, and an ascientific theology is not a handicap. When I say that I would rather see theologians know either much more or much less science, I'm not hoping that theologians will therefore get scientific degrees. The chief merit for a theologian to know science is that it can be a source of liberation that frees people from thinking "We live in a scientific age so it would be better for theology to be scientific." I'm not sure I would be able to question that assumption if I knew much less science. *But what I believe that buys me is not a better theology than someone scientifically innocent but freedom from the perceived need to "take science into account" in my theology so I can do the same kind of theology as someone scientifically innocent.*

I'm not as sure what to say about ecological theology; I wrote [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#) at without scientific reference that I remember, and I believe there are other human ways of knowing Creation besides science. But an ecological theologian who draws on scientific studies is not trying to honor a duty to understand things an educated person should know, but pursuing

something materially relevant. Science has some place; religion and science boundary issues are legitimate, and I don't know I can dissuade people who think it's progressive to try to make a scientific theology—although I really wish people with that interest would get letters after their name from a science discipline, or some other form of genuinely proper scientific credentials appropriate to a genuinely scientific theology.

There are probably other exceptions, and science is interesting. But there is no obligation to go from safely on one side of the road to a position in the middle because it is "closer" to a proper understanding of science. Perhaps liberation theologians want people to understand their cause, but it is better not to pretend to know liberation theology than to approach it in a way that leaves you "knowing" that the preferential option is optional. *It isn't what you know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so*—and rumor science, with its accepted list of important scientific knowledge that scholars need to take into account, is one way to learn from what ain't so.

Science is the prestige discipline(s) today; you see psychology wishing for its Newton to lead it into the promised land of being a science in the fullest sense of the term. You don't see psychology pining for a Shakespeare to lead it into the promised land of being a humanity in the fullest sense of the term. And the social disciplines—I intentionally do not say social **sciences** because they are legitimate academic disciplines but not sciences—are constantly insisting that their members are scientists, but *the claim that theologians are scientists annoys me as a scientist and almost offends me as a theologian*. It should be offensive for much the same reason that it should be offensive to insist on female dignity by claiming that women are really male, and that they are just as much male as people who can sire a child.

It would be an interesting theological work to analyze today's cultural assumptions surrounding science, which are quite important and not dictated by scientific knowledge itself, and then come to almost the same freedom as someone innocent of science.

"My theology," *ewwww*. (While I was at it, why didn't I discuss plans for my own private sun and moon? I'm *not* proud of proudly discussing "my theology".) I know the text has a wart or two.

But the piece contains a suggestion: "rumor science" may be a red flag to a real problem in the place we give science.

Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

That work left out the crowning jewel of scientific theories to ponder in "rumor science": Einstein's "theory of relativity." Some time later, in my science fiction short story / Socratic dialogue, [The Steel Orb](#), I wrote in fiction something that picked up what I had left out:

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even the most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed

by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the microscopically small difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A *mosquito*? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Rumor science": The tip of an iceberg?

But I would like to get on to something that is of far greater concern than "rumor science" as it treats Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the second law of thermodynamics, relativity, evolution, and so on. If the only problem was making a bit of a hash of some scientific theories, that would be one thing. But "rumor science" may be the tip of an iceberg, a telling clue that something may be seriously amiss in how theology has been relating to science. There is another, far more serious boundary issue.

There is something about the nature of academic theology today that may become clearer if we ask questions about the nature of knowledge and line up academic theology with Orthodoxy on the one hand and modern science on the other. The table below lists a few questions connected with knowledge, and then a comparison between Orthodox Christianity, academic theology, and modern science in their own columns:

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>What is knowledge like?</i>	"Adam knew Eve..." The primary word in the Old and New Testaments for sexual union is in fact 'know', and this is a significant clue about the intimate nature of knowledge. Knowledge is, at its core, the knowledge that drinks. It connects at a deepest level, and is cognate to how Orthodox say	Knowledge is <i>critical</i> , meaning <i>detached</i> : the privileged position is of the outsider who stands clear of a situation and looks into a window. The devout believer enjoys no real advantage in grasping his religion compared to the methodical	You can't know how stars age or the limitations of the ideal gas law from direct personal experience. Science stems from a rationalism cognate to the Enlightenment, and even if one rebels against the Enlightenment,

to how Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.

observer who remains detached —and the ordinary believer may be at a marked disadvantage.

it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of personal experience.

This may not be part of the standard Western picture, but the Orthodox, non-materialist

understanding of mind holds that there is a sort of "spiritual eye" which knows and which grasps spiritual realities as overflow to its central purpose of worshiping God.

The center of gravity for knowing is this spiritual eye, and it is the center of a whole and integrated person. Logical and other "discursive" reasoning may have a place, but the seat of this kind of reasoning is a moon next to the light of the sun which is the spiritual eye, the *nous*.

Good scholarship comes from putting all other aspects of the person in their place and enthroning the part of us that reasons logically and almost putting the logic bit on steroids.

Continental philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.

We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that allows this reasoning to shine.

What aspect of yourself do you know with?

They should train

They should train students to

What should teachers cultivate in their students? Teachers should induce students into *discipleship* and should be exemplary disciples themselves. students who will not be content with their teachers' interpretations but push past to their own takes on the matter. develop experiments and theories to carefully challenge the "present working picture" in their field.

What is tradition, and how does your tradition relate to knowing? One may be not so much *under Tradition as in Tradition*: Tradition is like one's culture or language, if a culture and language breathed on by the Holy Spirit of God. Though the matrix of Tradition need not be viewed with legalistic fundamentalism, it is missing something important to fail to love and revere Tradition as something of a

Something of the attitude is captured in what followed the telling of an anecdote about a New Testament Greek class where the professor had difficulties telling how to read a short text, until a classics student looked and suggested that the difficulty would evaporate if the text were read with a different set of accents from what scholars traditionally assigned it. The Greek professor's response ("Accents are not inspired!") was presented by the academic theologian

As Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman observed, "You get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment."

mother.

theologian
retelling this story

as full warrant to
suggest that
scholars should
not view
themselves as
bound by *tradition*
with its blind
spots.

*How much
emphasis
do you
place on
creativity?*

It reflects some
degree of
fundamental
confusion to
measure the value of
what someone says
by how original it is.
That which is true is
not original, and that
which is original is
not true. Perhaps
people may uncover
new layers of
meaning, but to
measure someone by
how many ideas he
can claim as "mine"
is a strange measure.

Publish something
original, or perish.
Better to say
something original
but not true than
not have any ideas
to claim as "mine."
If need be,
rehabilitate Arius
or Nestorius. (Or,
if you are
Orthodox, meet
current fashions
halfway and show
that St. Augustine
need not be a
whipping boy.)

Continue to push
the envelope. Are
you an
experimental
physicist? If you
cannot observe
anything new by
the layman's
means of
observation,
pioneer new
equipment or a
clever experiment
to push the
envelope of what
can be observed.
Publish
something
original or perish.

There is a very real
sense of empiricism,
albeit a sense that
has very little
directly to do with
empirical science.
Knowledge is what

~~Theologians are
just as empirical as
physicists whether~~

As much as
theology's
empiricism is the
empiricism of a
knowledge of the
"spiritual eye" and
the whole person,
our empiricism is

Where does your discipline place its empiricism?

you know through the "spiritual eye" and it is a knowledge that can only be realized through direct participation. An "idle word" may be a word of that which you do not have this knowledge of, and this sin would appear to be foundational to the empiricism of science. We really do have an empiricism, but it might be better not to engender pointless confusion by claiming to be empirical when the empiricism known to the academy is pre-eminently that of empirical science, whether it is either actual or aspiring science.

~~physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics.~~ We have such quasi-scientific empiricism as can be had for the human and divine domain we cover; there is a great deal of diversity, and some of us do not place much emphasis on the empiricism of science, but some of us have enough of scientific empiricism to do history work that stands its ground when judged by secular history's standards.

an empiricism of detached, careful, methodical, reasoned investigation—the investigation of the reasoning faculty on steroids. Our science exhibits professionalism and a particular vision of intellectual virtue. Our empiricism corresponds to this vision, and no one has pushed this empiricism of the reasoning faculty further, and the unique technology founded on science is a testament to how far we have pushed this kind of empiricism.

When they are lined up, academic theology appears to have a great many continuities with science and a real disconnect with Orthodox Christianity. Could academic theologians feel an inferiority complex about Not Being Scientific Enough? Absolutely. But the actual problem may be that they are entirely *too* scientific. I am less concerned that their theology is not sufficiently scientific than that it is not sufficiently *theological*.

Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

It is along those lines that I have taken something of the track of "join the enemy's camp to show its weaknesses from within" in exposing the blind spots of Darwinism, for instance. In the theologically driven short story [The Commentary](#), the issue is not really whether Darwinism is correct at all. The question is not whether we should be content with Darwinian answers, but whether we should be content with Darwinian *questions*.

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

Genesis

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

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

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

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

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

short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

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

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

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

There is a hint here of why some people who do not believe in a young earth are no less concerned about young earth creationism: the concern is not exactly that it is junk science, but precisely that it is *too* scientific, assuming many of evolutionary theory's blindnesses even as it asserts the full literal truth of the Bible in answering questions on the terms of what science asks of an origins theory.

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

Pointy-haired boss: I'm sending you to Elbonia to teach a

class on Cobol on Thursday.

Dilbert: But I don't know Cobol. Can't you ask Wally? He knows Cobol!

Pointy-haired boss: I already checked, and he's busy on Thursday.

Dilbert: Can't you reschedule?

Pointy-haired boss: Ok, are you free on Tuesday?

Dilbert: You're answering the wrong question!

Dilbert's mortified, "You're answering the wrong question!" has some slight relevance the issues of religion and science: in my homily, [Two Decisive Moments](#) I tried to ask people to look, and aim, *higher*:

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

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

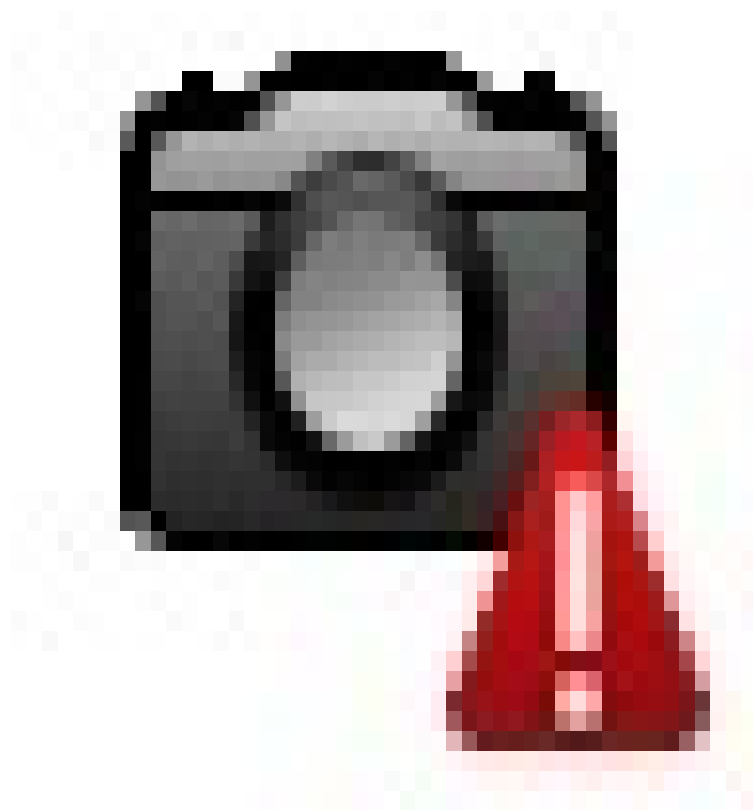
Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham,

Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "*Behold the man!*"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man! Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!*

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.



An icon of the Resurrection.

Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of

peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.*

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

I wince at the idea that for theologians "boundary issues" are mostly about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths to the day's state of flux in scientific speculation. I wince that theologians so often assume that the biggest contribution they can give to the dialogue between theology and science is the rubber stamp of perennially agreeing with science. I would decisively prefer that when theologians "approach religion and science boundary issues," we do so as boundaries are understood in pop psychology—and more specifically *bad* pop psychology—which is all about you cannot meaningfully say "Yes" until it is your practice to say "No" when you should say "No": what theology needs in its

boundaries with science is not primarily a question of what else we should seek to embrace, but of where theology has ingested things toxic to its constitution.

What gets lost when theology loses track (by which I do not mean primarily rumor science, but the three columns where theology seemed a colony of science that had lost touch with Orthodox faith) is that when theology assumes the character of science, it loses the character of theology.

The research for my diploma thesis at Cambridge had me read a lot of historical-critical commentary on a relevant passage; I read everything I could find on the topic in Tyndale House's specialized library, and something became painfully obvious. When a good Protestant sermon uses historical or cultural context to illuminate a passage from Scripture, the preacher has sifted through pearls amidst sand, and the impression that cultural context offers a motherlode of gold to enrich our understanding of the Bible is quite contrary to the historical-critical commentaries I read, which read almost like phone books in their records of details I'd have to stretch to use to illuminate the passage. The pastor's discussion of context in a sermon is something like an archivist who goes into a scholar's office, pulls an unexpected book, shows that it is surprisingly careworn and dog-eared, and discusses how the three longest underlined passage illuminate the scholar's output. But the historical-critical commentary itself is like an archivist who describes in excruciating detail the furniture and ornaments in the author's office and the statistics about the size and weight among books the scholar owned in reams of (largely uninterpreted) detail.

And what is lost in this careful scholarship? Perhaps what is lost is why we have Bible scholarship in the first place: it is a divinely given book and a support to life in Christ. If historical-critical scholarship is your (quasi-scientific) approach to theology, you won't seek in your scholarship what I sought in writing my (non-scientific) [Doxology](#):

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,

Compareth to thy worth.

Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named,

The Glory for whom all glory is named,

The Treasure for whom treasures are named,

The Light for whom all light is named,

The Love for whom all love is named,

The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,

The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה,

Ο ΩΝ.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

Who art eternally praised,

Who art all that thou canst be,

Greater than aught else that may be thought,

Greater than can be thought.

In thee is light,

In thee is honour,

In thee is mercy,

In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.

For good itself is named after thee,

God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and humble.

What mighteth compare to thee?

What praise equalleth thee?

If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,

Only can it be,

Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,

And ten thousand things besides,

Thou who art One,

Eternally beyond time,

So wholly One,

That thou mayest be called infinite,

Timeless beyond time thou art,

The One who is greater than infinity art thou.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

The Three who are One,

No more bound by numbers than by word,

And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,
Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
Ο ΩΝ.

What tongue mighteth sing of thee?
What noetic heart mighteth know thee,
With the knowledge that drinketh,
The drinking that knoweth,
Of the νοϋς,
The loving, enlightened spiritual eye,
By which we may share the knowing,
Of divinised men joining rank on rank of angel.

Thou art,
The Hidden Transcendent God who transcendest transcendence
itself,
The One God who transfigurest Creation,
The Son of God became a Man that men might become the sons of
God,
The divine became man that man mighteth become divine.

Monty Python and Christian theology

I would like to start winding down with a less uplifting note. A few years back, I visited a friend who was a Christian and a big Monty Python fan and played for me a Monty Python clip:

God: Arthur! Arthur, King of the Britons! Oh, don't grovel! If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people groveling.

Arthur: Sorry—

God: And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone it's 'sorry this' and 'forgive me that' and 'I'm not worthy'. What are you doing now!?

Arthur: I'm averting my eyes, O Lord.

God: Well, don't. It's like those miserable Psalms—they're so depressing. Now knock it off!

This is blasphemous, and I tried to keep my mouth shut about what my host had presented to me, I thought, for my rollicking laughter. But subsequent conversation showed I had misjudged his intent: he had not intended it to be shockingly funny.

He had, in fact, played the clip because it was something that he worried about: did God, in fact, want to give grumbling complaints about moments when my friend cried out to him in prayer? Does prayer annoy our Lord as an unwelcome intrusion from people who should have a little dignity and leave him alone or at least quit sniveling?

This is much more disturbing than merely playing the clip because you find it funny to imagine God bitterly kvetching when King Arthur tries to show him some respect. If it is actually taken as theology, Monty Python is really sad.

And it is not the best thing to be involved in Monty Python as theology

theology.

One can whimsically imagine an interlocutor encountering some of the theology I have seen and trying to generously receive it in the best of humor: "A book that promises scientific theology in its title and goes on for a thousand pages of trajectories for other people to follow before a conclusion that apologizes for not actually getting on to any theology? *You have a real sense of humor!* Try to avoid imposing Christianity on others and start from the common ground of what all traditions across the world have in common, that non-sectarian common ground being the Western tradition of analytic philosophy? *Roaringly funny!* Run a theological anthropology course that tells how liberationists, feminists, queer theorists, post-colonialists, and so on have to say to the Christian tradition and does not begin to investigate what the Christian tradition has to say to them? *You should have been a comedian!* Yoke St. Gregory of Nyssa together with a lesbian deconstructionist like Judith Butler to advance the feminist agenda of gender fluidity? *You're really giving Monty Python a run for their money!*" ... until it gradually dawns on our interlocutor that the lewd discussion of sexual theology is not in any sense meant as an attempt to eclipse Monty Python. (Would our interlocutor spend the night weeping for lost sheep without a shepherd?)

There are many more benign examples of academic theology; many of even the problems may be slightly less striking. But theology that gives the impression that it could be from Monty Python is a bit of a dead (coal miner's) canary.

Scientific theology does not appear to be blame for all of these, but it is not irrelevant. Problems that are not directly tied to (oxymoronic) scientific theology are usually a complication of (oxymoronic) secular theology, and scientific theology and secular theology are deeply enough intertwined.

The question of evolution is important, and it is no error that a figure like Philip Johnson gives neo-Darwinian evolution pride of place in assessing materialist attacks on religion. But it is not an adequate remedy to merely study intelligent design. Not enough by half.

If theology could, like bad pop psychology, conceive of its "boundary issues" not just in terms of saying "Yes" but of learning to stop saying "Yes" when it should say "No", this would be a great gain. So far as I have seen, the questions about boundaries with science are primarily not scientific ideas theology needs to assimilate, but ways theology has assimilated some very deep characteristics of science that are *not* to its advantage. The question is less about what more could be added, than what more could be taken away. And the best way to do this is less the Western cottage industry of worldview construction than a journey of repentance such as one still finds preached in Eastern Christianity and a good deal of Christianity in the West.

A journey of repentance

Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Repentance has been called unconditional surrender, and it has been called the ultimate experience to fear. But when you surrender what you thought was your ornament and joy, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And with letting go comes hands that are free to grasp joy you never thought to ask. Forgiveness is letting go of the other person and finding it is yourself you have set free; repentance is being terrified of letting go and then finding you have let go of needless pain. Repentance is indeed Heaven's best-kept secret; it opens doors.

I have doubt whether academic theology will open the door of repentance; it is a beginner's error to be the student who rushes in to single-handedly sort out what a number of devout Christian theologians see no way to fix. But as for theologians, the door of repentance is ever ready to open, and with it everything that the discipline of theology seeks in vain here using theories from the humanities, there trying to mediate prestige to itself science. Academic theologians who are, or who become, theologians in a more ancient sense find tremendous doors of beauty and joy open to them. The wondrous poetry of St. Ephrem the Syrian is ever open; the liturgy of the Church is open; the deifying rays of divine grace shine ever down upon those open to receiving them and upon those not yet open. The Western understanding is that the door to the Middle Ages has long since been closed and the age of the Church Fathers was closed much earlier; but Orthodox will let you become a Church Father, here now. Faithful people today submit as best they are able to the Fathers before them, as St. Maximus Confessor did ages ago. There may be problems with academic theology today, but the door to theology in the classic sense is never closed, as in the maxim that has rumbled through the ages, "A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian." Perhaps academic theology is not the best place to be equipped to be a giant like the saintly theologians of ages past. But that does not mean that one cannot become a saintly theologian as in ages past. God can still work with us, here now.

To quote St. Dionysius (pseudo-Dionysius) in [The Mystical Theology](#),

Trinity! Higher than any being,
any divinity, any goodness!
Guide of Christians
in the wisdom of Heaven!
Lead us up beyond unknowing light,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystic scripture,
where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.
Amid the deepest shadow
They pour overwhelming light
on what is most manifest.
Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen
They completely fill our sightless minds
with treasures beyond all beauty.

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

Two Decisive Moments

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

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

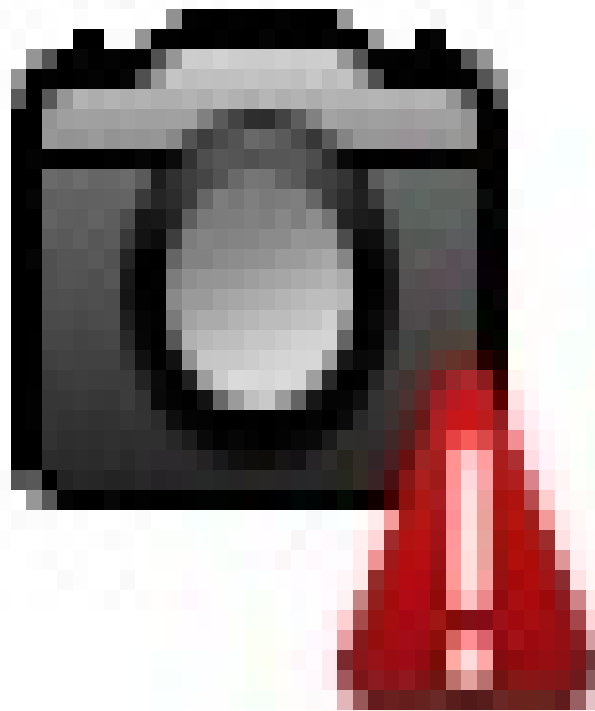
Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also

happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "*Behold the man!*"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man! Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!*

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.



An icon of the Resurrection.

*Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet'?" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.**

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

That is a decisive moment, but decisive moments are not some kind of special exception to Christian life. Christian history and the Christian spiritual walk alike take their pace from decisive moments. I would like to look at the decisive moment in the Gospel reading.

In that reading, the people who have gathered to listen to Jesus went beyond a "standing room only" crowd to being so packed you couldn't get near the door. Some very faithful friends of a paralytic did the only thing they could have done. They climbed on the roof and started digging through it. I suspect that the homeowner didn't like the idea. But they dug in, and lowered him, hoping this teacher will heal him.

Jesus saw *their* faith and said, "Your sins are forgiven." And people were shocked—there was a very good reason for this! If I have two friends, and one owes the other money, I can't tell the first one, "Your debt is forgiven. It's wiped clean." *That's not my place*. Sin is not a debt, or a crime, or even a disease. *It's worse*. And Christ told a man who owed an infinite debt to God that his slate was wiped clean and his sins were forgiven. And the reason people were saying, "This man blasphemes! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" was that they understood exactly how significant it was for Jesus to say, "Your sins are forgiven." Maybe they failed to recognize Christ as God (it is very rare that anyone but the demons identified him as the Son of God), but they were absolutely right when they said that Jesus was saying something that only God had the authority to say.

They were murmuring, and Christ knew why. So he asked them, "Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Arise. Take up your mat and walk.'" Everybody knew the answer, that forgiving sins was an infinitely weightier matter, but Jesus was about to give a lesser demonstration of the exact same authority by which he said, "Your sins are forgiven." He said to the paralytic, "Arise. Take up your mat and walk." And the paralytic did exactly that.

That is authority. That is the authority that commands the blind to gaze on the light of the Transfiguration, the deaf to listen to the song of angels, the mute to sing with God's angels, the lame to dance for joy, and what is greater than all of these, command you and me, sinners, to be freed from our sins.

Great and rare as the restoration of one paralytic may be, everybody knew that that was less important than the forgiveness of his sins. The story of that healing is a decisive moment.

But it's not the only decisive moment, and there is another decisive moment that may be much less rare, much less something we want to write home about, but is profoundly important, especially in Lent. I am talking about repentance.

When the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin, there are two responses I give, both of which I ought to be ashamed of. The first response is to tell God that he doesn't know what he's talking about. Now of course I am not blunt enough to tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." (Perhaps it would be better if I did.) What I say instead is something like, "I can see where you're coming from, and I can see that you have a point. But I've given it a little thought and I'd like you to consider a suggestion that is much better for everyone involved. Would you consider this consolation prize?" Now again, perhaps it would be better if I were honest enough to simply tell God, "You don't know what you're doing." Not only is it not good that I do that, but it is spurning the grace of God.

When a mother takes a knife or a sharp pair of scissors from a little boy, this is not because the mother wants a pair of scissors and is too lazy or inconsiderate to go get her own pair: her motivation is entirely for the child's welfare. God doesn't need our repentance or our sin. When he commands us through his Spirit to let go of our sin, is this for our sake or for his need? It is entirely for our own benefit, and not something God was lacking, that we are commanded to repent from sin. And this has a deeper implication. If God convicts us from our sin and asks our surrender to him in the unconditional surrender for repentance, then that is how we will be healed from our sin: it is the best medicine chosen by the Great Physician, *and it is out of his mercy that the Great Physician*

refuses all of our consolation prizes that will cut us off from his healing love. Repentance is terrifying at times; it is letting go of the one thing we least want to give over to God, and it is only once we have let go that our eyes are opened and we realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" The more we understand repentance the more we understand that it is a decisive moment when God is at work.

The second response I give to the Holy Spirit is even more an affront to the decisive *now* in which the Lord meets me. I say, "Well, I think you're right, and I need to repent of it, only now isn't the best time for me. I'd like to deal with it at another time." Here, also, things might be better if I were at least honest enough to acknowledge I was telling God, "Your timing is far from perfect." God lives outside of time, and yet he has all the time there is. There is never reason for him to say with a sheepish grin, "I know this really isn't the best time for you, but I only have two minutes right now, and I'm going to ask for you to deal with this now even though this isn't the best time." When he comes and tells us to repent, now, the reason for that is not that some point later on we may feel more like repenting and that is a better time; the reason is that by the time I am struggling against God's Spirit I have already entered the decisive moment when I can choose either to be cleansed and freed of my sin, or keep on fumbling for the snooze button while God tells me, "Enough sleep! It is time for you to arise!"

Let us repent, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, *'Good God!
That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.'*
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, *'God and the Son of God,
Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,'*
By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,

Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
[The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#),
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of [The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab](#).
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **Î§**, and **Î‘**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, ‘I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?’

The master said, ‘Inside your heart.’

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?’

‘Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my [Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?](#) How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?’

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou

knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial asceticism of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from asceticism, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by her children,” of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.’

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:
‘What then? How is this man,
A second rich young ruler become?
He who bore not a watch on principle,
Even before he’d scarce more than
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Weareth a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
And is displeased to accept,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
But that when it happened, he were sad.
For the rich young ruler lied,
When said he that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
Would that he would recall,
The heights from which he hath fallen,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.’

II.

Then the great Saint said, ‘But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?’

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’
Said Seneca the Younger,
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
That full and ancient philosophy,

Can speak, act, and help today,
Among athletes and business men,
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,
An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.'

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, 'Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry

wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the [Philokalia](#):

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire

virtue.

- Weakness and ignorance, so that, turning one's back on worldly things, one may be under obedience in stillness and humility.
- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

'And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to

utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some

fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the asceticism of a mathematician or a member of the Ultracatholics. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

‘The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come

across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written [Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret](#), and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

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

Gods.

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the

Pleasant Life, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the [Philokalia](#): the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist

if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of

the [Philokalia](#) is [The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers](#). If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the [Philokalia](#) hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a

semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society's *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

'Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

'Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one's own poor, miserable demographic.

'But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled "Love Without Boundaries," and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it" on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father's love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of $\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^{1/2}\hat{I}$, $\hat{I}\hat{\diamond}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}$, (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. [The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis](#) hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology

there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The [Philokalia](#) is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the

main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of

women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book

about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?
Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?
For I have written much,
And spent much care,
In [The Luddite’s Guide to Technology](#),
And looked all the whilst,
Down the wrong end,
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
I have written of man and creation defiled,
Yet for all my concerns,
Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’
Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
Of our embodied state,
Where better to seek healing,
For an occult-free simulation,
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
Than in the perfect creaturely response,
‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to thy word.’
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
‘Behold thy Mother!’
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:
But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminã”d teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest [a Fluxx deck](#) to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed [the game of Fluxx](#), though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that

name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for [the royal race of men](#). Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, [thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home](#), and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, “blessed,” $\hat{I}1/4\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^0\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}\blacklozenge\hat{I}1\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}$, (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including [Young’s Literal Translation](#):

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness’ sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the [Amplified Bible](#) naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was *εὐδαιμονία*, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were

more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
Of a child starkly scant of mind,
Who received a glittering package, a gift,
And kept the glittering package,
Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
And after long time,

When the disposable wrapping paper,
Were well battered and now dingy,
An adult asked,
'Aren't you going to open the package?'
The child exclaimed with joy,
Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
And squealed with joy, saying,
"Oh, there's *another* present!"
My Lord and my God!
Perhaps I will never open,
[The Sermon on the Mount](#).

VI.

I said myself then, 'O John! O glorious Saint John! Canst thou lead me on a path into the [The Sermon on the Mount](#)? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not

only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and [a 4D maze](#),
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original ‘fat Mac’,
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of RAM.

My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
[And a simple video game](#), had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without frequent \$500
repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
[Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of Unix.](#)
When I asked about one cardinally important open source project,
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.

I sing a song to my late iPhone,
[Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,](#)
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,

To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the [Philokalia](#),
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.

St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,

But we may not yet be in the clear.

And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under surveillance,"

Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,

To those that will reflect,

That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'

Is monitored by Big Brother,

But perhaps it is not just human agencies,

That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?

It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,

Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,

And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.

29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

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

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
'There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,

And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, "Michael,"
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
[Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?](#)
[Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?](#)
[As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,](#)
[Or as if the staff should lift up itself,](#)
[As if it were no wood.](#)
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,

Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil himself:
"Blow, and spit on him."

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the [Philokalia](#) describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.’

The Saint told me, ‘Thou hast read part of [Prayers by the Lake](#), in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

‘Rememberest thou also that in the [Philokalia](#) we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediateth to some degree.’

I said, 'May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?'

He said, 'Speak on.'

I said, 'I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in [For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.'

He said, 'Hast thou not been astonished at God's perfect Providence of years betimes?'

I said, 'Yes.'

He said, 'What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.'

I asked, 'Will I reach monasticism?'

He smiled at me, and said, 'Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

He said, 'Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

'With death cometh a realization of, "I shall not pass this wise again."

'Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God's champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job

the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?’

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?’

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where notes and candles glewed purest white, and unlike mine own

and, where pain and chance glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I had ever been in my life.