

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist? A Collection of Poems

From the "Major Works" series

CJS Hayward

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Preface

Poetry began to appear on [Jonathan's Corner](#) by accident; the author began to try to write *per cola et commata*: an ancient system of punctuation where the text is broken up by where the line breaks occur, rather than by punctuation marks. Poetry of a sort soon followed; writing *per cola et commata* is an invitation to write poetically, and by accident the writer found himself writing cherished works of poetry. But perhaps this stumbling over poetry is less strange than it sounds: the author has poetry in his heart.

Winston Churchill said, "Man will occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of the time he will pick himself up and continue on." Perhaps what is remarkable is not that the author stumbled over writing *per cola et commata* and found poetic outlet, but that he did anything but "pick himself up and continue on."

In any case, the collection addresses different topics: facing death as a gateway we must all pass, the divine glory, what excels beyond alchemy, the beauty of creation, the labyrinth we know as home, seeking the greatest in life, the precious present of now that is offered to us, spiritual openness, being a pilgrim in a foreign land, the power of silence, and a many-sided exploration of the question a thief asked when a priceless pageant unfolded before him.

You are invited to read them.

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.
Choolest thou this day,
Which thou shalt abide.

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

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

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.

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!

Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth

With what words
shall I hymn the Lord of Heaven and Earth,
the Creator of all things visible and invisible?
Shall I indeed meditate
on the beauty of his Creation?

As I pray to Thee, Lord,
what words shall I use,
and how shall I render Thee praise?

Shall I thank thee for the living tapestry,
oak and maple and ivy and grass,
that I see before me
as I go to return to Thee at Church?

Shall I thank Thee for Zappy,
and for her long life—
eighteen years old and still catching mice?
Shall I thank thee for her tiger stripes,
the color of pepper?
Shall I thank thee for her kindness,
and the warmth of her purr?

Shall I thank Thee for a starry sapphire orb

hung with a million million diamonds, where
"The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims the work of his hands.
Day to day utters speech,
and night to night proclaims knowledge.
There are no speeches or words,
in which their voices are not heard.
Their voice is gone out into all the earth,
and their words to the end of the earth.
In the sun he has set his tabernacle;
and he comes forth as a bridegroom out of his chamber:
he will exult as a giant to run his course."?

Shall I thank Thee for the river of time,
now flowing quickly,
now flowing slowly,
now narrow,
now deep,
now flowing straight and clear,
now swirling in eddies that dance?

Shall I thank Thee for the hymns and songs,
the chant at Church, when we praise Thee in the head of Creation, the
vanguard of Creation that has come from Thee in Thy splendor and to
Thee returns in reverence?

Shall I thank thee for the Chalice:
an image,
an icon,
a shadow of,
a participation in,
a re-embodiment of,
the Holy Grail?

Shall I forget how the Holy Grail itself
is but the shadow,
the impact,
the golden surface reflecting the light,

secondary reflection to the primeval Light,
the wrapping paper that disintegrates next to the Gift it holds:
that which is
mystically and really
the body and the blood of Christ:
the family of saints
for me to be united to,
and the divine Life?

Shall I meditate
on how I am fed
by the divine generosity
and the divine gift
of the divine energies?

Shall I thank Thee for a stew I am making,
or for a body nourished by food?

Shall I indeed muse that there is
nothing else I could be nourished by,
for spaghetti and bread and beer
are from a whole cosmos
illuminated by the divine Light,
a candle next to the sun,
a beeswax candle,
where the sun's energy filters through plants
and the work of bees
and the work of men
to deliver light and energy from the sun,
and as candle to sun,
so too is the bread of earth
to the Bread that came from Heaven,
the work of plants and men,
the firstfruits of Earth
returned to Heaven,
that they may become
the firstfruits of Heaven
returned to earth?

Shall I muse on the royal "we,"
where the kings and queens
said not of themselves "I", but "we"
while Christians are called to say "we"
and learn that the "I" is to be transformed,
made luminous,
scintillating,
when we move beyond "Me, me, me,"
to learn to say, "we"?

And the royal priesthood is one in which we are called to be
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
made divine,
a family of little Christs,
sons to God and brothers to Christ,
the ornament of the visible Creation,
of rocks and trees and stars and seas,
and the spiritual Creation as well:
seraphim, cherubim, thrones
dominions, principalities, authorities,
powers, archangels, angels,
rank on rank of angels,
singing before the presence of God,
and without whom no one can plumb the depths
of the world that can be seen and touched.

For to which of the angels did God say,
"You make my Creation complete," or
"My whole Creation, visible and invisible,
is encapsulated in you,
summed up in your human race?"

To which of the angels
did the divine Word say,
"I am become what you are

that you may become what I am?"

To which of the angels did the Light say,
"Thou art my Son; today I have adopted Thee,"
and then turn to say,
"You are my sons; today I have adopted you;
because I AM WHO I AM,
you are who you are."?

So I am called to learn to say, "we",
and when we learn to say we,
that "we" means,
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
a family of little Christs,
made divine,
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,
called to lead the whole Creation
loved into being by God,
to be in love
that to God they may return.

And when we worship thus,
it cannot be only us, for
apples and alligators,
boulders and bears,
creeks and crystals,
dolphins and dragonflies,
eggplants and emeralds,
fog and furballs,
galaxies and grapes,
horses and habaneros,
ice and icicles,
jacinth and jade,
kangaroos and knots,
lightning and light,

meadows and mist,
nebulas and neutrons,
oaks and octupi,
porcupines and petunias,
quails and quarks,
rocks and rivers,
skies and seas,
toads and trees,
ukeleles and umber umbrellas,
wine and weirs,
xylophones and X-rays,
yuccas and yaks,
zebras and zebrawood,
are all called to join us before Thy throne
in the Divine Liturgy:

Praise ye the Lord.

Praise ye the Lord from the heavens:

praise him in the heights.

Praise ye him, all his angels:

praise ye him, all his hosts.

Praise ye him, sun and moon:

praise him, all ye stars of light.

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens,

and ye waters that be above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the Lord:

for he commanded, and they were created.

He hath also stablished them for ever and ever:

he hath made a decree which shall not pass.

Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps:

Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours;

stormy wind fulfilling his word:

Mountains, and all hills;

fruitful trees, and all cedars:

Beasts, and all cattle;

creeping things, and flying fowl:

Kings of the earth, and all people;

princes and all judges of the earth.

princes, and all judges of the earth.

Both young men, and maidens;
old men, and children:
Let them praise the name of the Lord:
for his name alone is excellent;
his glory is above the earth and heaven.
He also exalteth the horn of his people,
the praise of all his saints;
even of the children of Israel,
a people near unto him.
Praise ye the Lord.

How can we know Christ
as the bridge between God and mankind
if we forget Christ
as the bridge between God
and his whole Creation?
Can a wedge come between the two?
Shall we understand the human mind
without needing to know of the body?
Shall we worship in liturgy at Church
without letting it create a life of worship?
Shall we say, "Let them eat cake?"
of those who lack bread?
No more can we understand Christ
as saving "Me, me, me!"
but not the whole cosmos,
of which we are head, yes,
but of which he is the greatest Head.

On what day do we proclaim:

As the prophets beheld,
as the Apostles have taught,
as the Church has received,
as the teachers have dogmatized,
as the Universe has agreed,
as Grace has shown forth,

as Truth has revealed,
as falsehood has been dissolved,
as Wisdom has presented,
as Christ awarded...
thus we declare,
thus we assert,
thus we preach
Christ our true God,
and honor as Saints
in words,
in writings,
in thoughts,
in sacrifices,
in churches,
in Holy Icons;
on the one hand
worshipping and reverencing
Christ as God and Lord,
and on the other hand
honoring as true servants
of the same Lord of all
and accordingly offering them
veneration... *[Then louder!]*
This is the Faith of the Apostles,
this is the Faith of the Fathers,
this is the Faith of the Orthodox,
this is the Faith which has established the Universe.

Is it not the day
when we celebrate the restored icons,
because Christ became not only a human spirit,
but became man,
entering the Creation,
the Word become matter,
taking on himself all that that entails.

And all that that entails
means that Christ became matter

and that matter is to be
glorified in his triumph,
the same Christ
whose physical body was transfigured
and shone with the Light of Heaven itself
and this was not an opposite
of what is to be normal
but rather transformed what is normal
so that our embodiment is to be our glory.
And this Christ,
who lived as a particular man,
in a particular place,
honored every time and place,
as the Nobel Prize for physics
honors not simply one chosen physicist per year,
but in its spirit
honors the whole enterprise of physics.
When Christ entered a here and now,
he honored every here and now,
and the Sunday of the restoration of icons
is not "The Sunday of Icons"
but
"The Sunday of Orthodoxy."
Christ was not a "generic" man
with no real time or place.
Christ entered a here and now
and his saints entered a here and now
and if he became what we are,
that we might become what he is,
the divine become human
that the human might become divine,
then if we are not to divide the Christ,
or truncate the Christ,
then his victory extends
to spirit shining through matter
in icons.
How can we praise Thee for this, O Lord?

Is not it all born up
in the scandal of the particular,
and we remember the woman in whom Heaven and Earth met,
who cannot be separated from the Church,
nor from the Cosmos,
to whom we sing
with the beauty of Creation?

Shall we recall his work in Creation
in the song to the woman
in whom Heaven and Earth met?

I shall open my mouth,
and the Spirit will inspire it,
and I shall utter the words of my song
to the Queen and Mother:
I shall be seen radiantly keeping
feast and joyfully praising her wonders.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Beholding thee,
the living book of Christ,
sealed by the Spirit,
the great archangel exclaimed to thee,
O pure one:
Rejoice, vessel of joy,
through which the curse
of the first mother is annulled.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Virgin bride of God,
restoration of Adam and death of hell.
Rejoice, all-immaculate one,
palace of the King of all.
Rejoice, fiery throne of the Almighty.

Glorv to the Father

and to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice, O thou who alone
hast blossomed forth the unfading Rose.
Rejoice, for thou hast borne the fragrant Apple.
Rejoice, Maiden unwedded,
the pure fragrance of the only King,
and preservation of the world.

Both now and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Rejoice, treasure-house of purity,
by which we have risen from our fall.
Rejoice, sweet-smelling lily
which perfumeth the faithful,
fragrant incense and most precious myrrh.

O Mother of God,
thou living and plentiful fount,
give strength to those
united in spiritual fellowship,
who sing hymns of praise to thee:
and in thy divine glory
vouchsafe unto them crowns of glory.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

From thee, the untilled field,
hath grown the divine Ear of grain.
Rejoice, living table
that hath held the Bread of Life.
Rejoice, O Lady, never-failing
spring of the Living Water.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

O Heifer that barest the unblemished Calf
for the faithful, rejoice,
Ewe that hast brought forth the lamb of God
Who taketh away the sins of all the world.
Rejoice, ardent mercy-seat.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice brightest dawn,
who alone barest Christ the Sun.
Rejoice, dwelling-place of Light,
who hast dispersed darkness
and utterly driven away
the gloomy demons.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Rejoice, only door through
which the Word alone hath passed.
By thy birthgiving, O Lady,
thou hast broken the bars and gates of hell.
Rejoice, Bride of God,
divine entry of the saved.

He who sitteth in glory
upon the throne of the Godhead,
Jesus the true God,
is come in a swift cloud
and with His sinless hands
he hath saved those who cry:
Glory to Thy power, O Christ.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

With voices of song in faith
we cry aloud to thee

we cry aloud to thee,
who art worthy of all praise:
Rejoice, butter mountain,
mountain curdled by the Spirit.
Rejoice, candlestick and vessel of manna,
which sweeteneth the senses of all the pious.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, mercy-seat of the world,
most pure Lady.
Rejoice, ladder raising all men
from the earth by grace.
Rejoice, bridge that in very truth
hast led from death to life
all those that hymn thee.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,
higher than the heavens,
who didst painlessly carry within thy womb
the Fountain of the earth.
Rejoice, sea-shell that with thy
blood didst dye a divine purple robe
for the King of Hosts.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Rejoice, Lady who in truth
didst give birth to the lawgiver,
Who freely washed clean
the iniquities of all.
O Maiden who hast not known wedlock,
unfathomable depth, unutterable height,
by whom we have been deified.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Praising thee who hast woven
for the world a Crown
not made by hand of man,
we cry to thee:
Rejoice, O Virgin,
the guardian of all men,
fortress and stronghold and sacred refuge.

The whole world was amazed
at thy divine glory:
for thou, O Virgin
who hast not known wedlock,
hast held in thy womb
the God of all
and hast given birth
to an eternal Son,
who rewards with salvation
all who sing thy praises.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most immaculate one,
who gavest birth to the Way of life,
and who savedst the world
from the flood of sin.
Rejoice, Bride of God, tidings
fearful to tell and hear.
Rejoice, dwelling-place of the Master
of all creation.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, most pure one,
the strength and fortress of men,
sanctuary of glory.

the death of hell,
all-radiant bridal chamber.
Rejoice, joy of angels.
Rejoice, helper of them
that pray to thee with faith.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, O Lady,
fiery chariot of the Word,
living paradise,
having in thy midst
the Tree of Life,
the Lord of Life,
Whose sweetness vivifieth
all who partake of Him
with faith, though they
have been subject to corruption.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Strengthened by thy might,
we raise our cry
to thee with faith:
Rejoice, city of the King of all,
of which things glorious and worthy to be heard
were clearly spoken.
Rejoice, unhewn mountain,
unfathomed depth.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Rejoice, most pure one,
spacious tabernacle of the Word,

shell which produced
the divine Pearl.
Rejoice, all-wondrous Theotokos,
who dost reconcile with God
all who ever call thee blessed.

As we celebrate this sacred
and solemn feast
of the Mother of God,
let us come, clapping our hands,
O people of the Lord,
and give glory to God who
was born of her.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

O undefiled bridal chamber of the Word,
cause of deification for all,
rejoice, all honorable preaching
of the prophet;
rejoice, adornment of the apostles.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

From thee hath come
the Dew that quenched
the flame of idolatry;
therefore, we cry to thee:
Rejoice, living fleece wet
with dew,
which Gideon saw of old,
O Virgin.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Behold, to thee, O Virgin,
we cry: Rejoice!

Be thou the port and a haven
for all that sail
upon the troubled waters of affliction,
amidst all the snares of the enemy.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Thou cause of joy,
endue our thoughts with grace,
that we may cry to thee:
Rejoice, unconsumed bush,
cloud of light
that unceasingly overshadowest the faithful.

The holy children
bravely trampled upon the threatening fire,
refusing to worship created things
in place of the Creator,
and they sang in joy:
'Blessed art Thou and
praised above all,
O Lord God of our Fathers.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

We sing of thee, saying aloud:
Rejoice, chariot of the noetic Sun;
true vine, that hast produced ripe grapes,
from which floweth a wine making glad
the souls of them that in faith glorify thee.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Rejoice, Bride of God,
who gavest birth
to the Healer of all;
mystical staff

mystical star,
that didst blossom with the unfading Flower.
Rejoice, O Lady,
through whom we are filled
with joy and inherit life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

No tongue, however eloquent,
hath power to sing thy praises, O Lady;
for above the seraphim art thou exalted,
who gavest birth to Christ the King,
Whom do thou beseech
to deliver from all harm
those that venerate thee in faith.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

The ends of the earth
praise thee and call thee blessed,
and they cry to thee
with love:
Rejoice, pure scroll,
upon which the Word was written
by the finger of the Father.
Do thou beseech Him
to inscribe thy servants
in the book of life, O Theotokos.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

We thy servants pray to thee
and bend the knees of our hearts:
Incline thine ear, O pure one;
save thy servants who are always sinking,

and preserve thy city
from every enemy captivity, O Theotokos.

The Offspring of the Theotokos
saved the holy children in the furnace.
He who was then prefigured
hath since been born on earth,
and he gathers all the creation to sing:
O all ye works of the Lord,
praise ye the Lord and exalt Him
above all for ever.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Within thy womb
thou hast received the Word;
thou hast carried Him who carrieth all;
O pure one, thou hast fed with milk
Him Who by His beck feedeth the whole world.
To Him we sing:
Sing to the Lord,
all ye His works,
and supremely exalt
Him unto the ages.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Moses perceived in the burning bush
the great mystery of thy childbearing,
while the youths clearly prefigured it
as they stood in the midst of the fire
and were not burnt,
O Virgin pure and inviolate.
Therefore do we hymn thee
and supremely exalt thee unto the ages.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

We who once through falsehood

were stripped naked,
have by thy childbearing been clothed
in the robe of incorruption;
and we who once sat in the darkness of sin
have seen the light, O Maiden,
dwelling-place of Light.
Therefore do we hymn thee
and supremely exalt thee unto the ages.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Through thee the dead are brought to life,
for thou hast borne the Hypostatic Life.
They who once were mute
are now made to speak well;
lepers are cleansed,
diseases are driven out,
the hosts of the spirits of the air are conquered,
O Virgin, the salvation of men.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Thou didst bear the salvation of the world,
O pure one, and through thee we
were lifted from earth to heaven.
Rejoice, all-blessed, protection and strength,
rampart and fortress of those who sing:
O all ye works of the Lord,
praise ye the Lord
and supremely exalt Him unto the ages.

Let every mortal born on earth,
radiant with light,
in spirit leap for joy;

and let the host of the angelic powers
celebrate and honor the holy feast
of the Mother of God, and let them cry:
Rejoice! Pure and blessed Ever-Virgin,
who gavest birth to God.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us, the faithful, call to thee:
Rejoice! Through thee, O Maiden, we have
become partakers of everlasting joy.
Save us from temptations, from barbarian
captivity, and from every other injury
that befalleth sinful men
because of the multitude of their transgressions.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Thou hast appeared as our
enlightenment and confirmation;
wherefore, we cry to thee:
Rejoice, never-setting star
that bringest into the world
the great Sun. Rejoice, pure Virgin
that didst open the closed Eden.
Rejoice, pillar of fire,
leading mankind to a higher life.

Most holy Theotokos, save us.

Let us stand with reverence
in the house of our God,
and let us cry aloud:
Rejoice, Mistress of the world.
Rejoice, Mary, Lady of us all.
Rejoice, thou who alone art immaculate
and fair among women.
Rejoice, vessel that receivedst
the inexhaustible myrrh poured out on thee

the inexhaustible hymn poured out on thee.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

Thou dove that hast borne the Merciful One,
rejoice, ever-virgin!
Rejoice, glory of all the saints.
Rejoice, crown of martyrs.
Rejoice, divine adornment
of all the righteous
and salvation of us the faithful.

Both now, and ever,
and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.

Spare Thine inheritance, O God,
and pass over all our sins now,
for as intercessor in Thy sight,
O Christ, Thou hast her that on earth
gave birth to Thee without seed,
when in Thy great mercy
Thou didst will to take the form of man.

To Thee, the Champion Leader,
we Thy servants dedicate
a feast of victory and of thanksgiving
as ones rescued out of sufferings,
O Theotokos:
but as Thou art one with might which is invincible,
from all dangers that can be
do Thou deliver us,
that we may cry to Thee:
Rejoice, Thou Bride Unwedded!

To her is sung:

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

More honorable than the cherubim,
and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim,
thou barest God the Word.
True Mother of God,
we magnify thee.

Shall we praise thee
for the beauty of a woman
with a child in her arms,
or a child nestled in her womb?

Mary is the one whose womb
contained the uncontainable God.

When that happened,
she gave him his humanity,
and there was an exchange of gifts.

Once you understand this exchange,
it changes everything.

She gave him
his humanity.
He gave her
grace,
the divine life,
as none before her
and none after.

The cherubim and seraphim are the highest ranks of angels.
'Seraph' means fiery one
and they stand most immediately in God's presence.

What is this fire?
Is it literal heat from a real fire?
Or is it something deeper,
something more fire-like than fire itself?
Would not someone who understood the seraphim
as the highest angels,

angels that burn,
would instead ask if our "real" fires
are truly real?
Is it emotion?
Or is it not "emotion"
as we understand the term,
as "deep love"
is not "hypocritical politeness"
as we understand the term?
Or yet still more alien?

Is there anything in our visible Creation
that can explain this?

If a man were to be exposed to this fire,
and he were not destroyed that instant,
he would throw himself into burning glass
to cool himself.

And yet an instant
of direct touch with God the Father,
were that even possible,
would incinerate the seraphim.

Then how can we approach God?

The bridge between Heaven and Earth:
the Word by which the Father is known,
the perfect visible image of the invisible God,
who has become part of his Creation.

When we look at the Christ, the Bridge,
and see the perfect image of God,
God looks at Christ, the Bridge,
and sees the perfect image
of mankind
and not merely mankind,
but inseparably the whole Creation.

How shall we worship the Father,
fire beyond fire beyond fire?

How shall we worship God,
holy, holy, holy?

It is a mystery.
It is impossible.
And yet it happens
in one who was
absolutely God and absolutely man,
and one who is
absolutely God and absolutely man,
bringing Heaven down to Earth,
sharing our humanity
that we might share in his divinity,
and bring Heaven down to Earth,
that Earth may be brought up to Heaven.

There is a mystic likeness
between
Mary, the Mother of God,
the Church,
and the world,
feminine beauty
created, headed, and served
by a masculine revealed God
whom no one can measure.
His Light is incomparably more glorious;
we can know the energies from God
but never know God's essence,
and yet to ask that question is
the wrong way of looking at it.
It is like asking,
"Which would you choose:
Compassion for your neighbor or common decency,
Being a good communicator or using language well,
Living simply or not wasting electricity?"

Christ and the Church are one,
a single organism,
and in that organism,
the rule is one unified organism,
not two enemies fighting for the upper hand.
I am one of the faithful,
and the clergy are not clergy at my expense.
We are one organism.

The Gift of the Eucharist does not happen,
except that it be celebrated by a priest,
and except that the people say, "Amen!"
The Church in its fullness is present
where at least one bishop or priest is found,
and at least one faithful—
and without the faithful,
the clergy are not fully the Church.

The "official" priest is priest,
not instead of a priestly call among the faithful,
but precisely as the crystallization of a priesthood in which
there is no male nor female,
red nor yellow nor black nor white,
rich nor poor, but Christ is all,
and is in all, with no first or second class faithful.

Every Orthodox,
every Christian,
every person
is called to be
part of a single united organism,
a royal priesthood,
a chosen people,
more than conquerors,
a Church of God's eclecticism,
made divine
a family of little Christs,
sons to God and brothers to Christ,
the ornament of Creation, visible and invisible,
called to lead the whole Creation

called to lead the whole creation
loved into being by God,
to be in love
that to God they may return.

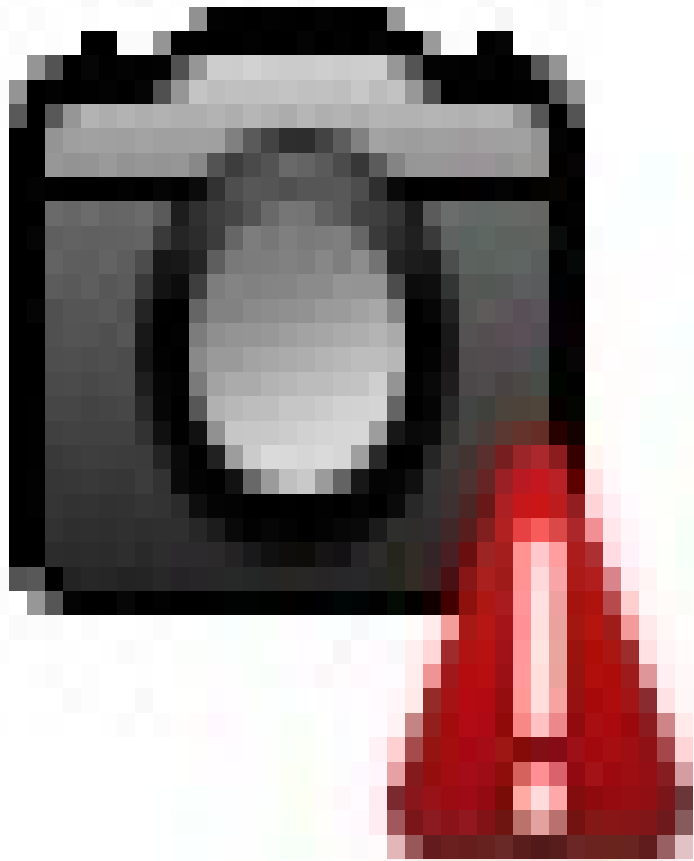
So what can we do,
save to give thanks
for rocks and trees,
stars and seas,
pencils and pine trees,
man and beast,
faces and embraces,
solitude and community,
symphonies and sandcastles,
language and listening,
ivy vines and ivy league,
cultures and clues,
incense and inspiration,
song and chant,
the beauty of nature
and the nature of beauty,
the good, the true, and the beautiful,
healing of soul and body,
the spiritual struggle,
repentance from sin
and the freedom it brings,
and a path to walk, a Way,
one that we will never exhaust—
what can we do
but bow down in worship?

Glory be
to the Father,
and the Son,
and the Holy Spirit,
both now and ever,
and to the ages of ages.
Amen.

The Labyrinth

What
labyrinth is this,
Around and
within me?
My God, my God,
why have I
forsaken Thee?

My God, my
God, why have I
forsaken Thee?
Why have I fled
from Thy help,
And the Word
whom Thou hast
shouted?
My God, Thou
criest out in the
fullness of day,
And in season of
night, yet there is
no silence in me.
But Thou dwellest
in a sanctuary:
Even the praises



of Israel.

[View high-resolution image](#)

In Thee our
fathers hoped,
They hoped, and Thou deliveredst them.
They cried to Thee, and were saved;
They hoped in Thee, and were delivered.
But I am a worm, no more a man,
A reproach to mankind, and of a people despised.
All who see laugh me to scorn,
They speak with their lips,
They shake their heads, saying,
He once trusted in the Lord,
Let Him deliver him,
Let Him save him,
If He still takes pleasure in him.
But Thou art He that drew me from the womb:
My hope from my mother's breasts.
I was cast on Thee from the womb;
Thou wert my God even in my mother's belly.
I stand afar off from Thee;
For I have drawn nigh unto affliction,
Where there are none who shall help.
For bears have encompassed me;
Ravering bears have circled round about me.
They have opened their mouths against me,
As a devouring and roaring dragon,
As a dragon spewing fire and brimstone.
I am poured out like water,
Yea, my very bones are pulled out of place,
My heart is like wax,
Melting away in my bowels.
My strong wealth is dried up like a potsherd,
My tongue never sated in my throat,
I have brought myself down,
To the very dust of death.
For many dogs have compassed me,
The assembly of wicked doers hath beset me round,

They ensnared my deeds and my movement.
They have a count on all my bones,
They observe and look on all I do and say.
They have split among themselves what covered me,
And my raiment perdureth but as perchance.

What is this labyrinth?
What is this I have enmeshed myself in?
For in the [Sermon on the Mount](#),
Hear the Lord the word spake:
No man can serve two masters:
Thou canst not serve God and Mammon.
What reached Mammon in the days of yore?
Ox and ass, a field, a vine,
A house of single room, by single lamp enlightened:
What reaches Mammon in our tangled web?
Lexus and iPhone, or Nokia and Government Motors,
Alike impossible to medieval lord,
And not so different in reality:
Oh what a tangled web we weave,
When we allow branding us to deceive!
Space-conquering tools of train and car,
Dwarfed not by supersonic airplane nor spacecraft,
But by internet communication, and mobile,
Stripped communication bearing not communion,
In the panopticon of NSA forever recorded:
For in the [Sermon on the Mount](#),
Hear the Lord the word spake:
No man can serve two masters:
Thou canst not serve God and Mammon:
When the apex of technology remained,
But the humble workshop of humble artisan,
Mammon's nature was spoken: not servant, but master,
A cruel yoke to shoulder, bear, and live.

But of our labyrinth,
Technology is neither beginning nor end,
Nor properly the center, for it sufficeth not.

To say as of computer games already obsolete,
You are in a maze of twisted Infocom parodies, all alike:
Do not confuse the skin with the heart.

Nor think only of the ancient attack on manhood,
Named porn, for it is not new:
Not new in sepia etching, nor old crumbling book;
Archaeologists dig it up in ancient ruins.
But in decades of yore, yt poison,
Called for a man to sneak into a store,
Hoping no one would see his parked car,
Beside a store of windows all papered;
Behold a new thing:
For now thou needest do no such thing,
It is included in a utility well nigh indispensable,
And thou needest not even seek temptation:
With a good filter, thou wilt receive less,
Of offers that make Hugh Hefner look like Botticelli,
And shouldst thy natural lust not suffice thee,
Thou wilt be told thou needest Viagra.

But call this not the sum of it either:
For SecondLife is called SecondWife,
Not only because thou needest not hear the moralist's protest,
Fornicate using your OWN genitals!
Push this temptation aside, which is not the sole *raison d'être*:
The true *raison d'être* be never new:
The true *raison d'être* was known to desert monks,
Ancient and today,
And by these fathers is called,
Temptation, passion, demon,
Of escaping the world.

SecondLife is the apotheosis,
Nay, the next installment,
Of what came in an earlier installment,
In cinematic movie theatres,

Such as rural American volunteers preserve,
As a piece of history to keep alive for the young,
And moralists said more than that movies can be made lewd,
For they spake of an escape into fantasy,
Whether literal or metaphorical is a smaller question than it might seem:
For fantasy is fiction squared, and in Western history,
Fiction emerged, with abstraction:
Abs-trahere, from Latin,
Meaning pulled back from real things,
And fantasy and science fiction provide a next installment:
If the characters and story be created whole cloth,
Why not unfold a bit further:
Why not the story's world itself?
And this ancient passion of escaping the world,
Of which monks were ever presently warned,
We devise more potent ways to escape,
Where God has placed us,
Whence thou wouldst do well to hear exhortation,
Of disenchanting exiles of SecondLife:
Get a first life!

We have many ways to create our own private world:
With technology or with ancient imagination,
Modern or postmodern in our bent,
Our own private escape from what is around us,
Our own private Hell,
But this need not rule us!

Tis a tangled labyrinth before us,
And whilst we gain,
In learning to use technology,
Not to further our journeys of passion,
But as tools in living life rightly,
The door to life rightly lived,
Is not closed to those who are neither ancient nor rural:
There is a little gain in learning to bear with silence,
Endure hunger, live on less,
As a remedy to covetousness count thy blessings.

Pray through boredom,
Yet here also,
Do not mistake the skin for the heart.

In the labyrinth, there is no hope:
Only infinite possibilities to lose thy way.

But above the labyrinth there is hope.
And Christ is the Door,
Now as much as ever;
Ascesis in the Church is lifegiving,
Now as much as ever,
Unseen warfare can lead us to serene contemplation,
Now as much as ever,
And God is here.

Paradise is wherever the saints are,
And we can find Paradise even with a labyrinth,
That surrounds us,
With no room to escape:
We do not need to escape.

But Thou, O Lord, be not far from me,
O mine every strength, hasten to help me.
Save my soul from the glaive:
My very nature from the power of the dog.
Save me from the dragon's mouth:
For let me learn humility as a unicorn's horn.
I will declare Thy praise to my brethren:
In the midst of the Church I will praise Thee.
You who fear the Lord, praise Him;
All ye seed of Jacob, glorify him;
For He hath not despised nor abhorred,
The affliction of the afflicted:
Neither hath He hidden his face from him,
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard him.
My praise is before thee in the great congregation;
I will pay my vows before them that hold him in holy fear.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
And they that seek the Lord shall praise him;
Let their hearts live forever!
All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord:
And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him.
For the Kingdom is the Lord's,
And he is the Ruler of the nations.
All the prosperous upon the earth shall eat and worship;
All those that go down to the dust shall bow before him:
And my soul eternally lives through him,
My posterity shall serve him;
The Lord will be declared to a generation yet to be born.
They shall declare to a people yet to be formed,
That by the Lord:
It is finished.

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!](#)

Now

Now.

Eternity is now.

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

Hope abides, with faith and love,
A hope things eternal to wit,
Earthly hopes do not deliver:
"Earthly things cannot give Heavenly comfort,
And in the end earthly things cannot give earthly comfort,
Either:
Heavenly comfort is the only comfort to be had."
Hoping for change on earth will disappoint:
This is the key to the riddle:
"Two great tragedies in life:
Not to get your heart's desire,
And to get it."
The desire for comfort in earthly hopes,
Is a vortex,

Sucking the energy out of life.
But there is another way.

To a thief crucified in torture,
To any man in circumstances dire,
Hear the word of the Lord:
"This hour you will be with me in Paradise."
And listen to its heart:
Paradise is not when we get some earthly wish;
Paradise is now,
A scattered mind,
Brought home as a dove in peace,
To an earth lifted up to Heaven.

He who wants peace and paradise,
And worries about how to arrange the things of earth,
Is rightly compared,
To a man who wants to swim and clap his hands.

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

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

Be in your mind,
"A garden locked,"
" "

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

The time for eternal life is now:
The time for obedience is now,
If you procrastinate,
Choosing not to obey now,
Saying, "I can do it later,"
When that "later" becomes "now",
It will be harder to do now,
Because you have already rejected doing it now.

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

Tomorrow does not come,
As a worry, or a plan, or other distraction:
God has not given it yet,
But when he does give,
He will give it as now.

A now where we will remain in the summons,
To gather ourselves into our heart,
To dismiss thoughts that disperse us,
Present to God,
Present to neighbor,
Present to surroundings,
And Paradise present to us.
When the time comes,
When we will sink or swim,
We will swim,
Because swimming is easier than you think,
When you are only trying to swim,
And not also clap your hands:
"My yoke is easy and my burden is light:
Come to me, all who are weary,
And I will give you rest."

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

Now.

Open

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

And yet I know,
Thou, the Theotokos, the saints,
Forever welcome me with open hearts,
And the oil of their gladness

And the on of their gladness,
Loosens my fist,
Little by little.

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

Pilgrim

O Holy Father, who hast made me a pilgrim,
What pilgrimage is this that thou hast given me?

Would that there were a volume inscribed,
Refutatio Omnium Haerasium,
Which is, being interpreted,
The Refutation of All Heresies
Whose pages were but inscribed,
With but a single word:
Michael.

The war in Heaven is short,
Already won,
When the Dragon swept a third of the starry host,
Thine own champion,
Michael,
But spoke his name,
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
The damned doomed Dragon like lightning fell,
From Heaven expelled,
With all the rebellious host:
Sore losers one and all,
To use the common term,
Confounded by a single word:

Michael.

But such a *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium*
Lieth not open to my pen:
A lesser work by far,
Righteous Father,
Hast thou given me to write.

To refute all heresies,
I would start on a point obscure,
And say that science and technology,
Have an occult resonance deep and loud,
For not with occult sin is one enchained,
A text to send,
But yet they beseem,
Of a single cloth to be cut,
And herein is a problem:
For of matters occult to treat,
The temptation is to believe,
*"If only we are dainty enough,
We can pick up a turd by the clean end,
And avoid getting our hands dirty."*
The point is sincere.
And yet we bear wounds,
Of the Damned Backswing,
And if all else were ignored,
I would speak carefully of the recurrent Damned Backswing.

The Sorceror's Bargain is one head of this Hydra:
The enchanter is told,
"Give me thy soul and I will give thee power,"
But if thou hast given thy soul,
Who hath the power?
This is one surfacing of the Damned Backswing,
A Damned Backswing shared by street narcotic:
At first, a doorway to deepest joy,
Or so it first appears,
Until the first appearance disappears,

And the *addictus*,
The one consigned,
Has escalating doses whose heights are lower,
Than the lows before taking a street drug.
Thus cutteth the Damned Backswing.

In ages past, Reason was enthroned,
Or such spake the spirit of the age,
Descartes and rationalism now made pariah,
In the postmodern flight from Reason,
But the Damned Backswing did not start,
When Descartes became vilified without question:
"Reason" enthroned was "Reason" pared down,
Like a toolchest replete with hammer, axe, awl, & c.
Pared down to a hammer alone,
And that hammer enthroned:
The Damned Backswing thus stole reason,
Not from when continental philosophers ridiculed Descartes,
But in Descartes and the Enlightenment itself,
Darkness reigned:
The Damned Backswing eviscerated Reason already.

In the '50s, in the '80s,
The economy was booming in many places,
Middle class citizens enjoyed creature comforts,
Beyond imagining to medieval King and Queen.
But something queer has happened:
The Damned Backswing cuts,
And we are not ever changing from prosperity to prosperity;
The Damned Backswing hews away at wealth.
To the United States of America,
The erstwhile champion of rights,
The Bill of Rights is called,
"Void where prohibited by law,"
And surveillance grows and grows,
Thus unfurls one cut of the Damned Backswing.

What shall I say of *porneia*,

Which is beyond a squid:
Thrown out the front door,
Its tentacles remain in your cabinets,
And if you clean these out,
They reach out from under your bed at night.
Literally spoken, *porneia* is sexual vice,
Yet its entwined, unbanishable tentacles,
Are the condition of much more than lust; An open-ended thing is
porneia.

In this *porneia* we have intertwined,
Plastic foods and plastic culture,
[Contraception and Splenda](#),
Pleasure to grasp and fruitfulness to escape,
Feminism renamed gender studies, queer concerns,
Sexual freedom and a pornified world,
Pride, narcissism, subjectivism, and the occult,
Things that are not separate, but bleed one into the other,
Our ersatz answer to the question,
"*What is the chief end of mankind?*"
For to glorify God and enjoy him forever,
Is no longer apparent.
The Christian way seems dull and discredited,
Or at any rate dull,
So people turn to "alternative spirituality,"
Or the iron yoke of Islamic surrender,
When they recognize religious impulse as such.

And just as people reaching for spirituality,
Find "alternative spirituality" what comes to hand,
People seeking the good of women,
Find feminism of some stripe to come to hand,
Not, perhaps, its extreme radical form,
But something modest,
Some *via media* to pick it up,
By the clean end.

What is not realized is that feminism is anti-woman.

In rhetoric and presentation,
It seems the promotion of women,
Yet the enemy, the enemy true,
Is not traditional men:
They are only a decoy.
The Enemy, capital "T", capital "E",
Are nonfeminist women,
Who enjoy happiness on a course—
Not engineered by feminism,
Who retain an organic spiritual diet,
And not the plastic social engineering,
Of feminists sitting down and designing,
Their creation to make women happy—
As they despise conditions that have made women happy.
We are urged to listen to women's voices,
And yet,
And yet,
And yet...

In practice only the suitably, conveniently liberal,
Seem to qualify as having women's voices.

And to examine another tendril,
Like in spirit and like in heart,
Fantasy is no longer a bookstore's fringe,
Christians read it,
Laced with escape,
From the terms of the here and now,
Which God has given us.
It springs from the same root,
As those for whom magic is not enjoyed,
By a reader's willing suspension of disbelief,
But literal and actually trying to make real.
There is a difference,
A difference profound,
But both are fruit of the same tree,
And both instill the same passion,
A spiritual condition that is wounded.

In its ability to enjoy where God has placed us.

These two are connected:
The clean end of moderate feminism,
And the clean end of fantasy that is just a book,
It seems we can pick it up without getting our hands dirty,
But there isn't a clean end,
Not really,
There isn't.

I see two responses,
One false, and one true:
The true response is to cite,
["The righteous shall live by his faith,"](#)
And the false is to tell how much,
In Wittgenstein-style "forms of life,"
We have lost:
For the 1950's were far from traditional;
For in traditional societies,
Men and women alike worked in adult company,
Not the 1950's housewife confined alone,
But this answer is a decoy.
C.S. Lewis was right:
"Life has never been normal."
[And the righteous will live by faith:](#)
Each day has enough trouble of its own,
And the path of life is to live,
Working on the day's work and food,
Given to us this day by God.

For the refutation of all heresies is:
Michael - Who is like God?

Amen.

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But we have the best of all possible Gods,

And live in a world ruled by the him,

And the most painful of his commands,

Are the very means to greatest glory,

Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,

To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,

An instant of earthly apprenticeship,

To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:

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

Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:

But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,

Turned to gold,

And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:

Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:

[Further up and further in!](#)

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

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

For if I have self-serving life in me,

What room is there for the divine life?

If I hold straw with a death grip,

How will God give me living gold?

[Further up and further in!](#)

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

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

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,
Faileth us in a disaster.

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

Why this waste?

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?