

Happiness in an Age of Crisis

**Ancient Wisdom from the
Eastern Orthodox Church**

From the "Best Works" series

CJS Hayward

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Questions and contact information:

CJSHayward.com/contact

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Orthodox Affirmations

All Orthodox theology is positive theology.

Nothing can harm the man who does not injure himself.

I can do all things I am charged with through Christ who strengthens me.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am first.

Only God and I exist.

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.

God did not only become man that I might become divine. He also became man that I might become human.

Make peace with yourself, and ten thousand around you will be saved.

Save yourself, and Heaven and earth will make peace with you.

Banish two thoughts and live two thoughts: banish “I am a saint” and “I will be damned,” and live “I am a great sinner” and “God is greatly merciful.”

All the world will be saved and I will be damned.

Keep your mind in Hell, and despair not.

The vilest of sins is a smouldering ember thrown into
the ocean of God's love.

Our social program is the Trinity.

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

Happiness in an Age of Crisis

Core Principles

I'd like to open by flatly contradicting something that is openly stated in Scripture. St. Paul in defending Christ's resurrection and our own (1 Cor 15:19, RSV), writes if there is no resurrection, "*If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.*"

Now I believe there is a resurrection, and furthermore that the significance of this life lies precisely in the fact that by our lives on earth we are making an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell. But I would like to submit something that may seem a straight-out opposite: suppose that there is no final resurrection, no judgment, no life or experience or existence after death, just nothingness, and the only life to be had is this life. That is all. In that case, what kind of life is to be desired? My answer is "Exactly the same as what Orthodox Christians try to live today."

In regard to future punishment and rewards, Martin Luther was right when he said, "If we knew what Christ came to save us **from**, we would die of *fear*. If we knew what Christ came to save us **for**, we would die of *joy*." And

for that matter, C.S. Lewis was right when he portrayed Heaven as infinitely eclipsing Hell. And it is in regard to future reward that St. Maximus Confessor distinguished from three ranks among the Lord's disciples: *slaves*, who obey out of fear, *mercenaries*, who obey out of hope for future reward, and *sons*, who obey out of love.

Now all three of these have a place, and I have obeyed as a slave at times, knowing that suicide would be a direct door to Hell, and on that point I would recall the *Philokalia* saying that strange as it may sound, we owe more to Hell than to Heaven, because more people have been saved through fear of Hell's torments than through hope of Heaven's joys. But mercenaries are more noble than slaves, and sons more noble than both. And in the end mercenaries are more insulated from Hell's torments than slaves, sons even more insulated than slaves, and sons are more handsomely rewarded than mercenaries in the next life.

But with this as a big picture I cannot rightly disown, I'd like to narrow things down and focus solely on mercenary concerns, and even more unusually focus on this life.

People have said that virtue is its own reward, enough so that Calvin and Hobbes, with a Spaceman Spiff wanting to teach aliens that virtue is its own reward, despite the fact that I have never seen in the entire Calvin and Hobbes history evidence of Calvin having any concept that virtue could be its own reward. But what *does* it mean? I am wary of assuming that the reader knows what this means, or whether the saying is understood in addition to being quoted mindlessly.

Ask a recovering alcoholic who's been dry for years which is better: being sober, or being drunk all the time. Now being drunk, or today toking, may bring great pleasure

if you're basically sober. However, I believe that most recovering alcoholics would vehemently affirm that being sober is better than being a slave chained to a bottle more constricting than a genie's lamp. It has been said that alcoholism is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy! Or to quote Chesterton about another topic, "It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride." Humility is a *vaster* thing than pride. And even within the limits of this life, on purely mercenary concerns, virtue is better today than vice.

There is an interesting point about how happiness is conceived in classical Greek, as represented by Plato and others, where the word, εὐδαιμονία or *eudaimonia*, literally means "good spirits" and describes the happiness that derives from one's spirit being in good condition. Thinking of happiness without particular regard to the health of one's spirit is a bit like thinking about the endocrine rush provided by a good exercise program without any real regard to the health of one's body: absurd, and how absurd it is is partly unpacked in the world's oldest, longest, least funny, and *least intentional* political joke: *The Republic*. As to how this is unpacked, I refer the reader to the classics; but the idea of achieving happiness without one's spirits being in good condition comes across as out of place, perhaps perhaps simply inconceivable, perhaps impossible, or perhaps just absurd and undesirable.

And this much may be said without touching any merits or joys that are specific to Christianity or Eastern Orthodoxy. But in fact living the life of Christ already starts on earth, acquisition of the Holy Spirit already starts on earth, and Heaven itself starts on earth, and if there is (I

speak hypothetically) no Heaven awaiting the faithful after death, I would rather live the beginning of Heaven on earth, and then stop existing or experiencing, than never touch Heaven at all.

And in terms of virtues and vices, I have something to say about the occult that may wound some of my dearest readers. *It is unnatural vice.*

The concept of unnatural vice in Orthodoxy is broader than sexual perversions including porn, and it may be hard to see why an informed person would call unnatural a nature religion like Wicca. My response is this: As far as standardized tests like the SAT go, there are some test preparation strategies that can legitimately raise scores. Kaplan, or its competitors, can raise scores. But there is another school that says that if you're not cheating you're not playing hard enough, and are strategies to cheat on tests. And the occult amounts to approaching cheating as how you raise your score, and is not satisfied with legitimate test preparation. It is an unnatural vice, and heavy nature theming and self-presentation as a route to harmony with nature do not change the fact that the empowerment Wicca claims is empowerment through nature-themed unnatural vice. Unnatural vice that works with plants is unnatural as artistic pornography in beautiful natural surroundings (eveandherfriends DOT tumblr DOT com) is an unnatural vice that disenchant the entire universe. Attempts to engage in an unnatural vice in a natural way do not remove the fact or the problem of a draining unnatural vice that destroys the possibility of joy. One acquaintance talked about how one person considered himself not to be an alcoholic, because he only drank *gourmet* wines!

I fear by saying this much, I may have already lost much

of my audience by now. However, to help bring you to your senses, I would bring a poem (simply text with punctuation based on per cola et commata's lines):

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 Mother of God, the saints,
Forever welcome me with open hearts,
And the oil of their gladness,
Loosens my fist,

Little by little.

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

G.K. Chesterton said something relevant to much more than poets and logicians:

The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion, like the physical exhaustion of Mr. Holbein. To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.

The Blessed Augustine wrote that if a master sends two slaves by routes that will cross, their meeting is an accident from the slaves' perspective but by design from the master's perspective. What is lost in all this is, if I may take a cue from astrology, dancing the Great Dance, where the dance is led by a little girl with a tambourine. Sin constricts; occult sin seeks to draw Heaven down to fit your desires. What we need is not to reduce Heaven to fit us; we need to open ourselves to fit Heaven. And when we pray, odd but wonderful coincidences can happen, and God draws us out of the Hell of self.

Applications in Our Day

Yes, that is well and good for easier times, but what about today?

Let me return to an example I have used earlier. The Bible contains warnings against drunkenness in both the Old and New Testaments. In Bible times, wine fermented to about 4% alcohol, which is a third of the alcohol in wine and slightly less than in a standard beer. In the Graeco-Roman world, that wine was mixed 1:2 with water, so we're bringing the alcohol content down to significantly less than lite beer. It takes (or at least it takes us—I unofficially suspect that major dietary differences influence how well you can hold your liquor) a fair amount of drinking to get drunk.

Since ancient warnings about using wine in moderation or not using it at all, we have developed not only strong beer but wine that used to be 12% alcohol (that number tends to steadily increasing), and eighty proof, and Everclear if you wish, and now cannibalis—er, cannabis—is legal, with stronger drugs illegal but still available in 50 States.

Q: Is sobriety still relevant?

A: Now more than ever.

It's harder to reach, but this sort of thing is if anything even more essential. (There is more on spiritual sobriety in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, which I highly recommend.)

Do not worry

Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount, said (Matthew 6:25-27, COB),

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

I have found that trying to solve a life's problems on a day's resources is a sure road to despair. The Sermon on the Mount is very practical in an everyday here and now. Some people have gotten the impression that I am better at planning and orchestrating than they are. I categorically deny the charges.

When I was in high school, there was a game of sorts called "Wargames," that showed a world map and had a button to launch missiles. When you clicked on "Launch," you could see the missile trajectories as missiles launched from the God-blessed USA to the godless USSR—and from the godless USSR to the God-blessed USA, resulting in essentially total world annihilation. Then a preachy enough message appeared: "The only way to win this game is not to play at all." And so it is with worry: *The only way to win this game is not to play at all.*

Inner peace does not come when you have worried your ducks all into a row. Inner peace comes when you solve

today's problems, or even the problems of part of today, on today's resources, and you let go.

Repulsive advice to heed

“In humility consider others better than yourself.”
(Philippians 2:3, RSV)

This has got to be near the top of things in the Bible that we want to drag our heels on, but let me ask almost a riddle:

Would you rather meet people you admire and are in awe of, or people you look down on and despise?

If you'd like to be in the presence of people you admire, *admire other people by in humility considering others better than yourself.*

It's **that** simple!

In the Philokalia we read St. Peter of Damascus's "A Treasury of Divine Knowledge":

...Thus through self-control he practices the other virtues as well. He looks on himself as in God's debt for everything, finding nothing whatsoever with which to repay to his Benefactor, and even thinking that his virtues simply increase his debt. For he receives and has nothing to give. He only asks that he may be allowed to offer thanks to God. Yet even the fact that God accepts his thanks puts him, so he thinks, into still greater debt. But he continues to give thanks, ever doing what is good and reckoning himself an ever greater debtor, in his humility considering himself lower than all men, delighting in God his Benefactor and trembling even as he rejoices (cf. Ps. 2: I 1).

It is no accident that positive psychology tries to crank gratitude to the max. But there is ideally a feedback loop between gratitude and humility, and humility is deeper; it could almost be called the fourth Christian or theological virtue.

It is a wondrous experience to recognize that one is unworthy even to thank God for his many blessings, and thank him for his many blessings anyway.

So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord... (1 Peter 3:5-6)

This passage is not politically correct, but it is a hinge of joy and it respects the nature of women however much we try to grind it out of them. Snow White sang, “Some day, my prince will come,” and it is the desire of every little girl to marry a prince. This is true in all the older Disney cartoons except maybe Aladdin: a princess like Ariel and a commoner like Belle are both happy in being married to a lord. Out of this I have advice: if you want to be married to a lord then you might well see, and treat, your husband as your lord.

C.S. Lewis in *That Hideous Strength* says that obedience is “...also an erotic necessity.”

Ok, more people probably lost there. Despite my best wishes.

I have presented a paltry few aspects of the layer Christianity has to offer to those who seek mercenary reward, and are concerned within the bounds of this life.

Christianity is not just pie in the sky when you die.

It is also steak on your plate while you wait.

Steak on your plate while you wait

I would like to give links to works on this site that significantly address mercenary concerns within the scope of this life, at least as one layer. This layer may not in the end be separable from obeying God out of sheer and undiluted love, but they are meant to speak here now and address our own interests.

You Can Choose to Be Happy in the Here and Now

A guide to something very easily overlooked. And not just because of first world problems.

Will There Be a Place for Me?

This is a question I have asked quite earnestly and quite fearfully. I look back on how God has provided after I wondered in terror, “Will there be a place for me?”

Why I’m Glad I’m Living Now, at This Place, at This Time, in This World

God did not make a mistake by placing you and me where he has put us in the world and in history. It is a decision made of quite maximum Providence, and I look at what in it should be appreciated.

Escape

A look at the perennial temptation to escapism, and how the temptation can be overcome and our eyes opened to a wonderful here and now.

What to Own for Happiness (and what not)

A look at what possessions are and aren't helpful to live a happy life.

Doxology

If you want to know what set of eyes you should be looking through, look through these eyes here. It tells of a glory offered us that begins here and now: and what kind of glorious God governs the here and now.

Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret

In *The Paradise Wars*, one character says, "You're not happy unless you're miserable." I generally find myself happiest in repentance—and blindsided by unexpected reward!

A Pet Owner's Rules

God is like a Pet Owner who has only two rules, and the rules are designed for *our* benefit, not His.

The Angelic Letters

Each of us has a guardian angel assigned at baptism, and a personal tempting demon allowed to test us for our strengthening. C.S. Lewis writes about a personal

tempter. I write about our guardian angel.

God the Spiritual Father

Life may sometimes feel like a ship without a Captain. But there is in fact a Captain who has arranged everything for you with as much care as if you were the only person He ever created.

God the Game Changer

Sometimes things happen that appear so bad that nothing good can come out of them. God has been taking good out of terrible situations since before His only Son was crucified.

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

This is what Orthodoxy has that is better than Narnia.

The Arena

Each of us is called to be famous before God, and God wishes to show His excellence in our excellence.

To a Friend

I wrote this, really, for just one friend, and I would do the same for you.

Tong Fior Blackbelt: The Martial Art of Joyous Conflict

I'm not happy with this piece, but it offers an extended exposition of "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

A Canticle to Holy, Blessed Solipsism

There is an Orthodox saying, "Only God and I exist."
Learn what it means.

Who Is Rich? The Person Who Is Content

A look at true wealth.

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

From one who has both the Philosopher's Stone and the Elixir of Life, and is not Solomon or Melchizedek

The Best Things In Life Are Free

This looks at how some of the toughest pills to swallow can in fact be the best things in life.

All Orthodox Theology Is Positive Theology

An upgrade from positive psychology.

The Consolation of Theology

I don't know if I can call this any sort of upgrade to Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, but if a Christian may be sustained by the riches of pagan philosophy, *a fortiori* an Orthodox Christian may be

sustained by the riches of Christian theology

Eastern Orthodoxy: Disorganized Religion at Its Finest

If you don't like organized religion, you'll love
Orthodoxy!

Paradise

The note on which I wish to end this ensemble.

Epilogue: For Further Reading

This is a long book, but some readers may well come to the end and wish it were longer. Here is a “for further reading” list of titles for that eventuality.

Calm

I was given a ride recently for a hospital visit over an hour away. I thanked the friend and postulant (beginner at an Orthodox monastery). He commented that he liked being with me, because I was very calm and calming to be around. That was exquisite politeness, but it was not flattery. Another postulant, my godson, commented that he liked being around me because he hoped some of my calm would rub off. The thought occurred to me that I might write down some of what I have learned about keeping one's calm, and send a link to both postulants. As I told them, some of my calm is hard-won, and I wanted to talk about what to do that might win it.

I do not believe the Law of Attraction as formulated in new age to be desirable, but there is a Little Law of Attraction that is worth its proverbial weight in gold. The Little Law of Attraction is that if you think thoughts of peace, you will get more and bigger thoughts of peace, and if you think thoughts of anger, you will get more and bigger thoughts of anger, *and conflict with it*. If we keep our mind on our circumstances, we will be dragged into a Hell on earth. If we focus on the Lord, we will have peace and a Heaven on earth. Thus I would summarize the better parts

of *Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives* by Elder Thaddeus, which also says that we have an incredibly beautiful sensitivity to the thoughts of others, and pick up on what they are feeling. This is part of why my deep calm was calming to the others. Furthermore, even if we do not realize it, we have a choice whether to be dominated by the anger of others. My understanding, not having read the book, is that this is the same freedom discussed in *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl, and the latter may be a better starting point. We may not recognize our freedom here, and it comes in a brief window, but we have a choice. Addicts are told, "You have more power than you think," and the power can be exercised in this short window.

That choice is in continuity with *nipsis* or the spiritual watchfulness of the Philokalia, which on this point I would summarize as follows. If there is a spark that can become a flame in your house, you can put it out before it becomes a proper flame. If it does become a proper flame, you can put it out before it spreads with a fire extinguisher, but this is worse than just putting out the spark. If it becomes a flame that is too big to put out with a fire extinguisher, and spreads through your house, if you leave with your life you can call the fire department and you may have the flame put out then, and get insurance to help, but it is better to put it out with a fire extinguisher than wait until it is too big for a fire extinguisher. There are several ways to escape with your life, but the earlier in the process you stop it, the better, and the least harm it will cause you. If you put out what is still just a spark when it is still just a spark, the entire remainder of the damaging process of a house fire is avoided.

For an Arthurian image, be like the Fisher-King, in a

boat on the waters, watching with a spear to stab fish in the water. And there is something further I would like to point out: the Fisher-King is wounded through the thighs, meaning he is wounded *between* the thighs, and of a damaged virility.

The biggest attack on manhood in the recent past is porn. Porn is, to quote Proverbs, "in the beginning as sweet as honey, and in the end bitter as gall and sharp as a double-edged sword." Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe, which disenchantments everything else, and then disenchantments itself. The only goal of lust is more lust, and porn is nothing more than an advertisement for more porn. Furthermore, what men do after looking at porn is an ultimate exploitation of the model, using her unhappy performance just as a tool to spark... if you have this struggle, and most men today do, think about what is really going on. And lust is cruel; it generates anger whenever it is not getting a "fix", and it is a great enemy to inner peace.

I mention this point, which may seem none of my business, because really *the whole Sermon on the Mount* relates to calm. Lust and porn are an enemy to calm, and worth getting free of. The Sermon on the Mount does not just help us reach calm when it touches on stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger's "We suffer more in imagination than in reality," and says not to borrow trouble from tomorrow because "each day has enough trouble as its own." Trying to solve the rest of your life's problems on a day's resources is a gateway to something truly hellish, and worry does nothing but hurt us: "Do you think you can add a single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry your way into being a foot taller!"

Another point in the Sermon on the Mount has to do

with love for enemies. Love for enemies was something I knew to be important growing up, but I did not really know how. My struggles with remembering wrongs others had done against me (a sin by the way—and nothing merry!), became markedly better when I was able to thank God for them. St. Silouan and the writing of St. Silouan's disciple St. Sophrony and St. Sophrony's disciple Archimandrite Zacharias were tremendously helpful in helping me let go of an onerous burden of remembering all the bad things that had happened to me. They also underscore something important: *how much you love your enemies is a litmus test for how far you love God*, so love for enemies is not just one issue among others. We should not be angry to those who wrong us, but love and pity them for bringing occasion for our suffering. Innocent suffering is a sharing in the sufferings of Christ, and the Sermon on the Plain bids you leap for joy when you are badly treated because of Christ. However, the principle applies to undeserved suffering.

There was a student who worked in my department's office, who talked about having butterflies in her stomach about a shortly upcoming dance performance. I gave permission to offer a word of advice, and I asked her, "Is there a person, or a place, or a memory that is pleasant to think about to you?" She said that yes, there was such a thing. I said that she had practiced and the only thing remaining was to do the performance, and I told her, "I want you to think about that until the performance." Counting your blessings, and being grateful for all that God and other people have given you, is a recipe for joy, and it was more in reach than my telling her not to worry: yes, that is what I wanted, but on her resources, *how?* If some of

what I said above is too much for you now, it may be an easier task to be mindful of your blessings. It has been said that in prayer we should not have very good thoughts but *no thoughts*, but that's a more advanced lesson. Even if St. Silouan and his spiritual progeny have something better, developing gratitude is a recipe for joy, and it is something else that we can do to try to push out remembrance of wrongs others have done against us.

When I was studying theology and things were getting rough, there was a period of about two or three weeks when I was stressed to the point of uninterrupted waking nausea. Part of it was triggered by a questionable decision a doctor made with my medication, but the heart of my worry was, "Will there be a place for me?" And there has been a place: I was at my parents' house, and then now at this monastery where I am trying to grow up. I am retired on disability. Now the question may come of, "But inflation is taking off," to which I would say, "The Bible never says, '*Lack of money is the root of all evil.*'" Most of the original recipients of the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the poor and downtrodden in what would today be considered a third world economy. As the cliché goes, "I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but I know *Who* brings tomorrow." Possibly changes in the economy will result in, or rather *trigger* my death, but I have never in my life gone to bed knowing that I would wake up the following morning. I do not see my death as really negotiable, unless I live to Christ's return, and I would recall a joke where a husband and wife came to Heaven and the husband told his wife, "We could have been here several years earlier if you hadn't cooked such healthy food!" Death is not to be feared, just death outside of repentance, death outside of obedience to

the Lord, and the Lord can see that there is a place for me even if I die tomorrow.

There is an old Protestant hymn that says,

Keep your eyes upon 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.

My abbot underscores a short maxim of "Never react. Never resent. Keep inner peace." The intent of this posting is not to offer something better, but to offer an aid *how*. And if you want low-hanging fruit, try to let go of worry and trying to solve tomorrow's problems on today's resources, and start trying to push such thoughts out of your heart by giving them competition in terms of active remembrance of every good blessing God has given you in your entire life. And maybe read e.g. "God the Spiritual Father" or better the whole collection in this book, which includes "God the Spiritual Father" and several other relevant pieces.

Much Love,
Br. Christos

I thank Thee

I thank Thee, O my God,
For all that Thou hast done,
And all that Thou hast given me.

I thank Thee for Fr. Seraphim's militants,
Whose response to *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim
Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*,
Did not stop in a forum at harassment,
But show ongoing vindictiveness,
Not satisfied with one-star ratings to that title,
But see to it that positive reviews of all my works on
Amazon,
If they can be dislodged,
Are taken down quickly,
Presenting readers with a review profile that gives every
impression of copious mediocrity.
I thank thee for the revenge that still rages at me.

I thank Thee for Amazon's censorship,
That of the Classic Orthodox Bible,
Blessed by my heirarch out of kindness,
Though prior single-volume publications remain live,
A Bible publishing friend's advice,
To break it in multiple volumes and be easier on the books'
spine,

With repetition the New Testament's Gospel and Epistles were approved at \$15 each; The whole Old Testament, Law, Historical Books, Wisdom Literature, and Prophets must elsewhere be sought, \$40 apiece.

I thank Thee for Fr. Seraphim's axe-wielding converts,
For know I not all the Reason in Thy Providence,
Yet I note a few guesses:
That by them Thou savest me from full-blown fame too soon,
And if they hit me in my pocketbook thus,
Thou givest what money I need,
Not all of my wants.

And for such things the Sermon on the Mount bids me rejoice,
And the Sermon on the Plain positively bids me leap for joy,
So truly, rejoicing is fit,
For dishonor at the hands of men on earth,
Is one mark of honor in the life to come.

I thank Thee for this transcendentally important life,
Birth and death, says St. Luke, are an inch apart,
While the ticker tape goes on forever.
After death, the blessed may rise from glory to glory:
In this life alone may we repent,
In this life alone may we choose between Heaven and Hell,
Life is the dress rehearsal,
And through eternity we will live the rôle we have chosen on earth.

The devil, God's buffoon, God's jester in fact,
Announced to all Heaven St. Job a mere mercenary,
Honoring God,

So said the slanderer, only for his wealth,
 And when the devil's slander proved utterly false,
 The devil, who hath not power over swine except that God
 permit,
 Slandered the saint again, shifting his slander to Job's
 health,
 A second time struck him,
 And was a second time made a buffoon.

St. Job, the blameless worshiper of God,
 A title given a scant handful of times in the entire scripture,
 Stands a prince to God's right hand,
 Part of the great cloud of witnesses,
 Victors who have run the race, fought the good fight, kept
 the faith;
 Crowned and cheering those of us who still run the race.
 St. Job's being struck down and rising up less than an inch
 apart,
 His glory as a blameless worshiper of God lasts forever,
 And following St. John Chrysostom, I proclaim him victor,
 Not from when God restored his fortunes double,
 But because when stricken, he answered,
 "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away:
 As it seemed good to the Lord, so hath it come to pass;
 Blessed be the Name of the Lord."
 Shaking the very foundation of Hell,
 A work not begun only after Christ's most blameless
 worshiper answered,
 "Behold the slave of the Lord;
 Be it unto me according to thy word."
 And both blameless worshipers of God cheer me,
 I who in whose suffer St. Job might see,
 A faint glimmer of his own in mine,
 Depression, and cancer, and so.

I thank me for providers past,

One on intake gave my dosing the benefit of the doubt,
But ere too long set their hearts on improving and
regulating my dosing,
Ignoring my cries that I was incapacitated when they had
gone halfway to their goal,
Genuinely saddened to see me in decline when they reached
their goal,
But not considering that their victory was costing me my
life;
Under that shadow and that uncertainty I wrote,
The Consolation of Theology.
And finally, they decided that their preferred dosing,
Was not *quite* as important as my life.

I thank thee for providers now,
Who took me in as a refugee from a provider trying to
improve my dosing,
But have decided that come spring,
They have their own new quest to improve my dosing.

I have not the right to complain,
I have not reason to complain,
And not just because Orthodox see next to nothing in terms
of rights,
My life is at God's disposal:
I have never gone to sleep knowing I would ever wake,
Nor can I deny,
That this may be precisely,
How the Lord sees me to glory.

Under this shadow,
*If it really is a shadow **at all**,*
I thank God for everything.
Glory to God for all things!

I thank God for my ranking 7th in a nationwide math contest,
For seeing me to repentance for thus defining myself,
For letting me write Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide,
A note that others may learn things I learned at dearer price.

I thank God for all things material,
For food enough even in a fast,
For bedding, for electricity, Internet access;
For clothing to spare, and Paleo food to spare;
For every flash of lightning,
Every weather called fair or foul;
For a universe which announces Thy wonder,
For Heavens that declare Thy glory:

For the phenomenon I write about in Zeitgeist and Giftedness,
My coincidences of skating ahead of the Zeitgeist,
And my hope that we may indeed be at the doors of a renaissance of Orthodoxy,
That I may witness to, living or departed.

I thank Thee for my difficulties in communicating,
With autism or without;
(For profoundly gifted traits may explain things,
Without the question of autism needed.)
I thank Thee that I have needed to struggle to communicate,
And that Thou hast been with me,
Guiding me still,

I thank Thee that Thou hast placed me,
Where Fr. Seraphim's followers have seen Creation Science as just legitimate, non-doctrinally biased "science,"
And not a massive import of Protestant belief and practice to Orthodoxy where it belongeth not,

Such things are a first domino to fall,
A second domino contrarian virtue signalling by asserting
Flag Earth and the like,
Perhaps a third, to take a contrarian attitude to minor
things "everybody knows" the Church asserts,
A fourth, to take a seemingly discerning exception to the
deity of Christ or God's redeeming love for all sinners,
I thank Thee for when and where Thou hast placed me,
And in Thy sovereign Love.

I thank Thee for a monastery at all—
Let alone a monastery such as this,
Unworthy son and brother though I may be.

I thank Thee for the Metropolitan Abbot—
Far in excess of what rights I might construe myself;
I thank Thee for the brotherhood, both for its many
kindnesses and occasional friction;
Few are wise to enter hermitage directly,
And most of us if we seek monasticism are advised to the
life together,
Where even frictions are part of how the Holy Spirit works
on us.

I thank Thee that I have lived in the time of Covid,
And the cyber-quarantine which makes my The Luddite's
Guide to Technology all the more to the point:
I thank Thee for the many places I have landed in the right
time at the right time,
I would be foolish indeed to think I earned but a sliver, if
any, by my own merits.

I thank Thee that I got into the web,
Within a year or two of its foundation;
I thank Thee for my website,

For every post Thou hast given me space to write,
 For every help Thou hast given me,
 For awards won, whether or not they were rightly sought.

I thank Thee for the Philokalia,
 And an Abbot wise enough to assign me humbler fare;
 I thank Thee both for his blessings to read things he thinks
 would fit me now,
 And his refraining from offering a blessing when I might
 better be served by something else:
 I thank Thee that I have in him a physician,
 To free me from self-will, a gate of Hell;
 I thank Thee for each brother;
 Perhaps even it may be said, as Ransom spoke in *That
 Hideous Strength*:
 "You never chose me. I never chose you."
 And if I live in times resonant with *That Hideous Strength's*
 ills,
 I thank Thee for the compliment Thou hast given me,
 Unworthy of it though I may ever be:
 For Thou hast not placed me, as in *Narnia*,
 Where peaceful reign followed peaceful reign,
 Until there was hardly anything to be put in history books.

I thank Thee for the many good things I do not even think
 to thank Thee for;
 To be placed in such a Creation,
 And under a God the Spiritual Father,
 Where everything that happens,
 Is said to be a blessing from God,
 Or a temptation allowed for our strengthening.
 I thank thee for my Abbot,
 Who like any good Abbot rejoices in the creation of
 immortal gods:
 And Thou Thyself who guidest him,
 And makes his work a participation that both represents

and embodies,
Thine own Work,
In the Creation of immortal gods.

I thank Thee for marriage,
And the many who find life in its blessed estate;
I thank Thee that my parents are still married to each other;
I thank Thee both for what they did wisely,
And where you have given me something to outgrow.

I thank Thee for my teachers and mine education;
For blessings and temptations for my strength;
I thank Thee that my Abbot has clarified,
That I am no longer an academic,
And has set me on a start of obediences,
To help me grow, as he seeks for each brother.

I thank Thee for the Hieromonk,
Who met me briefly on a pilgrimage elsewhere,
I hope I have not embarrassed him,
For he has done much to help me.

I thank Thee for each brother,
Child though I may be,
And their patience towards me.

I thank Thee for a 3D printer,
Both when it worked and now,
In the giving and the taking a lesson alike,
I thank Thee for what I have owned,
And what I have never owned.

I thank Thee that by Archimandrite Zacharias's writing,
blessed by my Abbot,
I have been given a glimpse,

Of being a monk,
 Identifying with all Adam,
 Repenting, if Thou allowest,
 To the benefit of all Adam.

And I thank Thee that I am a novice now,
 "Bishops wish they were novices!"
 And I thank Thee for Thy Holy Cross Hermitage,
 And the welcome they gave me,
 And the friendship that continues.

I am unworthy to thank Thee,
 But I thank Thee still;
 Thou art beyond all that even can be thought,
 And yet Thou offerest to be our God, and my God.

If I carry a calm with me,
 And am proven to be a calming presence,
 I thank Thee for that,
 And for seeing me through struggles that it took.

I thank you for words about arrogance in The Consolation
 of Theology:

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
 "There be no war in Heaven,
 Not now, at very least,
 And not ere were created,
 The royal race of mankind.
 Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
 And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
 There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
 The Archangel Saint Michael,

Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, "Michael,"
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth
therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that
shaketh it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it
up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,

Because that wert the greatest harm,
 That he saweth how to do.
 The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
 'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
 Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
 The Devil and the devils aren't much,
 Without the divine permission,
 And truth be told,
 Ain't much with it either:
 God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
 St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
 A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
 Asked the Abbot what he should do:
 "It is just the demons.
 Pay it no mind," came the answer.
 Every devil is on a leash,
 And the devout are immune to magic.
 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
 The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample
 under feet.
 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your
 feet.
 Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
 But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the
 Devil himself:
 "Blow, and spit on him."

And if I, utterly unworthy to give Thee thanks, may make so bold to make a request:

May you raise me up to pen a fitting word about humility?

Glory to God for all things!

Thy most unworthy slave,
 Br. Christos

You Can Choose to Be Happy in the Here and Now

There was one LinkedIn conversation that was bigger than what I realized. One man asked a question of how to handle the fact that he was not in a position to advance professionally and had no meaningful freedom.

I suggested something like,

Let's look at a position where you have as little freedom as possible, and ask if there can be any meaningful freedom. You can probably think of some pretty gruesome examples; I would like to look at Nazi concentration camps and ask, "Is there any way to have real freedom in a Nazi concentration camp?"

One person who answered "Yes" to that question was Victor Frankl, Jewish psychiatrist and Nazi concentration camp survivor who wrote *Man's Search for Meaning*."

If you are not in a position to advance professionally and don't see yourself as having any real freedom, you are in an excellent position to profit

from *Man's Search for Meaning*.”

(I've *got* to read the book directly and not just be going off of other people's summaries!)

That hit a nerve, although my correspondent was in every sense gracious. I was unwittingly corresponding with the Jewish son of a Jewish survivor of Hitler's concentration camps, and seared by the stories. There was nothing academic to him in the example I chose. He was very gentle about his response, and he was appreciative at my suggestion that if he was in the position he said he was in, he had a great deal of meaningful freedom, and perhaps at my pointer to *Man's Search for Meaning*.

The core point attributed to Frankl is that we do not automatically go from *stimulus* to *response*; we go from *stimulus* to *free choice* to *response*, even if we are unaware of our birthright. Such an insight is also at the core of the *Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*, with “nipsis” referring to an inner spiritual watchfulness. It is something like the core of what classical Buddhism has to offer as well. My dear Abbot condensed it to one line. He has said and underscored, “Never react. Never resent. Keep inner stillness.”

Enjoying the here and now is a choice. Our surroundings may seem like something to escape, but that is a spiritual trap, the core response in the *Philokalia* being to just keep on praying until the “demon of noonday” has passed. It is a crushing experience, but over time we can learn to crush it.

Most of our surroundings are beautiful, but we can become immune to the beauty of a wooden floor, an off-white wall. But we can choose to be awake to this beauty to

which we have fallen asleep. We can choose to be grateful, and by the way positive psychology is squarely on target that we should be grateful for. Mindfulness also helps; it used to be considered “paying attention” and part of politeness to the boomers, and we are seeking mindfulness from the East because we have rejected it in the West. But gratitude and mindfulness are both choices, as is enjoying beauty. A Russian proverb answers the questions by saying, “When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?” with, “There is only one important time, and that time is now. The most important one is always the one you are with. And the most important thing is to do good for the One Who is standing at your side.” Today this is recognized as profound mindfulness. It is still also manners at their best, and something that goes beyond manners.

There is also what St. John Chrysostom referred to as “healing an eye”. Lust, classic Fathers say, has the characteristic of a lion who looks at a deer and sees only meat. And, perhaps I might add, meat that is rarely enough and does not engender any form of permanent satisfaction. It has been called the disenchantment of the entire universe. But a man looking at a woman has a choice to see an integral and beautiful whole: a spirit adorned with a body and a body adorned with clothing. C.S. Lewis, telling an imagined story with the saints in paradise in *The Great Divorce*, said,

Long after that I saw people coming to meet us.
Because they were bright I saw them when they were
still very distant, and at first I did not know they were

people at all. Mile after mile they grew nearer. The earth shook under their tread as their strong feet sank into the wet turf. A tiny haze and a sweet smell went up where they had crushed the grass and scattered the dew. Some were naked, some robed. But the naked ones did not seem less adorned, and the robes did not disguise in those who wore them the massive grandeur of muscle and the radiant smoothness of flesh.

We are not ready for such things now and C.S. Lewis offered only an imagination. Or, if you prefer Wendy Shalit's *A Return to Modesty*, we can be "naked and bored." But there is great deal of benefit in seeing an integrated whole, a spirit adorned with a body and a body adorned with clothing.

More broadly though, our healed eyes can sense beauty, and in rough circumstances, bleeding and in an ER, I know one who was able to see the beauty of a hospital curtain and wait in satisfaction.

It is not easy. But counselors tell those fighting various addictions, "You have more power than you think." Nipsis or spiritual watchfulness extinguishes sparks before they become a fire. If your house is on fire you can call the fire department, and they may salvage surprisingly much. If your chair is on fire a fire extinguisher may see that a fire that started on a chair, stays only with that chair. But the best option is to stomp out the first spark before it has set the rug on fire. Or if I may take the bull by the hand to mix metaphors, don't go near the **bait**; just ignore it and let it pass by.

Never react. Never resent. Keep inner stillness.

Happiness in the here and now is a choice, and we have

more power than most of us think. When there is a little spark, dash it against the rock. But the metaphor is strained because the best solution is not to engage it and not give it the fuel of your attention.

Happiness is also a by-product of what positive psychology calls “the meaningful life,” and there are other things to being healthy in your heart of hearts and having a good condition. A healthy (such as Paleo) diet / exercise / sleep can also make a big difference. But the biggest difference is always in our heart of hearts. Part of that is that we can savor the here and now and be aware of its beauty.

You can choose to be happy in the here and now.

Will There be a Place for Me?

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Do not worry for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Do you think you can add one single hour to your life by worrying? You might as well try to worry your way into being a foot taller!

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even

Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

The Sermon on the Mount (COB)

The year was 2006 and I was studying at Fordham. A doctor made a mistake that let me be stressed to the point of uninterrupted waking nausea for weeks.

Part of my attendance at Cambridge, and then Fordham, was to get a PhD, the unofficial union card to teaching at university level, and the issue was not whether I would have the superhuman honorific of “Dr. Hayward.” Or rather that was a secondary issue that did not help, but my fear was of something much worse: “*Will there be a place for me?*”

Before all of that, another physician had prescribed medications that made for a year of idleness, lying on my bed, staring at my light bulb, and thinking “This is worse than watching television.” When the idleness ended, I found that my interests in the humanities came back quickly,

computer work came back more slowly and perhaps not quite as well, but my discipline, mathematics, never came back. I had reconnected with math after four months away from math once before, and that was when I was significantly younger.

My study of academic theology was meant as retooling; since the door to mathematics was closed, information technology work had been a square peg in a round hole, and I looked for what next. I inquired about interdisciplinary PhD, and was told to pick a single academic discipline as his department had tremendous difficulties placing “American Studies” PhD’s whose skills were divided between American history and literature: history departments wanted to hire a proper history PhD, and literature departments wanted to hire a proper literature PhD. And advised to pick one discipline, I picked the one that mattered to me most: theology.

And when things were turning ugly around Fordham, the question “Will there be a place for me?” was a question of what Providence I would be given. I’ve made a couple of forays at trying to teach theology without a PhD and without an Orthodox seminary degree, but no one has nibbled, and that may be just as well. But that left me with the square peg, round hole, and strong personalities who consider it disrespectful for a subordinate to be smarter than them. And I was going ahead, flailing.

Part of what I had worried before Fordham was how I would handle the daily grind, but for me a day’s worth of daily grind is doable one day at a time. And after my parents explained that they were not going to keep the house indefinitely for me, I was able to retire on disability, and when Section 8 housing would have required injections I

am not morally comfortable with, a door had been open and I have been a welcome guest at the little gem of St. Demetrios Skete.

There has always been a place for me. I don't know if I will die in a FEMA camp, but Paradise is wherever the saints are, and I am with (s)aints now. There has always been a place for me, and I believe God always will provide for me if I am faithful. I would recall the Akathist hymn "Glory to God for All Things:"

Glory to God for All Things

ODE 1

Everlasting King, Your will for our salvation is full of power. Your right arm controls the whole course of human life. We give You thanks for all Your mercies, seen and unseen: For eternal life, for the heavenly joys of the Kingdom which is to be. Grant mercy to us who sing Your praises, both now and in the time to come. Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

IKOS 1

I was born a weak, defenseless child, but Your angel spread his wings over my cradle to defend me. From birth until now, Your love has illumined my path, and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity. From birth until now the generous gifts of Your Providence have been marvelously showered upon me. I give You thanks, with all who have come to

know You, who call upon Your Name:

Glory to You for calling me into being.

Glory to You, showing me the beauty of the universe.

Glory to You, spreading out before me heaven and earth, like the pages in a book of eternal wisdom.

Glory to You for Your eternity in this fleeting world.

Glory to You for Your mercies, seen and unseen.

Glory to You, through every sigh of my sorrow.

Glory to You for every step of my life's journey, for every moment of glory.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 2

O Lord, how lovely it is to be Your guest. Breeze full of scents — mountains reaching to the skies — waters like a boundless mirror, reflecting the sun's golden rays and the scudding clouds. All nature murmurs mysteriously, breathing depths of Your tenderness. Birds and beasts of the forest bear the imprint of Your love. Blessed are you, mother earth, in your fleeting loveliness, which wakens our yearning for happiness that will last forever in the land where, amid beauty that grows not old, rings out the cry: Alleluia!

IKOS 2

You have brought me into life as if into an enchanted paradise. We have seen the sky like a chalice of deepest blue, where in the azure heights the birds are singing. We have listened to the soothing murmur of

the forest and the melodious music of the streams. We have tasted fruit of fine flavor and the sweet-scented honey. We can live very well on your earth. It is a pleasure to be your guest.

Glory to You for the feast-day of life.

Glory to You for the perfume of lilies and roses.

Glory to You for each different taste of berry and fruit.

Glory to You for the sparkling silver of early morning dew.

Glory to You for the joy of dawn's awakening.

Glory to You for the new life each day brings.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 3

It is the Holy Spirit Who makes us find joy in each flower—the exquisite scent, the delicate color — the beauty of the Most High in the tiniest of things. Glory and honor to the Spirit, the Giver of Life, Who covers the fields with their carpet of flowers, crowns the harvest with gold, and gives to us the joy of gazing at it with our eyes. O be joyful and sing to Him: Alleluia!

IKOS 3

How glorious You are in the springtime, when every creature awakens to new life and joyfully sings Your praises with a thousand tongues! You are the source of life, the destroyer of death. By the light of the moon, nightingales sing, and the valleys and hills lie like

wedding-garments, white as snow. All the earth is Your promised bride awaiting her spotless Husband. If the grass of the field is like this, how gloriously shall we be transfigured in the Second Coming, after the Resurrection! How splendid our bodies, how spotless our souls!

Glory to You for the warmth and tenderness of the world of nature.

Glory to You for the numberless creatures around us. Glory to you for the depths of Your wisdom—the whole world a living sign of it.

Glory to You: On my knees, I kiss the traces of Your unseen hand.

Glory to You, enlightening us with the clarity of eternal life.

Glory to You for the hope of the unutterable, imperishable beauty of immortality.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 4

How filled with sweetness are those whose thoughts dwell on You: how life-giving Your holy Word. To speak with You is more soothing than anointing with oil, sweeter than the honeycomb. To pray to You lifts the spirit, refreshes the soul. Where You are not, there is only emptiness; hearts are smitten with sadness; nature, and life itself, becomes sorrowful. Where You are, the soul is filled with abundance, and its song resounds like a torrent of life: Alleluia!

IKOS 4

When the sun is setting, when quietness falls, like the peace of eternal sleep, and the silence of the spent day reigns, then in the splendor of its declining rays, filtering through the clouds, I see Your dwelling-place. Fiery and purple, gold and blue, they speak prophet-like of the ineffable beauty of Your presence, and call to us in their majesty. We turn to the Father:

Glory to You at the hushed hour of nightfall.

Glory to You, covering the earth with peace.

Glory to You for the last ray of the sun as it sets.

Glory to You for sleep's repose that restores us.

Glory to You for Your goodness, even in time of darkness, when all the world is hidden from our eyes.

Glory to You for the prayers offered by a trembling soul.

Glory to You for the pledge of our reawakening on the glorious last day, that day which has no evening.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 5

The dark storm-clouds of life bring no terror to those in whose hearts Your fire is burning brightly. Outside is the darkness of the whirlwind, the terror and howling of the storm, but in the heart, in the presence of Christ, there is light and peace, silence. The heart sings: Alleluia!

IKOS 5

I see Your heavens resplendent with stars. How glorious You are, radiant with light! Eternity watches me by the rays of the distant stars. I am small, insignificant, but the Lord is at my side: Your right arm guides me wherever I go.

Glory to You, ceaselessly watching over me.
Glory to You for the encounters You arrange for me.
Glory to You for the love of parents, for the faithfulness of friends.
Glory to You for the humbleness of animals which serve me.
Glory to You for the unforgettable moments of life.
Glory to You for the heart's innocent joy.
Glory to You for the joy of living, moving, and being able to return Your love.
Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 6

How great and how close You are in the powerful track of the storm! How mighty Your right arm in the blinding flash of the lightning! How awesome Your majesty! The voice of the Lord fills the fields, It speaks in the rustling of the trees. The voice of the Lord is in the thunder and the downpour. The voice of the Lord is heard above the waters. Praise be to You in the roar of mountains ablaze. You shake the earth like a garment; You pile up to the sky the waves of the sea. Praise be to You, bringing low the pride of man. You

bring from his heart a cry of penitence: Alleluia!

IKOS 6

When the lightning flash has lit up the camp dining hall, how feeble seems the light from the lamp. Thus do You, like the lightning, unexpectedly light up my heart with flashes of intense joy. After Your blinding light, how drab, how colorless, how illusory all else seems.

Glory to You, the highest peak of men's dreaming.
Glory to You for our unquenchable thirst for communion with God.

Glory to You, making us dissatisfied with earthly things.

Glory to You, turning on us Your healing rays.

Glory to You, subduing the power of the spirits of darkness and dooming to death every evil.

Glory to You for the signs of Your presence, for the joy of hearing Your voice and living in Your love.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 7

In the wondrous blending of sounds, it is Your call we hear. In the harmony of many voices, in the sublime beauty of music, in the glory of the works of great composers, You lead us to the threshold of paradise to come, and to the choirs of angels. All true beauty has the power to draw the soul towards You and make it

sing in ecstasy: Alleluia!

IKOS 7

The breath of Your Holy Spirit inspires artists, poets, scientists. The power of Your supreme knowledge makes them prophets and interpreters of Your laws, who reveal the depths of Your creative wisdom. Their works speak unwittingly of You. How great are You in Your creation! How great are You in man!

Glory to You, showing Your unsurpassable power in the laws of the universe.

Glory to You, for all nature is filled with Your laws.

Glory to You for what You have revealed to us in Your mercy.

Glory to You for what you have hidden from us in Your wisdom.

Glory to You for the inventiveness of the human mind.

Glory to You for the dignity of man's labor.

Glory to You for the tongues of fire that bring inspiration.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 8

How near You are in the day of sickness. You Yourself visit the sick. You Yourself bend over the sufferer's bed; his heart speaks to You. In the throes of sorrow and suffering, You bring peace; You bring unexpected consolation. You are the Comforter. You are the Love which watches over and heals us. To You we sing the

song: Alleluia!

IKOS 8

When in my childhood I called upon You consciously for the first time, You heard my prayer; You filled my heart with the blessing of peace. At that moment I knew Your goodness, knew how blessed are those who turn to You. I started to call upon You, night and day, and even now, I call upon Your Name:

Glory to You, satisfying my desires with good things.

Glory to You, watching over me day and night.

Glory to You, curing affliction and emptiness with the healing flow of time.

Glory to You; no loss is irreparable in You, giver of eternal life to all.

Glory to You, making immortal all that is lofty and good.

Glory to You, promising us the longed-for meeting with our loved ones who have died.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 9

Why is it that on a feast-day the whole of nature mysteriously smiles? Why is it that then a heavenly gladness fills our hearts, a gladness far beyond that of earth, and the very air in church and in the altar becomes luminous? It is the breath of Your gracious love; it is the reflection of the glory of Mount Tabor.

Then do heaven and earth sing Your praise: Alleluia!

IKOS 9

When You called me to serve my brothers and filed my soul with humility, one of Your deep-piercing rays shone into my heart; it became luminous, full of light, like iron glowing in the furnace. I have seen Your face, face of mystery and of unapproachable glory.

Glory to You, transfiguring our lives with deeds of love.

Glory to You, making wonderfully sweet the keeping of Your commandments.

Glory to You, making Yourself known where man shows mercy on his neighbor.

Glory to You, sending us failure and misfortune, that we may understand the sorrows of others.

Glory to You, rewarding us so well for the good we do.

Glory to You, welcoming the impulse of our heart's love.

Glory to You, raising to the heights of heaven every act of love in earth and sky.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 10

No one can put together what has crumbled into dust, but You can restore a conscience turned to ashes; You can restore to its former beauty a soul lost and without hope. With You, there is nothing that cannot be redeemed. You are Love; You are Creator and

Redeemer. We praise You, singing: Alleluia!

IKOS 10

Remember, my God, the fall of Lucifer, full of pride; keep me safe with the power of Your grace. Save me from falling away from You; save me from doubt. Incline my heart to call upon You, present in everything.

Glory to You for every happening, every condition Your Providence has put me in.

Glory to You for what you speak to me in my heart.

Glory to You for what you reveal to me, asleep or awake.

Glory to You for scattering our vain imaginations.

Glory to You for raising us from the slough of our passions through suffering.

Glory to You for curing our pride of heart by humiliation.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 11

Across the cold chains of the centuries, I feel the warmth of Your breath; I feel Your blood pulsing in my veins. Part of time has already gone, but now You are the present. I stand by Your cross; I was the cause of it. I cast myself down in the dust before it. Here is the triumph of love, the victory of salvation. Here the centuries themselves cannot remain silent, singing

Your praises: Alleluia!

IKOS 11

Blessed are they that will share in the King's banquet; but already on earth You give me a foretaste of this blessedness. How many times with Your own hand have You held out to me Your Body and Your Blood, and I, though a miserable sinner, have received this Sacrament, and have tasted Your love, so ineffable, so heavenly!

Glory to You for the unquenchable fire of Your grace.
Glory to You, building Your Church, a haven of peace in a tortured world.

Glory to You for the life-giving water of baptism in which we find new birth.

Glory to You, restoring to the penitent purity white as the lily.

Glory to You for the Cup of Salvation and the Bread of eternal joy.

Glory to You for exalting us to the highest heaven.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 12

How oft have I seen the reflection of Your glory in the faces of the dead. How resplendent they were, with beauty and heavenly joy; how ethereal, how translucent their faces; how triumphant over suffering and death, their felicity and peace. Even in the silence they were calling upon You. In the hour of my death,

enlighten my soul, too, that it may cry out to You:
Alleluia!

IKOS 12

What sort of praise can I give You? I have never heard the song of the cherubim, a joy reserved for the spirits above. But I know the praises that nature sings to You. In winter, I have beheld how silently in the moonlight the whole earth offers You prayer, clad in its white mantle of snow, sparkling like diamonds. I have seen how the rising sun rejoices in You, how the song of the birds is a chorus of praise to You. I have heard the mysterious murmurings of the forests about You, and the winds singing Your praise as they stir the waters. I have understood how the choirs of stars proclaim Your glory as they move forever in the depths of infinite space. What is my poor worship? All nature obeys You, I do not. Yet while I live, I see Your love, I long to thank You, pray to You, and call upon Your Name:

Glory to You, giving us light.

Glory to You, loving us with love so deep, divine, and infinite.

Glory to You, blessing us with light, and with the host of angels and saints.

Glory to You, Father All-Holy, promising us a share in Your Kingdom.

Glory to You, Holy Spirit, Life-giving Sun of the world to come.

Glory to You for all things, holy and most merciful

Trinity.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 13 (Repeated three times.)

Life-giving and merciful Trinity, receive my thanksgiving for all Your goodness. Make us worthy of Your blessings, so that, when we have brought to fruit the talents You have entrusted to us, we may enter into the joy of our Lord, forever exulting in the shout of victory: Alleluia!

IKOS 1

I was born a weak, defenseless child, but Your angel spread his wings over my cradle to defend me. From birth until now, Your love has illumined my path, and has wondrously guided me towards the light of eternity. From birth until now the generous gifts of Your Providence have been marvelously showered upon me. I give You thanks, with all who have come to know You, who call upon Your Name:

Glory to You for calling me into being.

Glory to You, showing me the beauty of the universe.

Glory to You, spreading out before me heaven and earth, like the pages in a book of eternal wisdom.

Glory to You for Your eternity in this fleeting world.

Glory to You for Your mercies, seen and unseen.

Glory to You, through every sigh of my sorrow.

Glory to You for every step of my life's journey, for every moment of glory.

Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

ODE 1

Everlasting King, Your will for our salvation is full of power. Your right arm controls the whole course of human life. We give You thanks for all Your mercies, seen and unseen: For eternal life, for the heavenly joys of the Kingdom which is to be. Grant mercy to us who sing Your praises, both now and in the time to come. Glory to You, O God, from age to age.

This song was composed by a high-ranking Orthodox bishop, a few days before death, in a concentration camp.

The song and the beauty in *Fr. Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father* is paradise, wherever the saints are—even in a concentration camp. And the two most beautiful passages in *The Soul's Longing: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* on Biblical Interpretation are from concentration camps.

I do not predict that either of us will die in concentration camps, but God's bard said, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there." And my delightful monastery has blessings that I hadn't even had before going on; one of the fringe benefits is a sweet cat, who is very outgoing, and astonishingly enough doesn't irritate my allergies. The men at the monastery are like the St. Anne's company in C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength* (though, perhaps, without saving the rest of the world, and perhaps without Merlin).

And on a note of "*I do not know what tomorrow will*

bring, but I know Who brings tomorrow,” I believe that I have a chance, and have really always had the chance, to complete my life in triumph (or be subtilized by the returning Christ). I have in the mean time every grace that I need, and really quite a few niceties I do not need but are something to be grateful for.

Some people, learning that I have not been worrying, seem to think that I’m fundamentally better at having my ducks in a line. *I deny the charge.* What I have learned, besides that trying to solve a life’s problems on a day’s research is a ticket to overpowering despair, is how to make peace with a life that will never be under control, or at least not my control. It is a wonderful world that way.

“Will there be a place for me?” is a serious question, but I’ve had places for me come out of the blue. If we trust God, he has every ability to make a place for us. And trust is possible, and more than that is *trust*, when we trust what we cannot see.

As St. John Chrysostom said as his very last words, “Glory to God for All Things!”

Why I'm Glad I'm Alive Now, at this place, at This Time, in This World



First Things, in a column by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus,
muses,

The clock is ticking, and many in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee are counting the days, the hours, and even the minutes before Archbishop Rembert Weakland has to submit his resignation at twelve noon on his seventy-fifth birthday. I am told that the champagne bottles will be popped at 12:01 p.m. upon receiving the fax from Rome that the resignation is accepted. **Truth to tell, I've always had something of a soft spot for the Archbishop. He's liberally daffy but more amusingly candid than most of that persuasion. Of course he has a very high opinion of himself, but he's never tried to hide it. I particularly liked his public statement that he would have made a great Bishop of Salzburg in the time of Mozart but ended up as Bishop of Milwaukee in the time of rock and roll. There's something perversely refreshing about a bishop who doesn't mind saying that he's too good for the people he's called to serve.**

If I had been meant to live in Salzburg at Mozart's time, God would have done that. If I had been meant to live in the Middle Ages, in the desire that underpinned my second novel, God would have done that. And if I if I had been made to live in the age of many Church Fathers, God would have done that too. As it is, God's providence has placed me here and now... and God may make of me a Church Father anyway, without a time machine. To nostalgic Romans, it may be a sadness that the door to the Middle Ages is closed, but to Orthodox living at the corner of east and now, the

door to being patristic remains ever open, and I may die (or be subtilized by the returning Christ) a Church Father anyway. As things are, God has given me a whole lot of being in the right place in the right time, and put me in my own days. I got onto the web by accident (or rather by providence that I did not see as significant) and I have multiple major websites and a big bookshelf on Amazon.

As I write, incidentally, the majority of U.S. flags I've seen are black and white with a strip of color, the old "Don't tread on me" rattlesnake flag is seen not infrequently, and when I popped in to LinkedIn turned up a friend reflecting on a news item that grandmas are buying shotguns. I did not expect that, but I am not in the least surprised.

And one other thing: I can't meaningfully prep apart from measures I have taken that have been unfruitful. I am on maintenance medications, and if I stop taking them, I'll die within days. And as I write I seem to have COVID.

And in all this, I am *grateful*. St. John Chrysostom's final words were, "Glory be to God for all things!" and I echo them. I have food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and really quite a lot of things that I do not need and I am not entitled to. I only need to be faithful today with what I have today. God will bring tomorrow, and not knowing what tomorrow may bring is much less important if you know Who will bring tomorrow.

And my death is, basically, non-negotiable. God, in his great mercy, does not let us know ahead of time when we die, because we would put off repentance and be incorrigible sinners in the hour of death. A few saints know ahead when they will die. They are so secure spiritually that they will not be less faithful for knowing. For the rest of us,

it is mercy that we do not know. I could, possibly, die within days. I could for that matter die sooner: when I got my first COVID injection, a blood clot formed in my leg and dislodged to make trouble in my lungs, and the doctor said I was lucky I got to the hospital when I did, because it could have killed me. I think COVID injections are the greatest breakthrough in human health since DDT, but I digress. I could die an old man, like my grandfather who lived to be 95. I could live to see the returning Christ. And which of these, or other possibilities, hold, is not my concern. Each day has enough trouble of its own—and I have found solving a life's problems on a day's resources to be an entirely preventable ticket to despair.

Some people think that this life is only a preparatory life and is therefore unimportant. St. Nikolai, in *Prayers by the Lake*, talked (I forget exactly where) about how birth and death are only an inch apart, and the ticker tape goes on forever.

This makes what we choose in this life incredibly important. We can only “save for retirement” between birth and death. We can only repent between birth and death. After death, improving the lot we have eternally chosen in this life will be impossible. I wish to live in repentance for the rest of my life, but I have not gotten to monasticism yet, but if death cuts short my attempts, that matters less than you might think. God treats an active intent as if the person had done what is intended; I do not see I can rightly stop seeking monastic repentance, but if I am faithful and fail, I am in the same position as martyrs said to be “baptized in their own blood” because they were martyred before they could even reach *baptism*.

And, to borrow from a childhood favorite, *A Wind in*

the Door (my esteem is much less for it now), the heroine “felt as though fingers were gentle fingers pushing her down,” I sought to stay when I visited Mount Athos and was told that the conditions for being made a saint are in America, and implicitly reminded that monastic “white martyrdom” is an artificial surrogate to the “red martyrdom” of the Church in a hostile world.

I would like to quote a unicorn in C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, though I’m not sure it applies to our world:

He said that the Sons and Daughters of Adam and Eve were brought out of their own strange world only at times Narnia was upset, but she mustn’t think that things were always like that. In between their visits there were hundreds and thousands of years when peaceful king followed peaceful king till you could hardly remember their names or count their numbers, and there was really hardly anything to put in the History Books.

As to the question of why God did not create Narnia and bring me to it, I reply that every excellence is incomparably excelled in what “eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor any heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” I can’t get to a real Narnia, but I’m trying to get to a real “better than Narnia,” a “better than Narnia that begins on earth, as I discuss in *A Pilgrimage from Narnia*:

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

Wardrobe of fur coats and fir trees:

Sword and armor, castle and throne,
Talking beast and Cair Paravel:
From there began a journey,
From thence began a trek,
Further up and further in!

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

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

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,
Silence without, building silence within:
The prayer of the mind in the heart,
Prayer without mind's images and eye before holy
icons,
A simple Way, a life's work of simplicity,
Further up and further in!

A camel may pass through the eye of a needle,

Only by shedding every possession and kneeling
humbly,
Book-learning and technological power as well as
possessions,
Prestige and things that are yours— Even all that goes
without saying:
To grow in this world one becomes more and more;
To grow in the Way one becomes less and less:
Further up and further in!

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

We are summoned to war against dragons,
Sins, passions, demons:
Unseen warfare beyond that of fantasy:

For the combat of knights and armor is but a shadow:
Even this world is a shadow,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the victor in warfare
unseen,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the man whose heart
is purified,
Compared to the eternal spoils of the one who rejects
activism:
Fighting real dragons in right order,
Slaying the dragons in his own heart,
And not chasing (real or imagined) snakelets in the
world around:
Starting to remove the log from his own eye,
And not starting by removing the speck from his
brother's eye:
Further up and further in!

Spake a man who suffered sorely:
For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,
Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which
shall be revealed in us, and:
Know ye not that we shall judge angels?
For the way of humility and tribulation we are
beckoned to walk,
Is the path of greatest glory.
We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,
But we have the best of all possible Gods,
And live in a world ruled by the him,
And the most painful of his commands,
Are the very means to greatest glory,
Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,
To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,

An instant of earthly apprenticeship,
To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:
He saved others, himself he cannot save,
Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:
But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,
Turned to gold,
And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:
Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:
Further up and further in!

When I became a man, I put away childish things:
Married or monastic, I must grow out of self-serving
life:
For if I have self-serving life in me,
What room is there for the divine life?
If I hold straw with a death grip,
How will God give me living gold?
Further up and further in!

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

And for our world, I would quote C.S. Lewis in saying
that “humanity has always been on a precipice.” Such study

as I have had of Byzantine history leads me not to wonder that Constantinople fell, but that over a millennium after Constantine, after many times the Empire should have resolved, it took modern *cannons* to break through Constantinople's walls and subdue the great city. "Humanity has always been on a precipice"—and it seems to be increasingly more of a precipice.

It is believed by some Orthodox that Hinduism has room for the demonic and OrthoChristian.com describes Orthodox mission in India as "Perpetual Embers," but do not speak ill to a Hindu of Krishna and the milk-maids. However, it is not provocative to call Kali demonic: a goddess of death who wears a necklace of skulls and bestows madness as her special blessing. Or at least I don't see why it need offend a Hindu.

I have what I would call an "unintendedly kept loan" in that I was loaned a copy of the *Bhagavad-Gita* ("Song of God") by an Indian woman, and then lost all contact and don't see how to return it. Nor was the loan small; the *Bhagavad-Gita* was accompanied by commentary, as is Hindu tradition to unpack their greatest classic, in a beautiful two-volume boxed set. And the front matter talked about our being in the "Kali-yuga," or age of Kali. I don't know or understand what exactly a Hindu would mean by the Kali-yuga, but I can take a guess. And I have had some contact with the movement called "Traditionalists," which find certain underlying themes in many world religions that are threatened in the modern way of life and are sympathetic to Hindus who would see a Kali-yuga:

There is a singularity which has developed over past centuries, was present in decisive breaks made in the scientific revolution that paved the way to hard science as

we know it, and has been unfolding and accelerating, and now crassly has vomited TV's and cellphones on Africa, the poorest continent. One obvious question is, "Do you mean the Book of Revelation?" and my answer is an emphatic "Yes... *and No...*" There are certain things which I believe we have been told will pass as Revelation is fulfilled. These include great tribulation, the coming of the Antichrist, and the return of Christ in glory to judge the living and the dead, and the glorious resurrection. But trying to pin down Biblical prophecy down in detail is essentially an attempt to get a crystal clear view into deep waters that are impregnably and unfathomably murky. Don't, at least not before the prophecies have been fulfilled.

However, while I have extreme suspicion for detailed point-for-point pinpointing the events in Revelation, I think it is a much more possible and profitable measure to study the singularity we are in as a singularity, a point I explore with some video in "**Revelation and Our Singularity.**"

A student of World War II may be able to pinpoint a lynchpin in German manufacturing. There was a single point of failure in a ball bearing factory. If that factory had been taken out, it would all but destroyed Nazi Germany's capability to produce cars, trucks, tanks, and airplanes. Or in other words, it would have crushed their balls. Now let me ask: where is the lynchpin in our technological society? *Trick question!* There are so many that no one knows how many there are. One of the most Luddite statements I've read is from a computer programmer: "If builders built buildings the way computer programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."

At Honey Rock, there was a delightful place called “the Web” that used World War II cargo netting to make a great amusement for kids. It, after several decades, fell beyond safe use, and the camp’s people tried hard to find replacements. There were none to be found, came the conclusion from their research. Furthermore, it is now a respectable number of decades since technological museum curators have computer media that they believe to likely be intact but which they have no idea how to interpret. Cryptanalysis can break all sorts of very well-engineered codes. However, storage media produced with neither the desire nor attempt towards secrecy cannot straightforwardly read media that was intended to be straightforward to read.

To put things in miniature, like almost any at least half-serious website I have switched from sending unencrypted HTTP to confidential HTTPS. This was a right decision, I believe. However, to do that I need to get a stream of certificates, and if someone by any means shut down my ability to obtain certificates, my website would practically be dead in the water. Search engines would now be linking to security error pages; even bookmarks wouldn’t work. I might be able to get the word out that my website was served via HTTP, if I wasn’t blocked from social media by that time, but my use of the recommended practice of serving webpages confidentially via HTTPS introduces one more single point of failure. (That’s why I’m revamping and roughly doubling my “Complete Works” collections in paperback. Amazon believes it has a total right to delete anything from a Kindle any time.) We are going from fragile to more and more and more fragile, to an effect like that in *The Damned Backswing*.

In a homily a few weeks back, my priest said,

Let us go to the Egyptian desert, and overhear a conversation taking place between a group of monks led by Abba Iscariot. This took place in the third century and the conversation went like this.

Abba Iscariot was asked, “What have we done in our life?”

The Abba replied, “We have done half of what our fathers did.”

When asked, “What will the ones who come after us do?”

The Abba replied, “They are doing the half of what we are doing now.”

And to the question, “What will the Christians of the last days do?”

He replied, “They will not be able to do any spiritual exploits, but those who keep the faith, they will be glorified more than our fathers who raised the dead.”

We live in an **exciting** time.

My spiritual director said, “We think we are not on Plan A any more, not on Plan B, not on Plan C, and so on down the alphabet, *but God is always on Plan A.*”

If you wonder how that could possibly be, I invite you to read “God the Spiritual Father.”

Escape

I want to write today something to do with happiness, something that is interwoven with my whole life story.

“You are too old, children,” said Aslan, “and you must begin to come close to your own world now.”

“It isn’t Narnia, you know,” added Lucy. “It’s you. We shan’t meet you there. And how can we live, never meeting you?”

“Are—are you there too, Sir?” said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan. “But there I have another name. You must learn to know me by that name. This was the very reason why you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there.”

These words, from the end of a book by C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia* were for me a big spiritual turnoff for as long as I can remember. (They went over my head

when my father read *The Chronicles of Narnia* to my brother and me as little boys.)

When I read those words, they could not but grate because I wanted to continue to live vicariously in Narnia, not our world which seemed so drab and dull, and I was more interested in Aslan than a real Christ. And here I wish to touch on something.

The term “occult” has a few senses and meanings; it can mean supernatural power not given by God; or it can mean something that may or may not be supernatural but is very obscure and known to few. One classic study of occult memory techniques in Renaissance times is occult in both senses. By contrast, a familiarity with the story of the twelve paladins as heroic literature may or may not be occult in its supernatural dimension but is occult in the sense of being obscure. Today, Harry Potter and the X-Men may glorify an imaginary occult world but they are not occult in the sense of being obscure by the standards of pop culture: both of them are backed by tremendous marketing muscle to be a global financial powerhouse, and one need not try to delve into obscure matters to start becoming interested in either.

At that point I remember being puzzled by a counselor showing something almost like a patriotism towards one of the colleges in Harry Potter; in one sense it may seem harmless enough but I would expect a psychologist to know enough about happiness not to build a proper patriotism for something not literally available. I remember in reading “How to Be a Hacker” that talked about “hackers” (software experts who are usually not focused on breaking computer security) as being “neophiles”, meaning people who, like the “Athenians and strangers” of the Bible in Acts 17:21, “...

spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.” And though technologies change and develop and there is little end to which changes of some sort are available, one of the big things I read on reading propaganda for HTML5 is that the axe ground against its predecessor XHTML spoke of an appetite for change in excess of the admittedly significant technical changes HTML5 heralded. The amount of bad smell attributed to XHTML was reminiscent of New Age people grinding an axe against Newton, or perhaps today Einstein, as a primary authority figure. My involvement in physics, for instance, never really turned up figures grinding an axe against past paradigms by physicists. Newtonian physics may be considered to have been surpassed, but I was taught Newtonian physics before relativity, and engineers (and for that matter some physicists) routinely stick with Newtonian physics in a large number of cases where the discrepancy between Newtonian and relativistic physics (or quantum mechanics, or superstring theory) is dwarfed by much larger imprecision in other matters. And being a neophile is a downwind attribute of finding that things one already has are just *boring* and really not being happy with life as it is. I would expect a psychologist to know, not so much that enough involvement in literal occult activities is a recipe to lose your mind, but that placing what is rightly called patriotism in a mere fantasy setting is a recipe to find what one can literally *have*, to be quite dull in comparison. Perhaps a degree of curiosity towards new things is helpful in rapidly changing times, but boredom with tried and true technology is not an attribute of happiness, and patriotism for Hogwarts represents a problem in the first world that is not, as the idiom goes, a “first world problem.” A true first

world problem is something minor that is blown out of proportion. A spiritual condition that can let you be in circumstances coveted worldwide and not appreciate it is a matter of grave concern. In a world where many are hungry, many lack clothing or shelter, where many lack a safe place to stay, many people wish for a lot that comes easily in the USA, and is taken for granted when one pines for Harry Potter and Hogwarts. A true “first world problem” is something like having a cracked phone screen or having to use cheaper and rougher toilet paper, for the lack of graver and more pressing concerns. Being an American white middle class professional is something that is coveted around the world. (Being an American white middle class professional who thinks her lot is dull, and pines for a bit of spice in patriotism for Hogwarts, is a significant missed spiritual opportunity.)

I harp on escapism because even though I have resisted some of its manifestations, it is something I know well, and it is not innocent or harmless. I imitated the staring in one place that opened a portal to a magical world in *The Last of the Really Great Whang-Doodles*; in a French language novel by a friend, there was no question about whether escape was to be found, only of how it might be ferreted out. There is also in fiction the possibility of intense concentration or some other intense psychological state breaking through; though it is not exactly a delivery of *escape* by which the curse is broken at the end of *Ella Enchanted*, the ace card that trumps magic nothing else could ever break illustrates another portal by which escape is provided in literature. In my own experience, reading or dipping into games can be a way to imbibe tainted spiritual

realities as well.

My own attempted interest in Arthurian legends (in *The Sign of the Grail*, I omitted entirely one part of the rhythm of Arthurians where two knights hacked each other to death's door and were both well a few weeks later (contrast history where a sword duel was usually eventually fatal to *both* duelists), is relatively unique in that I don't see the fountainhead as being Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, but studied the medieval flourishing that escaped Celtic folklore into mainstream European popularity in the 12th century "Brut", and was finally transformed into a 1000 page synopsis by Mallory as the end of a flourish. (And I tried hard to convince myself that reading an arbitrarily long sample of Arthurian legend is fascinating. Most of the time I was fighting uphill to convince myself that what I was reading was interesting, when I knew it was deadly dull.)

These Arthurian legends, told and retold and formed and reformed from about the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, concern a time frame of allegedly the sixth century. The times in which the stories were told were separated from the time they occurred in by about as many centuries as the reteller's timeframe is distant to us historically, before history and period awareness were really discovered in Western culture.

For just a slice of what changed between the sixth century and the centuries of these retellings, such things as *knights* who fought on horseback and *jousts* simply were not available in sixth century England. Historically knights were mounted shock troops who fought from on horseback, and that depends on the *stirrup*, a technology not available in sixth century England. Without stirrups, horses can be

useful but they can only take you to a battle scene faster where you can fight on foot. A knight riding on horseback in a battle, or in a joust, simply was not available in the sixth century any more in the sixth century any more than people in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries would have been able to coordinate their combat by using modern radios, walkie-talkies, and cellphones in a world where news really couldn't travel faster than people.

They are the medieval equivalent of our fantasy TV shows having Robin Hood's merry band go through a haunted house, and have Maid Marian confronted with a magical apparition the other side of a mirror and saying, "I am having... a *biochemical... reaction!*" or otherwise show scriptwriters who know how fantasy storytelling works today, but do not share Lewis's and Tolkien's writing of medieval fantasy out of a profound knowledge of medieval literature and history. And in the days when these Arthurian legends were rampant, it really is not academic peskiness to suggest that chivalry was the real religion of the nobles, or to observe that Western Europeans traveling to the Byzantine empire participated in the dangerous sport of jousting that was practiced one place and the other sometime around the thirteenth century. "People now don't really love," to quote a repeated didactic comment about courtly love by a troubador, are the kind of signal that tells the historian that the milieu of medieval mania for Arthurian legend embodies courtly love as never before.

(And something of the same sensitivity gives me hope when Orthodox say that too little of the greatness of ancient monasticism is alive now, because it may signal a flourishing quite independent of our needing to re-create

the conditions of the Egyptian deserts met by the followers of St. Anthony the Great. *The Philokalia* is very widely read among the faithful today, and that in and of itself is exciting.)

My mother showed consternation in relating a report that children surveyed would “rather be rich and unhappy than be poor and happy,” but the consternation played out in circumstances in my life. Many people today would rather be escapist and ungrateful and unhappy with the here and now than be happy and grateful with the here and now.

I had the privilege of studying at the University of Cambridge in England, and in a very real sense that was an escape into a golden other world for me. A real Narnia to me, if you will. And it did not make me happy; I very much preferred being in Europe when the opportunity was open even if I was unhappy there. It was not until after I had returned to the U.S. that I learned how to be happy in the here and now. Years after that I traveled to Mount Athos, and I was expecting to feel better, but I was just happy, if the word “*just*” is appropriately used in such a case. The voyage was one of tremendous blessing to me, but I did not feel better for a transition to the Holy Mountain’s medieval settings.

When I was at Cambridge I was received into the Orthodox Church, and I bristled when I read Vladyka KALLISTOS’s comment in *The Orthodox Church* that Orthodoxy “is not something Oriental or exotic,” because that is precisely what I wanted Orthodoxy to be for me. I also bristled when the priest who received me said, “Orthodoxy is slog!” Now, years and a decade later, I find

that Orthodoxy *transforms* slog.

My “escape from escape” essentially unfolded as follows. When I had been leaning enough on, for instance, subtle mind tricks, one priest commented to me that monks in the desert were perennially warned about escape, with pastoral advice of praying through the temptation until it was gone. And I finally came to a point where I bleakly let go of escape, when all of my desire on one level was to escape the bleak here and now, and in an instant my eyes were opened and I no longer found the here and now to be bleak. Nowadays, the temptation comes back from time to time and I need to keep on intensely praying through the temptation the Fathers called “the demon of noonday,” but even if the activity of prayer is initially bleaker, I know where victory comes from. When I pray through the temptation, sooner or later it leaves, and I find that the here and now bears some of the marks of Paradise.

“The road less traveled” is today the embrace of the here and now instead of trying to find happiness via escapism, and leaving the broad highway of escapism for the narrow and straight road less traveled, by all means, makes all the difference.

What to Own for Happiness (and what not)

People have said that money cannot buy happiness, and I would give a caveat to that.

Years back, I mused that only up to a certain point can money buy more necessities; it can only buy luxuries. Beyond another point, money cannot buy more luxuries; it can only buy status symbols. Beyond another point, money cannot buy additional status symbols; it can only bring power.

And to that I would add a Canadian roommate's comment, made in the 90's, that a middle class American has basically all the creature comfort there is to be had.

But there is a caveat. A good pair of walking or running shoes may not buy especially more comfort for your feet, but it can make more attainable the goal of walking or running and the health benefits that that brings. And really, as the video I quote below says, if the health benefits of

exercise could be put into a pill, that would be the most important wonder drug in history. Walking or running shoes will not make you happy if you just buy them and don't exercise, but they can put regular exercise in better reach, and a solid exercise regimen can make you happier.

It is in this spirit that I would like to look at things that can make you happy. Getting more luxuries on Amazon brings only a fleeting pleasure, but some of the right purchases used rightly can help you to greater happiness.

[See the TED talk at

<https://tinyurl.com/a-disease-of-civilization>]

So here are a few things that, used rightly, might contribute to happiness.

(One important caveat: with a few exceptions, like Infowars Turboforce energy drinks, the benefits do not turn on a dime. You're more likely to feel noticeably better after a month of using EMF protective clothing and good nutritional supplements than in the next day or two. Give these things some time.)

A rugged outdoors computer

I spent more money buying a maxed-out GetAC x500 computer than I did on my car, as a computer that would let me work outside when weather permits and is built to last—for ages.

If you spend a fair amount of time on a laptop or desktop computer, it is a great advantage to have a computer with a sunlight-readable display. Macs usually

have a brighter display than normal PC's, but rugged PC's are brighter than either. Rugged PC's are available on Amazon, and they can be built to last as a longer-term investment.

(If you just use mobile devices and don't really use a PC, then this item is optional.)

A stand desk, if you work from a desk

Standing with good posture is better for most people than sitting.

Lambs EMF protective clothing

We are surrounded by much higher doses of ambient wifi, radio, 3G, 4G, and 5G electromagnetic fields (EMF), and this can be a drain on your mood where you don't even recognize what is happening.

There is a lot of EMF protective clothing on Amazon, but this is an area where brands can vary in value significantly, and you can't easily tell good protective clothing from bad. I wear a long sleeve T-shirt (a regular T-shirt would also work), to protect organs in my torso, and a beanie to protect my brain.

A blocbag used like a sleeping bag, with a T-shirt pulled over my head

While this does not offer absolute protection, it provides some opportunity to recharge.

One possible caveat: Throwing protective clothing

through the wringer by putting it through the regular wash can slowly degrade its protective value. I don't wash protective clothes if I can't smell anything in the armpits, and when I do wash it, I rinse it with cold water, dry what I can with a towel, and hang it to air dry.

Infowars supplements

Vitamins, minerals, and other supplements can vary greatly in effectiveness and bio-availability, and the difference between a really good brand and a common brand is substantial.

I personally use Infowars multivitamin, vitamin C with zinc, an eyedropper's worth of iodine, and Turboforce.

A sun lamp

Indoors lighting is usually much dimmer than outdoors; it's enough to see but not enough to thrive. Seeing bright lights during the day can help naturally, and sunlight is on the shortlist in the video above about things that prevent diseases of civilization.

Rob Wolf, *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet*

It is my considered judgment that the more I learn about how foods are produced, the more I think most of what is sold in the grocery stores needs a materials safety data sheet. Something of that wakeup call is found in Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and Diet*

Dictocrats, but the latter just looks at best solutions under conditions of civilization. The Paleo Solution looks at what humans have been optimized for hundreds of thousands of years longer than the paleontological eyeblink civilization has existed for.

One friend explained to me that Cheerio's, which are sold under claims like "I'm eating Cheerios to be alive longer for my loved ones," are harvested by poisoning the plants with herbicides so it will be easier to get the oats off. Quaker Oats are also really bad news.

One tip for people who are on a limited budget: Balanced consumption of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids is important and something that we as a society do really badly. Usually meat, for instance, is heavily skewed towards omega-6. Canned wild caught fish (such as tuna and sardines) offers cheap omega-3 acids for people whose budget won't allow regular consumption of grass-fed, organic beef.

***Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* by David Burns**

A good counselor can be very, very good and a bad counselor can be very, very bad; counseling can be a powerful resource, and Orthodox spiritual direction or pastoral counseling can be even better. I've known a couple of Orthodox mental health professionals, and they hold high regard for e.g. the "three column technique" laid out in *Feeling Good*.

This title can be helpful whether or not your own needs would benefit from counseling.

My own titles *Happiness in an Age of Crisis* and *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*

I've written a lot that relates to happy living in our present times, and *Happiness in an Age of Crisis* is shorter than the other work and covers essential things to understand happiness. *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is a longer and fuller collection that looks more broadly about what is good for human persons and what particular engagement with technologies are helpful. More is often less here, and these books have something to say to human flourishing.

If your phone is running your life, read these. One admittedly drastic tip for getting a little bit of control over your phone usage is to keep your phone turned off, and then turn it on when you have a specific purpose to use it for, then turn it off. *The added inconvenience is powerful.*

Orthodox classics

The Bible (I recommend the Orthodox Study Bible, perhaps paired with the Classic Orthodox Bible which sounds more like a Bible) says quite a lot about how we are made to function, and I am excited that the Philokalia is widely read not only by monastics but not the lay faithful. (The fifth volume is one that I have so far not had pastoral encouragement to read; the link is to the other four volumes.)

These are used best under the guiding hand of an Orthodox priest.

The things you give away

The story is told of someone who had a lot of books, and asked, “Will I have my books in Heaven?”

The answer came, “Some of them.”

“Which ones?”

“The ones you gave away.”

There is a parable in the *Philokalia* which states that people come and lodge for the night in an inn; some sleep on beds and some sleep on the floor, but all alike leave with only the possessions they brought in. The intended meaning is that on earth some people live in luxury, some not, but you can't take it with you, and you will leave with only your actions to your credit.

One priest commented that he had never seen a trailer attached to a hearse; the footwear I wear will be of no further use to me when I die, even if I am buried with footwear on, but the boots sent to Ukraine will be helpful.

And this isn't just a point about the next life; it is a point about this life, too, and we profit more when we are generous: it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Generosity is a characteristic of a happy and joyful spirit; it is an abundance to be had even if one possesses little; it is a cause and effect of good spiritual health. And what we can buy that will make ourselves happier is dwarfed by what we can buy that will make others happier.

Things not to own

In *Bridge to Terebithia*, one of the ways that the author marks Lesley as rich and privileged is that her family Does Not Own a Television.

I have listed above possessions that I believe to be conducive to happiness, and there are others. I haven't explicitly talked about owning older technologies, such as paper books. But a great amount of the stuff that we accumulate isn't really helpful.

Phones can be useful, but they open a door to some things that are really not savory—and I do not just mean porn. There are many G-rated uses for a phone that are a distraction and orient us away from joy. My own recommendations for cellphone use are to use it in a way that is purely instrumental; the only game I play is chess, which I want to learn how to properly play. There is also something to be said for not owning the newest and hottest doodad. I have an iPhone 8 which I purchased, used, and which I have taken steps to protect for the longer term (i.e. a screen cover and a shock-absorbing case), and which I would not trade for an iPhone 13 Pro Max (or whatever is the hottest new doodad when you are reading this). I believe my phone supplies enough EMF radiation; I do not hold it to my head much, and I do not really want to hold a 5G EMF radiation source to my head at all. (Older phones are already plenty radioactive enough to cause brain cancer in kids who always have a phone at their ear—and always on the same side they held the phone to.)

I do not know anyone who is happy to have a house that's brimming with *stuff*. It takes discipline, perhaps, not to buy things that will only bring satisfaction for a moment, and not buy things on impulse. But it's better, and less acquisitive purchasing decisions make for less cluttered houses. There is, in purchasing, something akin to the Weight Watchers maxim: "A minute on the lips, a lifetime

on the hips.”

General Omar Bradley, upon seeing atomic weapons, said, “We have grasped the mystery of the atom and we have rejected the Sermon on the Mount.” Now we have grasped the mystery of a worldwide communication network that sports 5G radiation and continues to grow, and still rejected the Sermon on the Mount.

But Christ’s words in the Sermon on the Mount still apply:

“A man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

And if that was true of the more natural forms of wealth available in ancient times, *how much more is it relevant with today’s technological smorgasbord in reach?*

Doxology

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,
Compareth to thy worth.

Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven
and on earth is named,
The Glory for whom all glory is named,
The Treasure for whom treasures are named,
The Light for whom all light is named,
The Love for whom all love is named,
The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,
The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה

O ΩN.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
Who art eternally praised,
Who art all that thou canst be,
Greater than aught else that may be thought,
Greater than can be thought.
In thee is light,

In thee is honour,
In thee is mercy,
In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.
For good itself is named after thee,
God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and
humble.

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

The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
O ΩN.

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

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

Beyond measure is thy glory,
The weight of thy power transcendeth,
Thy power of thine all-surpassing authority bespeaketh,
And yet art thou,
Not in fire, not earthquake,
Not wind great as maelstrom,
But in soft gentle whisper,
Thy prophets wait upon thee,
For thy silence is more deafening than thunder,
Thine weakness stronger than the strength of men,

Thy humility surpassingly far exceedeth men's covetous
thirst for glory,
Thou who hidst in a manger,
Treasure vaster than the Heavens,
And who offerest us glory,
In those things of our lives,
That seem humble to us,
As a manger rude in a cavern stable.

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

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

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,

For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not more,
Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be
another beside thee.
Thus thou spakest to Moses,
Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
Which is to say,
Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

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

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

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

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

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

And shine with uncreated Light,
The glory of God shining through his sons.

Let our spiritual eye be ever transfixed upon thine eternal
radiant glory,
Our hearts ever seeking thy luminous splendour,
Ever questing,
Ever sated,
Slaked by the greatest of draughts,
Which inflameth thirst.

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

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

Αμην,
So be it. Amen.

True “Woke” Is Repentance

Am I woke?

I am trying to redefine and challenge what the waking up in "woke" means.

First of all, am I woke? What are some experiences from my own life? Let me mention a few:

1. **Terminations.** I have never submitted an accommodation for disability without being terminated, always within a month, and always, always allegedly "for cause."

I've been fired a dozen times, and gave up on talking to HR because they never get it. At one point, when my boss demonstrably lied to me in a meeting for the purpose of scaring me silly, I complained to HR and they thought I was complaining because as a consultant I didn't have job security, and HR simply couldn't wrap their heads around any other

complaint. I was completely and utterly unable to get the point across that my boss was meeting with me to lie to intimidate me bigtime.

- 2. Fr. Seraphim of Platina's devoted crowd.** Fr. Seraphim of Platina is the only Orthodox "saint-figure" I have ever been urged to venerate on grounds of his giftedness. I unwisely enough answered, "If you are going to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he was gifted, you should venerate me more because I am more gifted [insert here a list of achievements], and [*the point I was trying to make*] if you're not going to venerate me more because I am more gifted, neither should you be telling me to venerate Fr. Seraphim because he is gifted.

That was answered by the worst harassment in my life, and the only time I've actually thought my body was shutting down because the degree of hate expressed to me. I wrote a book, *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*. I do not want to ask you to read the book if you don't want to, but *please read the one star reviews*. They are more alarming than the positive reviews!

Incidentally, I've noticed on Amazon that kind reviews to my work appear, and vanish without a trace. *This is ongoing*. I've been contacted by strangers with reviews that were censored ("An Intellectual Genius rooted in reality."). I have awfully

few posted reviews for someone who has had so many Kindle book giveaways and giving away so many review copies. Very few of the reviews stay around.

3. Square peg, round hole effects at Fordham.

You can read a sanitized version of my official writeup after Fordham said I washed out. It's posted as *Profoundly Gifted and Orthodox at Fordham*. I have said bitterly enough that they suffer from delusions of adequacy, and were incompetent enough in their treatment of me that at a couple of points my life was in question.

I might comment briefly that the internal-use term in the profoundly gifted community as I have engaged it is not normally "profoundly gifted," but "severely gifted." That has begun to appear in the psychological literature as well.

4. C&D letters to try to end harassment. I have had to send several "CEASE AND DESIST" letters after an ongoing and repeated "**NO!**" was simply being trampled on.

Now let me raise a question:

Am I woke?

I've had enough things happen to me, but let me explain why I have severe reservations about the concept of being

woke.

Emotional Intelligence

I was big into Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ* for a time at least, and the text has some particularly interesting things to say about the psychology of bullies.

What it says is that bullies do not feel entitled and above everyone else, free to issue aggression. They by contrast see themselves as persecuted victims. They believe everything is deliberately hostile to them. Other kids don't bump into them because kids that age have their bodies changing and are sometimes clumsy. It is intentional aggression, and it is therefore, to a bully, self-defense in a hostile situation to try to strike back hard enough against yet *another* kid who bumps into them and nothing seems to work.

The "un-bullying" of bullies is essentially to explain that not everybody is out to get them, that kids are clumsy at a certain age, and what seem microaggressions are really just random and meaningless. There is nothing intelligent, coordinated, or hostile most of the time when kids just bump into kids.

What Goleman did not say was an interesting implication. Consciousness raising is the opposite project; it is a teaching that bumps in the hallway are part of a coordinated attack. They only *seem* to be random. And the way one would go about making a bully is consciousness raising, or today telling someone to wake up and become woke.

One book I have wanted to write for years but haven't had click is *The History of my Misfortunes*, named after Abelard's *The History of my Misfortunes*, an unwittingly transparent work of a medieval autism diagnosis candidate who was full of himself, offended all sorts of people in all sorts of ways, betrayed people who had put him in a position of trust, alienated his allies, *and presents himself as the perfect innocent victim*. The spin I was going to mention was to talk about various ways I have created trouble for myself, all the things that are not anybody else's fault but my own. And really the only reason I have not moved forward with this is that it could be TMI. It was in the same spirit that I wrote:

A Professional Courtesy to a Fellow Poet

Out of the pitch black of my sin and vice,
 Chosen only of my own free will,
 I thank the God beyond all knowing
 For my yet still fighting soul.

In the cunning net of His Providence,
 I have spurned kindnesses for my good,
 Gifts I have fought as chance left me,
 Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?
 It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.*

Beyond this life of pleasure and pain,
 Lie the Gates of Heaven and Hell,

Battered I still make my choice,
Seeking neither to bolt nor bar,
From inside, the gates of Hell.

Narrow is the path and strait the gate:
The entrance to Glory beyond,
All trials and tests named in the scroll,
Thy Grace my wounds have bound with salve.

I thank the ranks of men made gods,
Who cheer me on to join their choir,
Thou blessest me beyond any fate,
That I could ever know to ask.

Thy Glory is to transfigure me,
To Live, Thou Thyself:
I AM the Master of my Fate!
I AM the Captain of my Soul!

(I also know what that *means!*)

A few details I could share: I was not happy with my circumstances because I wanted to be somewhere like Narnia and be a king instead of being right where I am. That is an extended unhappiness I have no one to thank but myself. Other things as well, that caused considerable unhappiness for a considerable time, boiled down to nothing but my own *sin*.

And now I've used a dirty word, one that isn't very popular today.

I would like to pause briefly and say that after extended practice jobhunting,* and talking with jobseekers of

different demographics, have instilled in me a strong conviction that **the hiring process is biased against applicants who have a pulse.**

* Not only have I been fired over a dozen times, but it is very stressful when a boss, who think your request for accommodation reflects a poor work ethic, is a boss trying to fabricate a paper trail of failures to claim for-cause termination.

I would like to get on to adapt St. John Chrysostom said, "The Treatise to Prove that No One Can Harm the Person Who Does Not Damage Himself." (I say "adapt" because the standard translation uses complex Victorian English and I want something easier to read. (It is also available as an audiobook.) Without further ado,

The Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Person Who Does Not Damage Himself

I understand very well that to people who don't get it, this treatise will appear strange and full of paradox. But they are people who don't get it. They are greedy of things you can get now. They are nailed to this world. They are slaves to physical pleasure. They do not and perhaps cannot grasp spiritual ideas. And no wonder that they will laugh me to scorn. No wonder that they will condemn me for saying ludicrous things from the very outset of this work. *Therefore*, I will not stop the present work. I will instead proceed with a great deal of effort, to prove just what I am seeking to prove.

If those who care about the topic will be kind

enough not to make clamor and a disturbance, but hear me to the end, *I am positive they will take my side*. They will condemn themselves, and realize they were wrong. They will take back, and apologize, and beg pardon for their mistaken opinion. **They will express great gratitude to me, like patients do to doctors who have cured them.**

So do not tell me of your current opinion, *but hear me out*, and then you will be able to make a fair judgment. Then you will not be stopped by your ignorance from recognizing the truth. Even judges in secular causes do not record their decision after the first lawyer spews a river of words, but even if the first lawyer is totally convincing, the judges reserve an unprejudiced consideration for the second. In fact the good thing about judges is they try as accurately as they can to understand what each side claims, and then announce their own judgment.

Now in place of a first lawyer we have a common human assumption. This assumption has taken deep root in people's minds, and says the following things about the world:

All things have been turned upside down. The human race is full of great confusion. There are many people who are wronged, insulted, victims of violence and loss. The weak are harmed by the strong, and the poor by the rich. As it is simply impossible to count the waves of the sea, it is simply impossible to count how very many people who are the victims of scheming,

damage, and suffering. Neither the correction of law, nor fear of being sued, nor anything else can stop this maddening disorder. The evil increases everyday, and the groans, and complaints, and the crying of the people who suffer is universal. Furthermore, the judges who are appointed to straighten out such evils, make it worse themselves, and worsen the disorder. Many of the people who don't get it, who are despicable, blame the Providence of God when they see the peaceful people frequently seized, oppressed, and tortured. The audacious and violent nobodies get rich, and gain authority, and become a force to reckon with, and inflict countless troubles upon the more reasonable people. This goes on in town and country, and in the desert, on sea and land.

What we need to discuss has to come in direct opposition to what has been claimed, saying something which is new, and just as I said is contrary to popular opinion, but useful and true. It is profitable to those who will listen to it and be persuaded. What I am trying to do is to prove (please, no commotions) that **no one who is wronged is wronged by someone else, but any *real* damage is self-inflicted.**

But to make my point more clearly, let us all ask what injustice is. Also, we should ask what human goodness is, and what it is which ruins it. Even further, we should ask what it is to seems to ruin human goodness but really does not.

For instance (because I need to make my point by analogy) each thing is vulnerable to the one evil which ruins it. Iron is vulnerable to rust, wool is vulnerable to moths, and flocks of sheep are vulnerable to wolves. The goodness of wine is harmed when it ferments and turns sour. The goodness of honey is harmed when it loses its natural sweetness, and becomes some sort of bitter juice. Ears of grain are ruined by mildew and drought. Leaves, and branches of vines are ruined by the troublesome plague of grasshoppers, other trees by the caterpillar, and mindless things by disease of various kinds. But to shorten the list and not go forever by going through all possible examples, our own flesh is subjected to fevers, and wounds, and a whole bunch of other bad things.

Therefore, since each one of these things is vulnerable to the thing that ruins its goodness, let us now consider what it is which damages the human race. Let us consider what it is that ruins the goodness of a person. Most people think that there are many things things which have this effect. So I need to expose wrong opinions on the subject, and after refuting them, go on to show what really does ruin our goodness. Even more, *I want to demonstrate clearly that no one could inflict this injury or bring this ruin upon our goodness.* Some say it is poverty, others diseases of the body, others loss of property, others slander, others death. They are perpetually dismayed and lament these things. When they are commiserating with the people who suffer and cry tears, they explain to one another, "What a terrible

thing happened to such and such people! They have been deprived of all their fortune at one blow." Again, someone will say about another, "such and such person has been attacked by severe illness and the doctors don't think he will live." Some bewail and cry out about prisoners, some of whom have been expelled from their country and exiled to another land. Others bewail those who have been deprived of their freedom. Others cry over those who have been seized and taken captive by enemies. Others lament people who have been drowned, or burned to death, or buried by a collapsing house, *but no one mourns those who are living in wickedness*. On the contrary, what is worse than all these wailings, they often congratulate them, a practice which causes all kinds of problems. Come then (only, as I asked you, do not make a commotion), let me prove that none of the things which have been mentioned harm the man who lives in a sober manner, nor can ruin his goodness.

For tell me if a man has lost his all at the hands of slanderers or of robbers, or been stripped of his property by evil servants, what harm has the loss done to the person's goodness?

But if it makes sense let me instead point out in the first place what is the goodness of a human being. Let me start by dealing with a separate case to make it easier to understand and plain to most readers.

What then makes a horse good? Is it to have a bridle studded with gold and belts to match? Is it silk to fasten the saddle? Is it many-colored, gold-plated clothing? Is it to have reins and bit studded with jewels? Is it gold woven into its hair?

Or is it to have swift and strong legs? Is it to move evenly? Is it to have hooves that are suitable to a well-bred horse? Is it to have a fitting courage for long journeys and warfare? Is it to be calm in the battlefield? Is it to save its rider in the event of defeat? Is it not clear that these are the things that make up the goodness of the horse, not the others?

Again, what should you say makes donkeys and mules good? Is it not the power of carrying burdens contentedly? Is it not the power to easily make journeys? Is it not to have hooves like rock? Shall we say that expensive external adornments give anything to their very own goodness? By no means. And what kind of vine would we admire? One which has many beautiful leaves and branches, or some that has a lot of fruit? Or what do we say makes an olive tree good? Is it to have big branches, and luxurious leaves, or to exhibit a lot of its own fruit dispersed over all parts of the tree?

Well then, let us act in the same way in the case of people too: let us determine what makes a human being good, and let us pay attention to what alone is damage which destroys that goodness. What then makes a man good? Not wealth so that you should fear being poor. Not physical health so that you should fear sickness. Not people's opinion of you, so that you should be alarmed at a bad reputation. Not freedom that you should avoid serving others. Not even life for its own sake, so that you should find death terrible. Instead of any of these, what matters is that you should hold fast to the truth, and behave rightly in life.

Not even the Devil himself will be able to rob a person of these if the person who possesses them will guard them with necessarily care: and *that most malicious and ferocious demon knows this well.*

In the Bible, the Slanderer was allowed to accuse Job of loving God only because God made him rich, and when he was given permission, to destroy all his wealth at once. When Job still clung to righteousness, the Slanderer changed his tune and said that Job loved God only because he was healthy, and was given permission to destroy his health. Job had no idea what is going on, but clung to what is good and made the Devil look like a sleeping fool.

This is why the Devil robbed Job of his wealth. It wasn't to make him poor, but force him to blaspheme in anger. The Devil tortured his body, not because he wanted to make Job sick, but to topple the goodness of his soul. But when he had done all of these things, and let me elaborate:

- When the Slanderer turned Job from a rich man into a poor one, which we consider the worst calamity—
- When he destroyed every single one of his children—
- When he had ripped into his whole body more cruelly than executioners do in a public execution, because their nails do not tear into the sides of people who fall into their hands as badly as one who is being eaten alive by worms

—

- When he got a terrible reputation, for Job's "friends" who were present with him said "You haven't gotten the punishment your sins deserve",—
- When he had not merely expelled from city and home to another city, but had actually made a pile of *shit* serve as his home and city—

After all this, the Devil not only did Job no damage but rendered him more glorious than the schemes he plotted against him. And he not only failed to rob him of any of his true possessions although he had robbed him of so many things, he even increased the wealth of his goodness. For after all these things he was more solidly placed because he had struggled in a more severe battle.

Now if he who went through such horrible sufferings, and not by the hand of human opponents but by the hand of the Devil who is more wicked than all men—if Job sustained no injury, which of these persons who say "Such and such a person harmed and damaged me," will have any defense to make in the future? For if the Devil,

- Who has so much great malice, after having set all his plans on motion—
- Who attacked him with all his weapons—
- Who poured out all external evils that can happen to a human being—

- Who to the greatest possible extent to the family and body of that righteous man—

...never did him any injury, but as I was saying put Job in a position of even greater spiritual profit.

How shall people be able to accuse such and such a person alleging that they have suffered damage at their hands, and not at their own hands?

What then? Someone will ask, "Didn't he inflict injury on Adam, and topple his goodness, and cast him out of Paradise?" No: the Devil did not make him do it, but the cause was the lazy apathy, and lack of balance and vigilance of the one who was injured. The Devil applied such a multitude of powerful plans and yet could not subdue Job. So how could he, by weaker methods, have conquered Adam, if Adam had not betrayed himself through his own lazy apathy?

What then? Hasn't the one been damaged who has been exposed to slander, and suffered confiscation of everything he owns, and has been deprived of everything else, and is thrown out of his heritage, and struggles with extreme poverty? *No!* He has not been damaged, but has even profited, if he be sober.

For, tell me, what harm did this do to the Apostles? Weren't they always struggling with hunger and thirst and lack of decent clothing? And this was the very reason why they were so famous, and distinguished, and earned for themselves much help from God.

Lazarus was a beggar at the gate of a rich man, and longed to have the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and did not get even that—until he died

and was brought to Paradise. Again what harm was done to Lazarus by his sickness, and sores, and poverty, and lack of protectors? *Weren't they the reasons why garlands of victory were more abundantly woven for him?*

Or consider Joseph, who was the victim of attempted murder, who was sold into slavery, then after resisting many attempts at seduction was falsely accused of not only attempted seduction but attempted rape, *out of complete butthurt after he spurned every single advance she made!* And he was thrown in prison, and by God's providence he rose to authority and kept many people from starving to death? What harm was done to him by his being falsely accused? This happened both in his own land and in the land of strangers where he was falsely accused of rape. Or what harm did slavery or exile do to him? Is it not specifically because of these things that we regard him with admiration and astonishment? And why do I even mention exile to a foreign land, and poverty, and false accusation, and slavery? For what harm did death itself inflict on Abel, although it was a violent and premature death because his brother envied that Abel's sacrifices to God were accepted and the brother's sacrifices were not, a murder inflicted by his brother's hand? Is this not the reason why Abel's praises are sung around the world? Don't you see how the explanation has demonstrated even more than it promised? For not only has it pointed out that no one is injured by anybody, but also that **those who handle the difficulties wisely**

themselves benefit all the more from such attacks.

What is the purpose then, people will ask, of jail and punishments? What is the purpose of Hell? What is the purpose of such great threats, if no one either harms or causes others harms?

What is it that you are saying? Why do you confuse the argument. *For I did not say that no one harms, but that no one is harmed.* And how is it possible, you will say, for no one to be harmed when many are committing harm? In the way I indicated just now. For Joseph's brothers did indeed harm him, yet he himself was not harmed: and Cain laid a trap for Abel, yet Abel himself was not trapped. Joseph's brothers, and Cain, only harmed *themselves*.

This is the reason why there are penalties and punishments. For God does not abolish penalties because of the goodness of those who suffer; but he orders punishments because of the wicked. For they who are treated badly become more illustrious because of the plans schemed against them, this is not the intention of those who scheme the plans, but the courage of those who are their victims. Therefore for the victims the rewards of clinging to the Truth and righteous life are made ready and prepared, but for those who maltreat them, the penalties of wickedness.

Have you had your money taken away? Read the word, "I came naked out of my mother's womb, and I shall return naked. And add to this the Apostle's saying, "for we brought nothing into this world; it is certain we can carry nothing out." Do people speak evil about you, and have some loaded you with endless

slander? Remember that passage where it is said "Woe unto you when all shall speak well of you" and "rejoice ye and leap for joy when they shall say evil about you." Have you been brought to the land of exile? Consider that you do not have a homeland here, but if you will be wise you are well advised to regard the whole world as a foreign country. Or have you come down with a dire illness? Quote the apostolic saying, "*The more our outward person decays, so much the more is the inward person renewed every day.*" Has anyone suffered a violent death? Consider the death of John the Baptist, his head cut off in prison, carried in a plate, which the king paid as the reward of his whorish niece's dancing. Consider the reward which comes through these things: for all these sufferings when they are justly inflicted by anyone on another person, wipe away sins and work righteousness. So there is a great advantage for people who bear such things bravely.

When then neither loss of money, nor slander, nor being yelled at, nor diseases, nor tortures, nor anything that seems fundamentally beyond them all, namely death—when none of those things harm the people who suffer them, but instead profits them all the more, from where can you prove that anyone is harmed when nothing of these things can harm that one? For I will try to prove the reverse, demonstrating that the people who are most harmed and damaged, and suffer the worst evils, are the persons who do these things. For what could be more miserable than the condition of Cain, who murdered his own brother?

What is more pitiable than Philip's wife who beheaded John the Baptist? Or Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery and delivered him into exile? Or the Devil who tortured Job with such great calamities? For he will pay no small penalty for this assault as well as his other sins.

Don't you see how the argument has proven even more than was offered, showing that those who are insulted not only suffer no harm from the assaults, but that the whole mischief backfires on those who plan them? For since neither wealth nor freedom, nor life in our native land, nor the other things I have mentioned, but only good actions by the soul, constitute the goodness of a person, naturally when the harm is directed against these false goods, human goodness itself is not harmed in any way.

What then? Supposing someone does harm the moral condition of the soul? Even then if someone suffers damage, the damage does not come from anyone else but comes from inside, and to the person from himself. "How so," do you say? When anyone having been beaten by someone else, or deprived of his property, or gone through some other terrible attack, speaks blasphemously, he is certainly harmed by it, and very great harm, but it does not come from the person who inflicted the attack, but from his own pettiness of soul. For what I said before I will now repeat, no man if he be infinitely wicked could attack any one more wickedly or more bitterly than that revengeful demon who is implacably hostile to us, the Devil. But yet this cruel demon had no power to topple or overthrow those who lived before the Law, and

before the time of grace. This is the power of nobility of soul. **And what shall I say of Paul?** Didn't he go through so many calamities that even listing them is no easy task? He was:

- Put in prison—
- Loaded with chains—
- Dragged here and there—
- Tortured by his countrymen—
- Pelted with stones—
- Wounded on the back not only with whips, but also with rods—
- Immersed in the sea—
- Attacked by robbers—
- Met with strife by his own countrymen—
- A victim of countless schemes and plots—
- Struggling with hunger and lack of clothing—
- Undergoing other frequent and lasting misfortunes and afflictions—

And why do I need to mention the majority of them? He was dying every day. Yet, though he was victim of so many of so terrible sufferings, not only did he not utter any blasphemous word, but rejoiced over these things and gloried in them. One place he says, "I rejoice in my sufferings," and even more "not only

this, but we also glory in afflictions." If he rejoiced and gloried when suffering great troubles, what excuse will you have, and what defense will you make, if you blaspheme God when you do not undergo the smallest fraction of them?

"But I am harmed in other ways," you may say, "and even if I do not blaspheme, yet when I am robbed of my money I am prevented from giving to beggars." This is a mere pretext and pretentiousness. *For if that upsets you, be sure that poverty is no bar to generosity.* For even if you are infinitely poor, you are not poorer than the woman who possessed only a handful of grain, and the one who only had two cents. Each of these, having spent all their wealth on those who were in need, were a matter of such great admiration. Such great poverty was no hindrance to such great and loving kindness, but the gift spent from the two cents was so abundant and generous as to leave the rich completely in the dust, even though they strove zealously to give more money than all the others. Therefore even here you are not harmed but rather benefited. Your small contribution receives a more glorious reward than people who dropped large sums.

But since, if I were to keep on saying these things forever, pleasure-seekers who love to grovel in worldly wealth, and revel in what we have now, would not readily endure leaving the fading flowers (for such are the pleasant things of this life) or letting go of its shadows: but better people cling to both the one and the other, while the more pathetic and low cling more strongly to the first than the second. So let us strip off

the pleasant and showy masks which hide the low and ugly face of these things, and let us show how deformed the whore is. For that is the nature of this kind of life which is devoted to luxury, wealth, and power. *It is foul and ugly, and full of much abomination, disagreeable and burdensome, and charged with bitterness.* For this is the particular feature in this life which deprives those who are captivated by it from every excuse, that though it is everything they hope for, it is filled with:

- Much trouble and bitterness—
- Too many evils to count—
- Dangers—
- Bloodshed—
- Spiritual crags and precipices—
- Murders—
- Fears and tremblings—
- Envy and badwill,
- Hostile scheming,
- Ongoing anxiety and worry.

It derives no profit, and produces no fruit, from these great evils—except for, perhaps, punishment and revenge, and unending torment.

But although this is its character it seems to most people an object of ambition, and eager contention,

which is a sign of the folly of those who are captivated by it, not of the blessedness of the thing itself.

Little children are indeed eager and excited about toys, and cannot take notice of the things that are worthy of full-grown adults. There is an excuse for them because they are too young to expect maturity: but the others simply have no defense, because, although of full adult age, they are childish in behavior and more foolish than children in how they live.

Now tell me why is wealth an object of ambition? *Here is extreme irony.* For you need to start from this point, because to most people who have this terrible malady think it is more precious than health and life, and public fame and good opinion, and household, and friends, and relatives and everything else. More than this, the flame has ascended to the clouds themselves: and this fierce heat has taken possession of land and sea. Nor is there anyone to put out this fire: but all people are busy stirring it up, both those whom it has already caught, and those who have not been caught, so that they may be captured. And you may see everyone, husband and wife, household slave and freeman, rich and poor, each as far as they can carrying loads which supply much fuel to this fire, both during the day and also the night. They do not have loads of wood or sticks (for it is not that kind of fire), but loads of souls and bodies, of evils and sins. For such is the stuff that lights this kind of fire.

For people who have lots of money do not ever stop feeding this monstrous passion, even if they own the whole world. The poor, worse, try to even get ahead of them. A kind of incurable craze and

unstoppable frenzy and unhealable disease possesses everyone's souls. And this desire has conquered every other desire and thrust it away, expelling it from the soul. Neither friends nor relatives are considered: and why do I speak of friends and relatives? Not even wife and children are regarded, and what can be more precious to a man than these?

But all things are dashed to the ground and trampled, when this savage and inhuman tyrant has laid hold of the souls of all those she keeps captive. For as an inhuman master, and harsh tyrant, and savage barbarian, and public and expensive whore she debases and exhausts and punishes those who have chosen to be her slaves with innumerable dangers and torments. Yet although she is terrible and harsh, and fierce and cruel, and has the face of a barbarian, or rather of a wild beast, fiercer than a wolf or a lion, she seems to those she has enslaved to be gentle and lovable, and sweeter than honey. And although she forges swords and weapons against them every day, and digs pits and leads them to precipices and crags and makes endless traps for them, yet she is supposed to make these things objects of ambition to those whom she has enslaved, and those who want to be enslaved. And just as a pig delights and revels in wallowing in the ditch and mire, and beetles love to always be crawling over shit, even so they who are captivated by the love of money are more miserable than these creatures.

For the abomination is greater in this case, and the mire more offensive: for they who are addicted to

this passion imagine that much pleasure is derived from it. This does not arise from its nature, but the human understanding which is afflicted with such a foul and irrational taste. And this taste is worse in their case than in that of animals: for as with the mud and the shit the pleasure is not caused by them, but in the irrational nature of the creatures who plunge into it. So consider it to be in the case of us human beings.

And how might we cure those who want such a thing? It would be possible if they would open their ears to us, and unfold their heart, and receive our words. For it is impossible to turn irrational animals away from their unclean habit, for they do not have human intelligence. But this, the noblest of all tribes, honored with reason and speech, I mean human nature, might be quickly and easily be released from the mire and the stench, and the hill of shit and its abomination. *If we chose to.* For why, O person, do you think wealth is worth such diligent pursuit? Is it because of the pleasure which obviously comes from food? Or because of the honor and company of those who attend on you, because of your wealth? Is it because you can defend yourself from those who bother you, and have everyone be afraid of you? For you cannot name any other reasons, save pleasure and flattery, and fear, and the power of taking revenge; for wealth does not ordinarily make anyone wiser, or more self-controlled, or more gentle, or more intelligent, or kind, or benevolent, or superior to anger or gluttony or pleasure: it does not train anyone to be moderate, or teach him how to be humble, nor introduce any other element of goodness in the soul to

become deep-rooted. Neither could you explain which of these things makes it deserving of such seeking and such desire. For wealth is not only ignorant of how to plant and cultivate any good thing, but even if it finds a bunch of them it messes them up. Some of them it even uproots and introduces their opposites: taking excessive liberties, ill-timed wrath, unrighteous anger, pride, arrogance, and foolishness.

But let me not speak of these; for they who have been seized by this malady simply will not listen to talk about what makes people good and what makes people bad. They are entirely abandoned to pleasure and therefore remain its slaves. So let us not consider these points any further, and let us bring forward the others which remain. Let's see whether wealth has any pleasure, or any honor: *it looks to me like quite the opposite!*

And first of all, please, let us consider the meals of rich and poor, and ask the guests which they are who enjoy the purest and most genuine pleasure. Is it they who:

- Recline for a full day on couches—
- Join breakfast and dinner together—
- Distend their stomach—
- Blunt their senses—
- Sink the vessel by an excessive cargo of food—
- Waterlog the ship—

- Drench it as in some shipwreck of the body—
- Devise fetters, and manacles, and gags—
- Bind their whole body with the band of drunkenness and excess more grievous than an iron chain—
- Enjoy no sound pure sleep undisturbed by frightful dreams—
- Are more miserable than madmen and introduce a kind of self-imposed demon into the soul and display themselves as a laughing stock to the gaze of their servants—
- Or rather to the kinder sort among them as a tragic spectacle worthy of tears—
- Cannot recognize any of those who are present
—
- Are incapable of speaking or hearing but have to be carried away from their couches to their bed—

—Or—

Is it they who:

- Are sober and vigilant—
- Limit their eating to what they truly need—
- Sail with a favorable breeze—
- Find hunger and thirst the best relish in their

food and drink?

For nothing so helps the enjoyment and health as to be hungry and thirsty when one comes to the table, and to think that simply necessary food is enough, nor imposing a load upon the body too great for its strength.

But if you disbelieve my statement, study the physical condition and the soul of each class. Aren't the vigorous bodies those who live moderately? (Please don't tell me of the rare case that some may be weak from some other circumstance, but get your bearings from what is constantly going on.) I ask, are they not vigorous, and their senses clear, easily working as they should? While the bodies of others are flaccid and softer than wax, and have a many terrible things happen to them? For they soon have:

- Gout—
- Untimely palsy—
- Premature old age—
- Headache—
- Farting—
- Weak digestion—
- Loss of appetite—
- Constant need for medical attention—
- Perpetual dosing—

- Daily worries—

Are these things pleasurable? Tell me! Who of those that know what pleasure really is would say so? For pleasure is produced when desire leads the way, and fulfillment follows: **now if there is fulfillment, but desire is nowhere to be found, the conditions of pleasure fail and vanish.** This is why invalids, although the most charming food is set before them, eat it with a feeling of disgust and a sense of oppression: because there is no desire which gives a keen relish to the enjoyment of even the most charming food.

For it is not the nature of the food, or of the drink, but the appetite of the eaters, which is capable of producing the desire, and capable of causing pleasure. That is also why a certain wise man who had an accurate knowledge of all that related to pleasure, and understood how to moralize about these things, said, "The foul soul mocks at honeycombs." This shows that the conditions of pleasure are not in the nature of the meal, but in the disposition of the people eating it. That is also why the prophet, in recounting the wonders in Egypt and in the desert, mention this in connection with the others, "God satisfied them with honey out of the rock." Yet it doesn't appear anywhere that honey actually sprang forth for them out of the rock. So what does the expression mean?

Because the people who were exhausted by enormous amounts of work and long travel, and who were extremely thirsty, rushed to the cool spring, their craving to drink something served as an incentive. The

writer who wanted to describe the pleasure they received from those fountains called the water "honey," not meaning that the water was converted into honey, but that the pleasure received from the water rivaled the sweetness of honey, because those who drank it rushed to it in their eagerness to have something to quench their thirst.

Since these things are this way and no one, however stupid, can deny it: Is it not perfectly obvious that pure, undiluted, and lively pleasure is to be found at the tables of the poor? While at the tables of the rich there is discomfort, and disgust and defilement? As that wise man has said, "Even sweet things seem to be repulsive."

But riches, some will say, procure honor for those who possess them, and enable them to take vengeance on their enemies with ease. And is this a reason, please, why riches seem to you desirable and worth chasing after: that they nourish the most dangerous passion in our nature, leading anger into action, swelling the empty bubbles of ambition, and stimulating and urging people to be arrogant? Why, these are just the very reasons we ought to resolutely turn our backs on riches, because they introduce certain fierce and dangerous wild beasts into our heart, depriving us of the real honor we might receive from all. Worse, they introduce deluded men something else which is the opposite of this, only painted over with a whore's colors, and persuading them to fancy it is the same, when by nature it is not so, but only seems like it to the eye. For as the beauty

of whores, made up as it is of dyes and pigments, has no real beauty, but makes a foul and ugly face appear fair and beautiful to those who are deluded by it, when it is not so in reality. In the same way riches force flattery to look like honor.

For I beg you not to consider the praises which are openly bestowed through fear and fasting: for those are only makeup and paints; but let us unfold the conscience of each of those who flatter you in this fashion. Inside it you will see too many accusers to count speaking against you, and loathing and despising you worse than your bitterest adversaries and foes. And even if a change of circumstances should occur which would remove and expose this mask which fear has manufactured, just like the sun when it shines a hotter ray than usual discloses the *real* faces of those women I mentioned, then all will change. You will see clearly that all through the former time you were held in the greatest contempt by those who fawned on you, and you fancied you were enjoying honor from those who thoroughly hated you, and in their heart poured infinite abuse on you, and longed to see all sorts of terrible things happen to you. For there is nothing like goodness to produce honor: honor neither forced nor feigned, nor hidden under a mask of deceit, but real and genuine, and able to stand the test of hard times.

But do you want to take vengeance on those who bother you? This is, as I was saying just now, the very reason why we should specifically avoid wealth. For it prepares you to thrust the sword against yourself, and renders you answerable Ed to heavier charges at the

Crack of Doom, and makes your punishment intolerable.

For revenge is so great an evil that it actually revokes the mercy of God, and cancels the forgiveness of countless sins which have already been bestowed. Christ told a story of a man who owed billions and billions of dollars, and his master forgave them, and then took another man and said "Pay back what you owe!" over a debt of a few thousands of dollars. For he who received forgiveness of the debt of billions of dollars, and after having received so great a benefit by merely for asking it, then made a demand of several thousand dollars from his fellow servant owed to himself. In his harshness to his fellow servant he etched his own condemnation in stone. For this reason and no other he was delivered over to the torturers, and tormented with a torture rack, and required to pay back the billions of dollars. The unmerciful servant was not allowed any excuse or defense to his benefit, but suffered the most extreme penalty, being commanded to repay the whole debt which the loving kindness of God had formerly let go.

Is this then the reason, pray, why you so earnestly pursue money, because it so easily you into this kind of son? No, truly, that is why you should abhor it as an enemy and an adversary teeming with countless murders. But poverty, some will say, disposes people to be discontent and often also to utter profane words, and give themselves to despicable actions. It is not poverty which does this, but littleness of soul: for Lazarus was poor—*very poor*—and besides poverty he

suffered from illness, a more bitter trial than any form of poverty, and one which makes poverty a harsher blow. And in addition to illness he had a total lack of protectors, and difficulty in finding anyone to supply his needs, which increased the bitterness of his poverty and illness. For both of these are painful in themselves, but when there is no one to serve the sufferer's needs:

- The suffering becomes greater—
- The flame more painful—
- The distress more bitter—
- The tempest fiercer—
- The billows stronger—
- The furnace hotter—

And if you examine the case thoroughly there was yet a fourth trial besides there—the unconcern and luxury of the rich man who lived nearby. And if you would find a fifth thing, serving as fuel to the flame, you will see quite clearly that he was afflicted by it.

For not only was that man rich man living luxuriously, but two and three times, or really several times a day he saw the poor man. For he had been laid at the rich man's gate, being a grievous spectacle of pitiable distress, and the mere sight of him was enough to soften even a heart of stone. Yet even this did not draw that unmerciful man to help this case of poverty: but he had:

- His luxurious table spread—
- Goblets wreathed with flowers—
- Pure wine plentifully poured forth—
- Grand armies of cooks, and groupies, and flatterers from early dawn—
- And troops of singers, cupbearers, and jesters—

And he spent all his time in devising every species of dissipation, and drunkenness, and overeating, and in reveling in fine clothing and feasting and many other things.

But although he saw that poor man every day distressed by grievous hunger and the worst illness, and the pain of his many thoughts, and by being destitute, and the ills which result from these things, he never even gave him a thought. Yet the groupies and the flatterers were pampered even beyond their needs. But the poor man, and he so very poor, and surrounded by so many miseries, was not even fed with the crumbs which fell from that table, although he wanted them very much. And yet none of these things injuharmred him, he did not vent a single bitter word, nor did he utter a profane speech. But like a piece of gold which shines all the more brilliantly when it is purified by overpowering heat, even so Lazarus, although afflicted with all these sufferings, was superior to all of them, and to the agitation which they often produce.

For if generally speaking poor people, when they

see rich people, are consumed with envy and racked by malicious ill-will, and deem life not worth living. This is true even when poorer people are well supplied with necessary food, and have persons to serve their needs; what would the condition of this poor man have been had he not been very wise and noble-hearted, as:

- He was not only poorer than any other poor men—
- Not only poor but also ill—
- Without anyone to protect or cheer him—
- Lay in the midst of the city as if it were a desolate, faroff desert—
- Wasted away with bitter hunger—
- Saw all good things being poured upon the rich man as out of a fountain—
- Did not have the benefit of any human consolation, but—
- Lay exposed as a perpetual meal for the tongues of verminous street dogs, for he was so weakened and broken down in body that he could not drive them away—

Don't you see that he who does not harm himself suffers no evil? For I will again take up the same argument.

For what harm was done to this hero by his bodily illness? Or the absence of protectors? Or by the coming of verminous dogs? Or the evil nearness of the

rich man? Or by the great luxury, haughtiness and arrogance of the latter?

Did it sap him for the contest on behalf of goodness? Did it ruin his strong character? Nowhere was he harmed at all, but that multitude of sufferings, and the cruelty of the rich man, rather increased his strength. More than this, it became the pledge for him of infinite crowns of victory, a means of adding to his rewards, an increase of his repayment, and a promise of more good things in the world to come. For he was crowned not merely on account of his poverty, or his hunger or of his sores, or the verminous dogs licking them. But because, having such a neighbor as the rich man, and being seen by him every day, and was forever overlooked, Lazarus endured this trial bravely and with much inner strength, a trial which added no small flame but in fact a very strong one to the fire of poverty, and illness and lowliness.

And, tell me, what was the case of the blessed Paul? For there is nothing to stop me from mentioning him again. Didn't he experience innumerable storms of trial? And in what respect was he damaged by them? Wasn't he crowned with all the more victory as a result:

- Because he suffered hunger—
- Because he was consumed with cold and lack of clothing—
- Because he was often tortured—
- Because people threw stones at him—

- Because he was cast into the sea—

But then some say he was Paul, and called by Christ. Yet Judas was also one of the twelve, and he too was called of Christ, but neither his being one of the twelve nor his call profited him, because he did not have a mind disposed to goodness. But Paul although struggling with hunger, and at a loss to get necessary food, and daily undergoing such great sufferings, pursued with great zeal the road which leads to Heaven. While Judas, although:

- He had been called before him—
- Enjoyed the same advantages as he did—
- Was initiated into the highest form of Christian life—
- Partook of the holy table and that most awesome of sacred feasts—
- Received such grace as to be able to raise the dead, and cleanse the lepers, and cast out devils—
- Often heard discussion concerning poverty—
- Spent so long a time in the company of Christ Himself—
- Was entrusted with money for the poor, so that his passion might be soothed by it (for he was a thief)—

Even then Judas did not become any better,

although he had been favored with such great kindness. For since Christ knew he was greedy, and destined to eternally perish on account of his love of money, Christ not only did not demand punishment of him for this at that time. But with a view to softening Judas's passion he was entrusted with the money for the poor, that having some means of appeasing his greed he might be saved from falling into that appalling gulf of sin. The thought was to check a greater evil beforehand by a lesser one.

Thus in no case will any one be able to harm someone who does not harm himself: but if a person is not willing to be reasonable, and aid himself from his own resources, no one will ever be able to bring him profit. Therefore also that wonderful history of the Holy Scriptures has portrayed the lives of men of old time, extending the narrative from Adam to the coming of Christ, as if in some great, large, and broad picture. And it shows to you both those who are defeated, and who are crowned with victory in the contest, so that it may instruct you by means of examples that *no one will be able to harm one who does not suffer any self-inflicted wound, even if all the world were to kindle a fierce war against him.* For it is not:

- Stressful circumstances—
- Variations of seasons—
- Attacks from men in power—
- Schemes attacking you like snowstorms—

- Nor a whole bunch of terrible calamities—
- Nor an unbounded collection of all the ills to which mankind is subject—

—which can disturb even slightly the person who is brave, and temperate, and watchful. By contrast, the lazy and low person who are themselves their own betrayer cannot be made better, even with the aid of innumerable helps.

This at least was made manifest to us by the parable in the Sermon on the Mount of the two people, one of whom built a house on the rock, the other on sand. Not that we are to think of sand and rock, or of a building of stone, and a roof, or of rivers, and rain, and wild winds, beating against the buildings, *but we are to extract goodness and evil as the meaning of these things, and to perceive from them that no one harms a person who does not suffer self-inflicted wounds.*

Therefore neither the rain although driven furiously along, nor the streams vehemently dashing against the house, nor the wild winds beating against it with a mighty rush, shook the one house in any degree: but the house remained undisturbed and unmoved. By this understand that no trial can agitate the person who does not betray himself. But the house of the other person was easily swept away, not on account of the force of the trials (for in that case the other would have experienced the same fate), but because of his own foolishness. For it did not fall because the wind blew on it, but because it was built upon the sand, in other words on laziness and sin. For before the storm beat against it, it was weak and ready

to fall. For buildings of that kind, even if no one puts any pressure on them, fall to pieces by themselves, and the foundation sinks and gives way in every direction. And just as cobwebs fall apart, although no real weight is placed on them, but hardened steel remains even when it is struck: likewise, those who do not harm themselves become stronger, even if they receive innumerable blows. But they who betray themselves, even if there is no one to disturb them, fall by themselves, and collapse and perish. For that is how even Judas perished, not only not having been attacked by any trial of this kind, but actually having enjoyed the benefit of quite a lot of help.

Would you like me to illustrate this argument in the case of whole nations? What great forethought was bestowed on the Jewish nation! Was not the whole visible Creation arranged with a view to their service? Was not a new and groundbreaking method of life introduced among them? For they did not have to send things down to a market, and so they had the benefit of things which are sold for money without paying any price for them. Neither did they:

- Cut furrroughs nor drag a plow—
- Nor harrow the ground—
- Nor cast in seed—
- Nor did they have any need of rain, and wind, and annual seasons, nor sunshine, nor phases of the moon, nor climate, nor anything of that kind—

- They prepared no threshing floor—
- They threshed no grain—
- They used no winnowing fan for separating the grain from the chaff,
- They turned no millstone—
- They built no oven—
- They brought neither wood nor fire into the house—
- They handled no spade—
- They sharpened no sickle—
- They required no other art, I mean of weaving or building or supplying shoes—

...but the Word of God was everything to them. And they had a table prepared off hand, free from all toil and labor. For this was the nature of the manna: it was new and fresh, nowhere costing them any trouble, nor straining them by labor.

And their clothes, and shoes, and even their physical frame forgot their natural weakness. The clothes and shoes did not wear out in the course of so many years, nor did their feet swell although they made such long marches.

Of doctors, and medicine, and all other concern about that kind of art, there was no mention at all among them. So completely banished was weakness of every kind: for it is said "He brought them out with silver and gold; and there was not one feeble person

among their tribes." But like men who had left this world, and were conveyed to another and better one, even so they ate and drank, neither did the sun's ray hurt their heads when it grew hot; for the cloud parted them from the fiery beam, hovering all around them, and serving like a portable shelter for the whole population. Neither at night did they need a torch to disperse the darkness, but they had the pillar of fire, a source of unspeakable light, supplying two needs, one by its shining, the other by directing the course of their journey. For it was not only a bright light, but also guided that countless host along the wilderness with more certainty than any human guide. And they journeyed not only upon land but also upon sea as if it had been dry land. They made an audacious experiment upon the laws of nature by treading on that angry sea, marching through it as if it had been the hard and resisting surface of a rock. Indeed when they placed their feet upon it the element became like solid earth, and gently sloping plains and fields. But when it received their enemies it behaved like a sea, and to the Israelites indeed it served as a chariot, but to their enemies it became a deathtrap. It brought the Israelites across with ease, but drowned their pursuers with great violence. The chaotic flood of water displayed the good order and obedience which marks reasonable and highly intelligent people, fulfilling the part at one time of a guardian, at another an executioner, and exhibiting these opposites together on one day. What shall one say of the rocks which poured forth streams of waters? What of the clouds of

birds which covered the whole face of the earth by the number of their carcasses? What of the wonders in Egypt? What of the marvels in the wilderness? What of the triumphs and bloodless victories? For they subdued those who opposed them like people keeping a holiday rather than making war. And they vanquished their own masters without the use of weapons. They overcame those who fought with them after they had left Egypt, with singing and music. *What they did was a festival rather than a military campaign, a religious ceremony rather than a battle.*

For all these wonders took place not only for the purpose of supplying their needs, but also so that the people might preserve more accurately the teaching which Moses taught about the knowledge of God. Voices proclaiming the presence of their master were uttered on all sides of them. For the sea loudly declared this, by becoming a road for them to march upon, and then turning into sea again. The waters of the Nile uttered this voice when they were converted into the nature of blood. The frogs, and the great army of locusts, and the caterpillar and blight declared the same thing to all the people. The miracles in the desert, the manna, the pillar of fire, the cloud, the quails, and all the other incidents served them as a book, and writing which could never be erased, echoing daily in their memory and resounding in their mind. Nonetheless:

- After such great and remarkable Providence—
- After all those unspeakable benefits—

- After such mighty miracles—
- After care indescribable—
- After continual teaching—
- After instruction by means of speech—
- After admonition by means of deeds—
- After glorious victories—
- After extraordinary triumphs—
- After abundant supply of food—
- After the plentiful production of water—
- After the ineffable glory with which they were clothed in the eyes of the human race—

Being ungrateful and senseless, they worshiped a calf, and paid reverence to the head of a bull, even when the memorials of God's benefits in Egypt were fresh in their minds, and they were still in actual enjoyment of many more.

But the Ninevites, although a barbarian and foreign people who had never participated in any of these benefits, small or great, saw neither words, nor wonders, nor works when they saw a man who had been saved from shipwreck, who had never associated with them before, but appeared then for the first time. He entered their city and said "Three more days and Nineveh will be overthrown," and the Ninevites were so converted and reformed by the mere sound of these words, and putting away their former wickedness,

advanced in the direction of goodness by the path of repentance, that they caused the sentence of God to be revoked, and stopped the threatened disturbance of their city, and averted the Heaven-sent wrath, and were delivered from every kind of evil. "For," we read, "God saw that every man turned from his evil way, and was converted to the Lord." I ask how they were turned. Although their wickedness was great, their sins unspeakable, their moral sores difficult to heal, which the prophet plainly showed to say "their wickedness rose even unto the Heavens:" indicating by that distance just how wicked they were... nevertheless such great sin which was piled up to such a height as to reach even to the Heavens... they abolished, removed out of sight, and put away all of this in a brief moment of time through a few words what they heard from one man's mouth and he an unknown shipwrecked foreigner. And they had the happiness of hearing the declaration "God saw that every one turned from his evil way, and He repented of the evil which God said He would do to them." Do you see how he who is moderate and watchful not only suffers no harm from the hands of people, but even turns back wrath sent from Heaven? But despite this the person who betrays himself and harms himself by what he does, even if countless benefits were received, does not receive much of an advantage. So, at least, the Jews did not benefit from those great miracles, nor were the Ninevites harmed by having no share in them. However, seeing that they were inwardly well-disposed, having laid hold of a slender chance they became better, barbarians and foreigners as they may

have been, ignorant of all divine revelation and dwelling some distance from Palestine.

Again, was the goodness of the "three children" corrupted by the troubles they faced? While they were still young, mere youths of really a child's age, did they not undergo the terrible affliction of captivity? Did they not have to make a long journey from home, and when they arrived in the foreign land were they not cut off from the Jewish homeland, from home and Temple, and altar and sacrifices, and offerings and drinking offerings, and even singing Psalms? For not only were they cut off from their home, but as a consequence they were furthermore cut off from much of the worship they knew. Had they not been given into the hands of men, wolves rather than humans? And, most painful disaster of all, when they had been banished to so distant and barbarous a country, and suffering captivity, weren't they without Jewish teachers, without prophets, without a ruler? "For," it is written, "there is no ruler, nor prophet, nor governor, nor place for offering before Thee and finding mercy." Worse than this, they were thrown into the pagans' royal palace, as upon some cliff and mountaintop, and a sea full of rocks and reefs, being compelled to sail over that angry sea without a captain or signal or crew or sails. They were cooped up in the royal court as in a hostile prison. For so far as they knew spiritual wisdom, and were superior to worldly things, they counted their journey there as their trouble getting worse. For if they had been outside the court, and living in a private house they would have

had more independence. However, having cast into that prison (for they deemed the external splendor of the palace no better than a prison, no safer than a place of slippery rocks) they were immediately subjected to something cruel, and worse than embarrassment. For the king commanded them to receive food from his own table, a decadent, idol-stained, *defiled* table, something which was absolutely forbidden to Jews, and seemed more terrible than death. They were lonely men hemmed in like lambs among so many wolves. And they were forced to choose between being consumed by famine, or rather led off to execution, and tasting defiled and unclean foods that were forbidden to Jews. What then did these youths do, forlorn as they were, captives, strangers, and slaves of those who commanded these things? They did not consider that this dilemma or the absolute power of the ruler to justify their giving in; but they tried every plan and method to enable them to avoid sin, although they were abandoned on every side. For they could not influence people by money. How should they, being captives? Nor by friendship and social influence: how should they, being strangers? Nor could they get the better of them than any exercise of power: how was it possible to slaves like them? Nor could they win by force of numbers: how could they, being only three strong? Therefore they approached the eunuch who possessed the necessary authority, and persuaded him by their arguments. For when they saw him fearful and trembling, and in agony and alarmed for his own safety, and the fear of death that agitated his soul was

intolerable: "for I fear," said he, "my lord the king, lest he should see your faces sadder than the other children like you and so you shall endanger my head before the king" having released him from this fear the three children persuaded him to grant them the favor. And given that they brought to the work all the strength which they had, God also henceforth contributed His strength to it. For it was not God's doing alone that they achieved those things for the sake of which they were to receive a reward, but the beginning and starting point was from their own initiative. Having manifested that to be noble and brave, they won for themselves the help of God, and so accomplished their aim.

Do you not then see that if a person does not injure himself, no one else will be able to harm him?

Consider the following: They were,

- Scarcely older than children—
- Captivity and destitution—
- Exile into a foreign land—
- Great fear of death attacking the eunuch's mind
—
- Poverty—
- Being so few in numbers—
- Living surrounded by barbarians—
- Having enemies for masters—

- Surrender into the hands of the king himself—
- Separated from all their relatives—
- Removal from priests and prophets—
- Removal from all others who cared for them—
- Being completely cut off from drink offerings and sacrifices—
- Loss of the Temple and Psalmody—

And yet none of things harmed them: but they had more public fame than when they had all these things in their native land.

And after they had accomplished this first and had placed the glorious crown of victory on their heads, and had kept the Jewish Law even in a foreign land, and trampled underfoot the tyrant's command, and overcame the fear of the avenger, and yet receiving no harm from anywhere, as if they had been quietly living at home and enjoying the benefit of all benefits of Jewish society which I mentioned... after they had so fearlessly accomplished their work, they were again summoned to other contests.

And again they were the same men; and they were subjected to a more severe trial than the earlier one, and a furnace was lit, and they were confronted by the barbarian army in company of the king. The whole Persian force was set in motion and everything was devised which would tend to deceive or confront them: different kinds of music, and various forms of punishment, and threats, and what they saw was alarming on every side, and the words they heard were

more alarming than what they saw... nevertheless, as they did not betray themselves, but made the most of their own strength, they never sustained any kind of damage. They even won for themselves more glorious crowns of victory than before. For Nebuchednesor tied them up and threw them into the furnace, but he failed to burn them, but instead helped them, and made them more illustrious. And although they were:

- Deprived of Temple (for I will repeat my former remarks)—
- Deprived of altar—
- Deprived of homeland—
- Deprived of priests and prophets—
- Although they were in a foreign and barbarous country—
- In the very midst of the furnace—
- Surrounded by all that mighty warhost—
- With the king himself who had done all this looking at them—

They set up a glorious trophy. They won a notable victory. And they had sung that admirable and extraordinary hymn which from that day to today has been sung throughout the world and will continue to be sung for future generations:

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, God of our fathers,

and to be praised and highly exalted for ever;
And blessed is Thy glorious, holy Name
and to be highly praised and highly exalted for
ever;

Blessed art Thou in the Temple of Thy holy glory
and to be extolled and highly glorified for ever.

Blessed art Thou, Who sittest upon cherubim
and lookest upon the deeps,
and to be praised and highly exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou upon the Throne of Thy
Kingdom

and to be extolled and highly exalted for ever.

Blessed art Thou in the firmament of Heaven
and to be sung and glorified for ever.

"Bless the Lord, all works of the Lord,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you Heavens,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, you angels of the Lord,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all waters above the heaven,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all powers,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, sun and moon,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, stars of Heaven,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all rain and dew,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all winds,

Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, fire and heat,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, winter cold and summer heat,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, dews and snows,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, nights and days,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, light and darkness,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, ice and cold,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, frosts and snows,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, lightnings and clouds,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Let the earth bless the Lord;
Let it sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for
ever.
Bless the Lord, mountains and hills,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all things that grow on the earth,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you springs,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, seas and rivers,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you whales and all creatures that
move in the waters,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.

Bless the Lord, all birds of the air,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, all beasts and cattle,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you sons of men,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, O Israel,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you priests of the Lord,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you servants of the Lord,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, spirits and souls of the righteous,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in
heart,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
Bless the Lord, Hanani'ah, Azari'ah, and Mish
'ael,
Sing praise to Him and highly exalt Him for ever.
For He has rescued us from Hades and saved us
from the hand of death,
And delivered us from the midst of the burning
fiery furnace;
From the midst of the fire He has delivered us.
Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,
For His mercy endures for ever.
Bless Him, all who worship the Lord, the God of
gods,
Sing praise to Him and give thanks to Him,
For His mercy endures for ever."

So when a person does not harm himself, he cannot possibly be hurt by another. I will not cease constantly harping on this saying. For if captivity, and slavery, and loneliness and loss of country and all kindred and death, and a great warhost and a savage tyrant could not do any damage to the innate goodness of the three children, *even though they were captives, slaves, and aliens in a foreign land.* To the contrary, the enemy's assault became to them instead the occasion of greater winning. What shall be able to harm the reasonable and moderate person? There is nothing, even if the whole world would be up in arms against him. "But," someone may say, "in their case God stood beside them, and plucked them out of the flame." Certainly He did: and if you will play your part to the best of your power, the help which God provides will definitely follow you.

Nevertheless the reason why I admire those youths and I call them blessed, and admirable, is not because they trampled on the flame and vanquished the power of the fire. It is because they were tied up with ropes and thrown into the furnace, and delivered to the fire for the sake of living the Truth. For this is what constituted the completeness of their triumph, and the wreath of victory was placed on their heads as soon as they were thrown into the furnace, and not a moment later. It was before the events occurred which were woven to them, when they spoke with much boldness and candid freedom of speech to the king when they were brought into his presence. "We have

no need to answer thee concerning this thing. For our God in Heaven Whom we serve is able to rescue us out of the burning fiery furnace: and He will deliver us out of thy hands, O king. But even if He cannot, let it be known to you O King, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up."

After they spoke these words I proclaimed them conquerors. After these words, having grasped the prize of victory, they went on to claim the glorious crown of martyrdom, by following up the confession they made in words with the confession they made through their deeds. But when they had been thrown into the furnace, the fire had respect for their bodies. The fire took off the ropes they were tied up in, and allowed them to go down into it without fear, and forgot its natural force, so that the furnace of fire became a fountain of cool water. This marvel was the effect of God's grace and the divine wonder-working power. Yet the heroes themselves even before these things took place, as soon as they set foot in the flames, had erected their trophy. They had won their victory. They had put on their crowns. They had been proclaimed conquerors both in Heaven and on earth. So far as they were concerned, there was nothing more to ask for their splendor.

What then would you have to say to these things? Have you been driven into exile, and expelled from your country? So were they. Have you suffered captivity, and become the slave of barbarian masters? Well! You will find that this also happened to these men. But you have no one present there to put order to your life nor advise and instruct you? Well! These

men lacked such attention too. Or have you been tied up, burned, and killed? For you cannot tell me of anything more painful than these things. But look at this! These men who went through them all, were made more glorious by each one of them, yes, *much more glorious*. More than this, they increased the store of their treasures in Heaven.

And the Jews indeed who had:

- Both Temple and altar—
- Ark and cherubim—Mercy-seat—
- Veil and an infinite multitude of priests—
- Daily services—
- Morning and evening sacrifices—
- Continually heard the voices of the prophets, both living and dead, sounding in their ears—
- Carried about with them the memory of the wonders which were done in Egypt, and in the wilderness, and all the rest—
- Turning the story of these things over in their hands—
- Had them inscribed on their doorposts and enjoyed the benefit of much supernatural power and every other kind of help—

—were yet in no way profited, but rather harmed:

- Having set up idols in the Temple itself—
- And having sacrificed their sons and daughters under trees—
- In almost every part of the country in Palestine having offered these forbidden and condemned sacrifices—
- perpetrated countless other deeds that were still more monstrous—

But these three men, although in the midst of a barbarous and hostile land, living in a tyrant's house deprived of all that care I have been talking about, led away to execution, and subjected to burning, not only suffered no harm there from anyone small or great, but became all the more famous.

Knowing then these things, and collecting other instances like this from the inspired divine Scriptures (for it is possible to find many such examples with various other persons) we declare that neither a difficulty arising from seasons or events, nor compulsion and force, nor the arbitrary authority of rulers provide enough of an excuse for us when we sin. I will now close my discourse by repeating what I said at the beginning, that *if anyone be harmed and damaged he certainly suffers this as entirely self-inflicted damage, not at the hands of others even if there may be innumerable many people harming and attacking him.* If you does not suffer this at your own hands, *not even all the creations which inhabit the whole earth and sea if they combined to attack*

you would be able to hurt you if you are vigilant and sober in the Lord.

Let us then, I plead to you, be sober and vigilant at all times. Let us endure all painful things bravely so that we may obtain those everlasting and pure blessings in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory and power, now and ever throughout all ages.

Amen!

How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following?

How does this relate to Fr. Seraphim's militant following, such as I wrote about in *The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts?* I pity them, and pray, "Holy Father Seraphim, pray for your followers, that they may not suffer harm on my account," and I consider them to be benefactors.

(Perhaps unwilling and unwitting benefactors, but benefactors nonetheless.)

In *Profoundly Gifted Survival Guide*, I wrote:

I wrote in another blog post that I believed I had experienced what I would call "fame lite." Leonard Nimoy, in *I Am Spock*, talks about how Hollywood has teachers for all kinds of skills they would need to portray that skill in movies: musical instruments, riding a horse, and so on and so forth. However, there

was something that no teachers were to be found in Hollywood: dealing with fame. Nimoy learned, for instance, how to enter a restaurant through the kitchen because there would be a public commotion if Spock walked in through the front door. And on that count, I do not obviously suffer the consequences of real fame. I've been asked for my autograph, *once*. I've had someone call out publicly, before I entered Orthodoxy, "*That's Jonathan Hayward!*", *once*. I have repeatedly had pleasant meetings with people who know me through my website. And since then, the only new tarnish to my claim of undeserved "fame lite" is in recent years when a job opportunity was really a cloak for attempted seduction. If that was because of my website or reputation; I am not sure it was.

Fr. Seraphim's militant followers have kept an eagle eye to ensure that positive reviews don't stay up on Amazon too long, if they have any excuse to have it taken down. Consequently, if you look at my author page on Amazon, you will see what looks to me like the customer review title of an author who's written a lot of mediocrities. Editorial reviews help sales, but Amazon customers are used to buying things that have ★★★★★☆ to ★★★★★ and usually hundreds, if not thousands, of customer reviews.

My magnum opus is *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, and at the time of this writing, has ★★☆☆☆☆ and four customer ratings. There is no hint in this, to the Amazon customer, that the title merits study.

So why do I say that Seraphinians are my benefactors? C.S. Lewis wrote wonderful books and definitely did not just have "fame lite"; he had "full-blooded fame" and spent

much of his later life in essentially pastoral correspondence with his readers. It would be quite wrong on my part to think myself entitled to write what may be good books but be too good to spend lots of time answering heartfelt correspondence from my readers. But I seem shielded from a benefit I would be immature to seek.

Furthermore, I am well-known with a good reputation, at least among conservative converts to Orthodoxy. I was informed a couple of years ago that in Facebook conversation, my name, listed as "Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward," had condensed to "CSH," in other words, "C.S. Hayward." That would also be bad enough for me to seek, but I have it. And I have just a pleasant degree of experience of meeting people and finding that they already know and like me, through my website.

People who are enough in the know, know that a pedestal can be a heavy cross to bear. Fr. Seraphim himself tried to avoid being put on a pedestal, but it happened to him anyway. At present I am on a pedestal but one that could be much larger and worse than it actually is, and part of my smaller and less burdensome pedestal is due to the hate of Fr. Seraphim's followers.

Furthermore, it is well-known in Orthodoxy that if you have a spiritual director and are obedient, part of what is done for you is that your spiritual director and not you will answer for your sins. What is less well-known is that if someone really maltreats you, they will answer for your sins like a spiritual director was. And this is something I wish were not so, and reason to pity Fr. Seraphim's followers, however hostile. When I die I want my sins to fall on Christ, and maybe my spiritual director. But they may fall on

people who are already poor spiritually.

Being woke, as it is commonly understood, means being sensitized to notice subtle terms of political terms of disenfranchisement. In this and other cases I do not wish to explore, the term "subtle" simply does not apply. But I do not need to perhaps look cues for other even more subtle ways haters try to sabotage and oppress me. There is still plenty that is un-subtle!

...and true awakening

People today are big on being woke, of *waking up and smelling the shit*. And so it is in Orthodoxy too. But the real waking up smelling the shit is not the shit of political disenfranchisement, but **the shit of our own sin**. *Pure and simple*.

Furthermore, the Orthodox understanding of repentance is to wake up from your slumber, and arise from your sleep. Repentance is unconditional surrender, but it is also waking up from sleep *par excellence*.

I have spent much of my life unhappy, and been slow to wake up. For all my privilege, I was an escapist. I wanted to leave the world, wanted to have something from another world, such desires as power Within the Steel Orb. I found the here and now to almost always be desolate.

At one point a priest mentioned me that monks in the desert were always warned of the temptation to escape the world. And I repented, let go of having something sexy or enticing or otherwise an exception to this desolate world, and when I wrote a blank check to God and most bleakly accepted that my place was in this desolate world, my eyes were opened and I saw, as for the very first time, that the

here and now I was in were not desolate, but beautiful. And that marked a beginning of being glad to be alive. And in the wake of this, I wrote "Paradise:"

Paradise

O Lord,
Have I not seen,
How thou hast placed me in Paradise?

And how have I said,
That a first monastic command,
Is, "Go home and spend another year with your family?"

While I have spent a few?
The obedience is not limited,
By a count of years,
But by obedience,
This being a first *obedience*.

Gifts I have fought as chance left me,
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?
It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.

I stand, or sit,
Not scholar, nor user experience professional,
Making use of a life of leisure,
Learning leisure well, to lord it over leisure,
Once I made a vow before a wonder-working icon in Brooklyn,

That I might receive a doctorate,
 Earned or honorary,
 And since then have prayed that my vow not be
 granted,
 An honorary doctorate not to receive,
 Because I do not want it enough to even travel,
 To give the icon a kiss of veneration!

An Invitation to the Game is an icon,
 Of children in a proletariat of excessive leisure,
 Excessive leisure being a training ground,
 Before a new life in a new world begins.

God the Spiritual Father looks after,
 Each person he has made,
 As a spiritual father looks after each disciple,
 God looketh after each,
 In the situations he placed each:

Life's Tapestry

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

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
 where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
 and you shall see the embroidery of God

from the good side
and then... everything will seem to you to be a
system and order.

What have I to add,
To words such as these?
This time is a time of purification and training,
And as in times past,
In an instant, I may be taken to a monastery,
As I was taken to study theology,
Six months' work to obtain student loans,
Falling into place one business day before leaving.
Thou teachest me,
And I know thou art willing to save:
Whether or not my plans are the best.
Whether I ever reach monasticism,
Thou art potent to save.
I might need to seek monasticism:
God can save me with or without.

So I learn patience,
Fly through FluentU and learn Russian,
And here I sit,
In a place thou hast opened my eyes to see as Paradise,
And with lovely food pantries,
And visits to pets at a lovely cat shelter,
And thou ever ministerest to me.

Though thousands around me be addicted to
television,
And ten thousands can't stop checking their cell

phones,
Thou hast delivered me,
And taught me to lord it over technologies,
Perchance a prophet in the way,
To the technology user who still suffers,
To those who remain entangled in the Web.
Thou hast delivered me from mortal danger:
Perhaps thou givest me more time to repent.
Or perhaps thou givest merely,
More time to repent.
Glory to God for all things!

Thou givest me simple pleasures,
Who knew tidying up a besmudged keyboard could be
fun?
Whither I go, thou art with me;
Thou preparest a table before family and friends.

"World" refers not to God's creation,
But to our collections of passions,
Seeing through a glass, darkly,
What bathes in the light of Heaven:
Hell is a state of mind,
But Heaven is reality itself.

I am perhaps not worthy of praise,
To say such things in middle-class comfort.
I seek monasticism, to be a novice,
Which is meant to be exile,
Yet an abbot's work,
Is to help me reach freedom from my passions,
And what true joy I have in luxury,

Only know further in monastic exile.
Years I have waited:
Now I am willing to wait years more.
Only if I may pursue repentance,
On such terms as it is offered me.
Glory to God who has allowed me such luxury!
Glory to God who has allowed me such honors!
Glory to God who has shown me that these avail
nothing,
And seek the true fame,
Fame before God himself!

Be thou glorified, O God, in me,
Though I know nothing,
Though I am nothing,
Be none the less glorified in me.
The Infinite can do the Infinite in the finite:
Be thou therefore glorified and praised in me,
Though I am nothing before thee,
Yet thou grantest me breath and life,
Joy,
And ever offerest me salvation.

Glory be to God on high!
Glory be to God for Paradise!
Which Paradise is in all things!
Glory to God for all things!

Amen.

In *The Paradise War*, one of the characters says, "You aren't happy unless you're miserable!" And strange as it

may sound, I am never so happy as when I discover a repentance.

The Philokalia says that people hold on to sin because they [wrongly] think it adorns them. And the pattern for repentance is often the same. There is some struggle, something I think I desperately need, that conscience or authorities tell me I need to let go of, and when I let it go and let go of all it represents for me, bleakly certain that some shining part of me will be lost and gone forever, I repent, then realize I was holding on to a piece of Hell, and am blindsided by a reward I would not have thought to seek. Repentance is bliss, as is well powers a passage in C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*:

I saw coming towards us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. Like all the Ghosts, he was unsubstantial, but they differed from one another as smokes differ. Some had been whitish; this one was dark and oily. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of him he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. 'Shut up, I tell you!' he said. It wagged its tail and continued to whisper to him. He ceased snarling, and presently began to smile. Then he turned and started to limp westward, away from the mountains.

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my body too (for there was heat coming from him as well

as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

'Yes. I'm off,' said the Ghost. 'Thanks for all your hospitality. But it's no good, you see. I told this little chap' (here he indicated the Lizard) that he'd have to be quiet if he came—which he insisted on doing. Of course his stuff won't do here: I realise that. But he won't stop. I shall just have to go home.'

'Would you like me to make him quiet?' said the flaming Spirit—an angel, as I now understood.

'Of course I would,' said the Ghost.

'Then I will kill him,' said the Angel, taking a step forward.

'Oh—ah—look out! You're burning me. Keep away,' said the Ghost, retreating.

'Don't you *want* him killed?'

'You didn't say anything about *killing* at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.'

'It's the only way,' said the Angel, whose burning hands were now very close to the Lizard. 'Shall I kill it?'

'Well, that's a further question. I'm quite open to consider it, but it's a new point, isn't? I mean, for the moment I was only thinking about silencing it because up here—well, it's so damned embarrassing.'

'May I kill it?'

'Well, there's time to discuss that later.'

'There is no time. May I kill it?'

'Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance. Please—really—don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep

of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now. Thanks ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

'Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.'

'The gradual process is of no use at all.'

'Don't you think so? Well, I'll think over what you've said very carefully. I honestly will. In fact I'd let you kill it now, but as a matter of fact I'm not feeling frightfully well today. It would be most silly to do it *now*. I'd need to be in good health for the operation. Some other day, perhaps.'

'There is no other day. All days are present now.'

'Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill *me* if you did.'

'It is not so.'

'Why, you're hurting me now.'

'I never said it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't kill you.'

'Oh, I know. You think I'm a coward. But isn't that. Really it isn't. I say! Let me run back by to-night's bus and get an opinion from my own doctor. I'll come again the first moment I can.'

'This moment contains all moments.'

'Why are you torturing me? You are jeering at me. How *can* I let you tear me in pieces? If you wanted to help me, why didn't you kill the damned thing without asking me—before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had.'

'I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible.'

Have I your permission?'

The Angel's hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

'Be careful,' it said. 'He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he *will!* Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. How could you live? You'd be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn't understand. He's only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn't for us. Yes, yess. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren't they better than nothing? And I'll be so good. I admit I've sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won't do it again. I'll give you nothing but really nice dreams—all sweet and fresh and almost innocent. You might say, quite innocent . . .'

'Have your permission?' said the Angel to the Ghost.

'I know it will kill me.'

'It won't. But supposing it did?'

'You're right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.'

'Then I may?'

'Damn and blast you! Go on, can't you? Get it over. Do what you like,' bellowed the Ghost; but ended, whimpering, 'God help me. God help me.'

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it

bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

'Ow! That's done for me,' gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solider, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that the something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back, rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinneying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse's neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed into each other's nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the

liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his seats he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

The Orthodox Church understands repentance to be a fundamental spiritual awakening, far more profound than getting bit by a political bug.

Repentance is not just True Awakening. It is also Heaven's best-kept secret.

Curiouser and curiouser

Furthermore, as far as awakening goes, it is the dogmatic theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church that it was always Plan A for our race to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was initially forbidden, but the ban was only temporary, until Adam and Life could

grow strong enough to eat such foods. The reason Adam and Eve fell after eating the fruit was not that they ate something that they were not meant to eat; it is because they went behind God's back and were like an infant trying to eat solid food when it needs breast milk.

Among the seasons of the Orthodox Church, Lent is the central season, a season of the repentance that brings Heaven here now, and builds up into the season of the Resurrection, a season of Heaven on earth, and then after a season where the Risen Christ helped his disciples on to more solid food, ascension where Christ rose to Heaven and brought the Church with him. Then comes Pentecost, which is my chief interest here, and not only because it marks the beginning of the Orthodox Church's road through time and history.

When Christ was teaching the disciples, he was always bringing them to higher things. With years of face-to-face discipling, they didn't get it. When Christ rose, they didn't get it. When he spent forty days trying to introduce more solid food, they didn't get it. When the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost, *they got it*.

Pentecost marks the season of awakening par excellence. It was at Pentecost that the disciples maturely ate and received of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and went from cowering behind locked doors to going fearlessly to proclaim good news throughout the known world. One of them was threatened by authorities with crucifixion; he answered, "If I feared the Cross, I would not be preaching it." Another who had denied his master three times before he "got it," when he was sentenced to death by crucifixion, said that he was not worthy to die like his Lord, and asked instead to be subjected to upside-down

crucifixion—the one form of torture and execution worse than his Lord's. Almost all of them died martyrs; they had something fundamentally beyond anything the world knew. Such things as Basil's response to threats come to mind:

The emperor Valens, mercilessly sending into exile any bishop who displeased him, and having implanted Arianism into other Asia Minor provinces, suddenly appeared in Cappadocia for this same purpose. He sent the prefect Modestus to Saint Basil. He began to threaten the saint with the confiscation of his property, banishment, beatings, and even death.

Saint Basil said, "If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

The official was stunned by his answer. "No one has ever spoken so audaciously to me," he said.

"Perhaps," the saint remarked, "that is because you've never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it

concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear.”

Reporting to Valens that Saint Basil was not to be intimidated, Modestus said, “Emperor, we stand defeated by a leader of the Church.”

And we, too, are to maturely eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

"Want to try some Snow Crash?"

Neal Stevenson in *Snow Crash* introduces a concept of Snow Crash that is not a narcotic, but is often laced with narcotics. Well into the book we learn that Snow Crash, the mysterious phenomenon, is a bigger, better, and geekier version of the Japanese animation technique that was banned when it caused mass epileptic seizures in its audience.

A political bug that is laced with a feeling of having made a spiritual breakthrough, that perhaps you are awake and the whole world is asleep, is false treasure. Such memes deprived of the breakthrough sensation, not laced with a narcotic, would not go very far. Laced with a sense of delightful spiritual awakening, political bugs bite people and get them to go places wisdom would not go.

It has been observed that gifted people are often very liberal, but *profoundly gifted people are often very, very conservative, or at very least populist*. Part of the taste that is exhilarating to most of the gifted population has a taste

more like flat beer to the profoundly gifted.

If you would like to know if you're having a real spiritual breakthrough, one question I would ask is, "What sin are you repenting of, recoiling from it in horror and tremendously glad to be clean?" If there is no clear answer to this question, the yellow metallic shine is fool's gold.

Conclusion

Do you desire to be woke? *Awaken!*

You desire a good thing...

...but there is a lot of fool's gold to be had...

...and the real gold takes some digging.

Some have cynically said, "Truth is a commodity that, however scarce, has always had a supply far in excess of the demand." I don't know whether that is true, but I have outlined what "True Woke" really means.

It is well worth pursuing.

Would you seek it?

A Pet Owner's Rules

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!
2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Lust is also drinking out of the toilet. Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe. It is a magic spell where suddenly nothing else is interesting, and after lust destroys the ability to enjoy anything else, lust destroys the ability to enjoy even lust. Proverbs says, "The adulterous woman"—today one might add, "and internet porn" to that—"in the beginning is as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword." Now this is talking about a lot more than pleasure, but it is talking about pleasure. Lust, a sin of pleasure, ends by destroying pleasure. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.

Having said that lust is drinking out of the toilet, I'd like to clarify something. There are eight particularly dangerous sins the Church warns us about. That's one, and it isn't the most serious. Sins of lust are among the most easily forgiven; the Church's most scathing condemnations go to sins like pride and running the poverty industry. The harshest condemnations go to sins that are deliberate, cold-blooded sins, not so much disreputable, hot-blooded sins like lust. Lust is drinking out of the toilet, but there are much worse problems.

I'd like you to think about the last time you traveled from one place to another and you enjoyed the scenery. That's good, and it's something that greed destroys. Greed destroys the ability to enjoy things without needing to own them, and there are a lot of things in life (like scenery) that we can enjoy if we are able to enjoy things without always having to make them mine, mine, mine. Greed isn't about enjoying things; it's about grasping and letting the ability to enjoy things slip through your fingers. When people aren't greedy, they know contentment; they can enjoy their own

things without wishing they were snazzier or newer or more antique or what have you. (And if you do get that hot possession you've been coveting, greed destroys the ability to simply enjoy it: it becomes as dull and despicable as all your possessions look when you look at them through greed's darkened eyes. It takes contentment to enjoy even greed: greed is *also* drinking out of the toilet.

Jesus had some rather harsh words after being unforgiving after God has forgiven us so much. Even though forgiveness is work, refusing to forgive one other person is drinking out of the toilet. Someone said it's like drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

The last sin I'll mention is pride, even though *all* sin is drinking out of the toilet. Pride is not about joy; pride destroys joy. Humility is less about pushing yourself down than an attitude that lets you respect and enjoy others. Pride makes people sneer at others who they can only see as despicable, and when you can't enjoy anyone else, you are too poisoned to enjoy yourself. If you catch yourself enjoying pride, repent of it, but if you can enjoy pride at all, you haven't hit rock bottom. As G.K. Chesterton said, it takes humility to enjoy even pride. Pride is drinking out of the toilet. *All* sin is drinking out of the toilet.

I've talked about drinking out of the toilet, but Rule Number Two is not the focus. Rule Number One is, "I am your owner. Enjoy freely of the food and water I have given you." Rule Number Two, "Don't drink out of the toilet," is only important when we break it, which is unfortunately quite a lot. The second rule is really a footnote meant to help us focus on Rule Number One, the real rule.

What is Rule Number One about? One window that lets us glimpse the beauty of Rule Number One is, "If you have

faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to a mountain, 'Be uprooted and thrown into the sea,' and it will be done for you." Is this exaggeration? Yes. More specifically, it's the kind of exaggeration the Bible uses to emphasize important points. Being human sometimes means that there are mountains that are causing us real trouble. If someone remains in drunkenness and becomes an alcoholic, that alcoholism becomes a mountain that no human strength is strong enough to move. I've known several Christians who were recovering alcoholics. And had been sober for years. *That* is a mountain moved by faith. Without exception, they have become some of the most Christlike, loving people I have known. That is what can happen when we receive freely of the food and drink our Lord provides us. And it's not the only example. There has been an Orthodox resurrection in Albania. Not long ago, it was a church in ruins as part of a country that was ruins. Now the Albanian Orthodox Church is alive and strong, and a powerhouse of transformation for the whole nation. God is on the move in Albania. He's moved mountains.

To eat of the food and drink the Lord has provided—and, leaving the image of dog food behind, this means not only the Eucharist but the whole life God provides—makes us share in the divine nature and live the divine life. We can bring Heaven down to earth, not only beginning ourselves to live the heavenly life, but beginning to establish Heaven around us through our good works. It means that we share in good things we don't always know to ask.

Let's choose the food and drink we were given.

Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret

Rewards that are not mercenary

We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different types of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.

C.S. Lewis, "The Weight of Glory"

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often, or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the *Philokalia* well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now, and it is nothing that is real to you until you have undergone that repentance. It is like looking forward to washing with fear, wondering if you will be scraped up in getting mud off, and in a very real sense suddenly recognizing that you had not in mind what it was like to be clean.

Let me explain by giving some examples.

Discovering the treasure of humility

The first illustration I have is not strictly speaking an example of repentance, at least not that I have seen, but might as well be.

One of the hardest statements in the Bible that I am aware of is, "In humility consider others better than yourself" (Phil 2:3). It's a slap in the face to most of us, *including* me. But humility is only about abasing yourself up to a point. The further you go into humility, the less it is

about dethroning "me, me, me," and the more it can see the beauty of others.

If it seems a sharp blow to in humility consider others better than yourself, let me ask you this: would you rather be with nobodies who are despicable, or in the company of giants? Pride closes the eyes to any beauty outside of yourself, and falsely makes them appear to have nothing worthy of attention. Humility opens the eyes to something of eternal significance in each person we meet.

There is one CEO at a place I worked who might as well have taken up the gauntlet of considering others better than himself. (I don't know about his spiritual practices as a whole; that's between him and his *shul*.) But on this point he has taken up the gauntlet, not of St. Paul necessarily, but of *humility*.

This CEO showed delight and some awe in each person I saw him meet. It didn't matter if you were near the top of the org chart, or at the absolute bottom; the CEO was delighted to see you. End of discussion. And he wanted to hear how you were doing, and not in a Machiavellian sense.

Now let me ask a question: who benefitted most from his respect at work (and, I can scarcely doubt, his respect outside of work)? Is it the ambitious leader, the low-level permanent employee, the timid intern? Certainly all these people benefitted, and though it was not so flambuoyantly expressed, there is a thread of deep respect running through the whole organization, and some things work smoother than any other place I've been. There are a lot of people who benefit from the CEO's humility. *But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's aptitude for respect is the CEO himself.* Others may enjoy kind treatment and perhaps be inclined to more modestly follow his example.

But he is in that respect at least functioning the way a person functions optimally, or to speak less abstractly, his state puts him in the presence of people he deeply respects and delights in again and again and again. To be proud is to be turned in on yourself, and he has something better: a spiritual orientation that lets him see the genuine beauty in others. (And, to be clear, the phenomenon also plays out more quietly among the rest of the organization.) Humility opens the eyes to the beauty of others. It also has other benefits; humility is less tempted to meet bad news with wishful thinking; the CEO is, I imagine, as sincerely wrong as often as the rest of us are sincerely wrong, but my suspicion is that he is less wrong, and less often wrong, than if he were to freely opt-in to being wrong by freely indulging in wishful thinking. This is another incidental advantage to humility, and perhaps there are others. But I insist that the person who benefits most from the CEO's humility is the CEO himself. And the reward for him looking on others with delight and awe is that he is put in a condition where he meets others filled with delight and awe. If that sounds like a tautology, *it is*. The reward for his seeing others through the eyes of humility is that he sees others through the eyes of humility: the biggest reward for humility is, quite simply, humility: *virtue is its own reward*.

Now humility may express itself in self-abasement, and another powerful gauntlet is thrown down when *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* or the *Philokalia* speak of "thirsting for the cup of dishonor as if it were honor." I will not treat that at length, beyond saying that it is a mighty door and opens to blessed humility.

What I do wish to point out is that pride turns you in on

yourself, blinding you to beauty outside of you and making you fill a bag of sand with holes in satisfying your narcissism, or trying to. Humility opens you up to all the beauty around you, and if you repent of pride and despair of being able to gaze on yourself in fascination, you may be surprised by the joy of gazing on others in joy and fascination, or something better than the transient and fleeting fascination offered by narcissism.

But what if I can't find anything in a person to respect?

If you can't find anything in a person to respect, I submit that you are missing something about being human. To quote *Tales of a Magic Monastery*:

The Crystal Globe

I told the guestmaster I'd like to become a monk.

"What kind of monk?" he asked. "A real monk?"

"Yes," I said, "a real monk."

He poured a cup of wine, and said, "Here, take this."

No sooner had I drunk it than I became aware of a small crystal globe forming about me. It expanded until it included him.

Suddenly, this monk, who had seemed so commonplace, took on an astonishing beauty. I was struck dumb. I thought, "Maybe he doesn't know how beautiful he is. Maybe I should tell him." But I really *was* dumb. The wine had burned out my tongue!

After a time, he made a motion for me to leave, and I gladly got up, thinking that the memory of such

beauty would be well worth the loss of my tongue. Imagine my surprise when, when each person would unwittingly pass into my globe, I would see his beauty too.

Is this what it means to be a real monk? To see the beauty in others and be silent?

Plants and animals command respect, and not just in the sense articulated by green advocates. Empty space itself is itself interesting. *How?* It is empty space that is much of the study of quantum physics and superstring theory. A great many physicists have earned PhD's, and continue to research, based on the physical properties of empty space. And, more importantly, the whole of God is wholly present in any and every empty space. In that sense, empty space in Orthodox Christianity is more pregnant, more dignified, than what an atheist would consider to be everything that exists. So empty space is worth respecting. But more than that, inanimate things, rocks and such, exist on the level of empty space but fill the space: "Blessed be the Rock" lets an inanimate thing represent God. It exists; it is something rather than nothing, and for that reason it is worth respecting. Plants exist on one more layer than mere existence; they have the motion, the fire, of life inside them. And animals exist on these layers but exist more fully; they are aware of their surroundings and act. And you and I, and every person you have trouble respecting, exist on all of these layers and more: we are made in the image of God, the royal and divine image, with the potential of the angelic image and of theosis, and are all of us making an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell. Those who choose Hell

represent a tragedy; but even then there is the dignity of making an eternal choice; Hitler and Stalin represent the dignity of eternal agency and making a choice between Heaven and Hell, and sadly using that choice to become an abomination that will ever abide in Hell. But they still tragically represent the grandeur of those who exist on several layers and use their free and eternal choice to eternally choose Hell. Some saint has said, "Be kind to each person you meet. Each person you meet is going through a great struggle," and all mankind, including those one struggles to respect, exist on several profound levels and are making an eternal choice of who they will permanently become. And respect is appropriate to all of us who bear the image of God, and have all of the grandeur of God-pregnant empty space, physical things, plants, animals, and a rational and spiritual and *royal* human existence, even if there is nothing *else* we can see in them to respect. Being appropriate to treat with respect is not something that begins when we find something good or interesting about a person: it begins long before that.

Returning from drunkennes to sobriety

In "A Pet Owner's Rules," I wrote,

God is a pet owner who has two rules, and only two rules. They are:

1. I am your owner. Enjoy freely the food and water which I have provided for your good!

2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

That's really it. Those are the only two rules we are expected to follow. And we still break them.

Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. If you ask most recovering alcoholics if the time they were drunk all the time were their most joyful, merry, halcyon days, I don't know exactly how they'd answer, if they could even keep a straight face. Far from being joyful, being drunk all the time is misery that most recovering alcoholics wouldn't wish on their worst enemies. If you are drunk all the time, you lose the ability to enjoy much of anything. Strange as it may sound, it takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. Drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet.

Bondage to alcohol is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. If you reject bondage to alcohol and fight your way to sobriety with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous, the reward if you succeed is that you have rejected bondage to alcohol and fought your way to sobriety. The reward for sobriety regained is sobriety regained—and sobriety includes ways of enjoying life that are simply not an option when one is in bondage to alcohol. *The virtue is its own reward.*

Returning from covetousness to contentment

Advertising, in stimulating covetousness, stimulates and builds discontent. Covetousness may well enough say,

"If I only get _____, then I'll be content." But that is fundamental confusion. Getting whatever _____ may be may bring momentary satisfaction, but the same spiritual muscles twisted to be discontent with what you had before, will make you become discontent with the _____ that you now think will make you happy.

What makes for contentment is learning to be content, and repenting of covetousness and being satisfied with what you have now gives the reward that is falsely sought in indulging covetousness. The reward for repenting of covetousness and learning contentment is that you are freed from covetousness and blessed with contentment.

The virtue is the reward.

Returning from lust to chastity

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe; repenting of lust, like repenting of pride and occult-like escapism, opens one's eyes to beauty one cannot see. Lust greatly hinders the ability to appreciate and enjoy things; repentance from lust is occasion for the slow re-awakening of the eyes to everything that lust cannot see—which is a lot.

Returning from contraception to how God built marriages to work

I had a bit of a hesitation in including contraception, because in Orthodoxy "everybody knows" that such things as drunkenness are real sins, while "everybody knows" that contraception is debatable, and probably OK if one gets a blessing etc. And here what "everybody knows" is out-and-out wrong.

The Fathers universally condemn contraception, and the first edition of K.T. Ware's *The Orthodox Church* said point-blank, "The Orthodox Church forbids artificial methods of contraception," but subsequent versions moved further and further to permissiveness. But it is not the Orthodox Church that has changed her mind; it is only certain salad bar theology today that wishfully tries to believe that the Orthodox Church says contraception can be permitted.

St. John Chrysostom calls contraception point-blank "worse than murder," and counsels parents to leave their children brothers and sisters, and not mere things, as an inheritance. The Blessed Augustine blasts what is today called "natural family planning," and should be called "contraceptive timing", saying that the heretics who practice what is today called "periodic continence" to frustrate the fertility of sex thereby forbid marriage, earning the searing rebuke about forbidding marriage in 1 Tim 4:1-5, and says that where there is contraception, there is no wife, only a mistress. St. Maximus Confessor describes sex as being wrong when it is done for some other purpose than making a baby. In my researches, I have yet to hear of any Christian teacher or canonized saint from the first millenium stating or allowing that any form of contraception is permitted in any form. For that matter, I have yet to hear of any of the Reformation offering anything but condemnation to the sin of contraception.

Biologically speaking, the beginning, middle, and end of the purpose of sex is procreation. Sex is not intended merely for pleasure, but each pleasure, such as that of eating (for which we have made Splenda), exists to continue the

species, whether through procreation or preserving individuals by nourishing their bodies with food. But I wish to state something more than just the condemnations of contraception, because the condemnations are the guardian of something basically human.

When I was studying in the Bronx, I was bombarded by posters from Planned Parenthood, which in their most forceful forms said, "Take *control* of your life!" And in general I am suspicious about the final honesty of advertising, but in this context the advertisement could hardly be more candid. Planned Parenthood's marketing proposition is that you can enjoy the pleasure of sex, perhaps increasingly overclocked by Viagra and ED drugs, while only having children when you individually opt-in, and retain your life in control as a pleasure-seeker. And that goes for Orthodox Christians as much as everyone else: perhaps abortion is out, but contraception, accidents excluded, is how people can pursue the pleasure of sex without the drag of unintended children.

But, before looking at monasticism, let me say that part of growing to full human stature is not being a permanent pleasure-seeker, and not being in control of oneself. In monasticism this is partly through things such as monastic obedience, an absolute obedience which frees monk or nun from fulfilling self-will. In marriage this comes from having children beyond the point where you can have control as a pleasure-seeker. In that sense disconnecting sex from making babies is in marriage what optional obedience would be for monasticism. It is easier, it is more palatable, and it all but neutralizes the whole point.

The benefit of repenting of contraception is not that God preserves pleasure-seeking. The benefit of repenting of

contraception is that you grow to transcend yourself, and marriage reaches its full stature just as obedience to a spiritual physician helps monastics reach full human stature. Marriage and monasticism are different in many ways, and today I think marriage should be recognizing as having some of the status traditionally seen in monasticism. But the point of being an adult is to grow up, to grow by a crown of thorns, to transcend oneself, whether by marriage or by monasticism. The means may be very different, but the goal is self-transcendence, and the marketing proposition of contraception is to short-circuit that hard lesson and allow the adult to remain a sexually active pleasure seeker who does not grow any higher. And this is part of why I wince when I find people I know telling of their contraception; it is something of a missed opportunity, where people have marriage but do not use it to their full stature, opting instead for an "à la carte" version of marriage that is the equivalent of a "monasticism" that allows veto over obedience.

Returning from Gnosticism and escape to the here and now

When I read one title on Gnosticism, I was pulled up short by one passage. It described Gnosticism not as a set of ideas or hinging on ideas (it can be connected with many ideas), but on a mood, and more specifically that of despair. I was quite surprised by that because the appeal of Gnosticism is something enticing, something "sexy," of a sweet forbidden escape. But that is only an enticing bait if one wants escape because one has despair about the here

and now that God has provided us.

Monks in the desert were perennially warned about escaping the here and now; it is tied to what was, and is, called the "demon of noonday." And a great many things today are laced with that sweetly-coated poison. It is not just gnosticism, which I shouldn't have researched, or the occult, or "metaphysics" in the occult sense, or Harry Potter, or *the Chronicles of Narnia*. And yes, I did say, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. It is the story of people brought out of the everyday world into another world, and that is a classic bait, and one that is far from exhausted from the short list here.

The reward for rejecting the temptation to escape from the here and now is the discovery of the here and now as something one does not need to escape from. At an advanced level, one discovers that paradise is present wherever saints are; that is why crude settings at a monastery are genuinely sweeter than more luxurious settings where Mammon is worshiped. But, as in giving up pride, giving up escape sets the stage to enjoy what you wanted to escape from. Before you give it up, what you want is something that almost by definition is something you cannot have: whatever enters the here and now becomes one more dreary fixture of the here and now, maybe not instantly, but at least eventually. But like humility which opens the eyes of others pride cannot see, repenting of escapism in any form is rewarded by finding that one is in God's good Creation and escape is in fact *not* the best one can hope for: one hopes for engagement in worship of God, and that is what one is rewarded with. The reward for repenting and accepting virtue is that one steps out of escape and accepts virtue: the virtue is its own reward.

Moving on from grudges to forgiveness

Forgiveness is tied for some of us to repentance of unforgiveness. Perhaps some people forgive easily and quickly, or at least quickly. But when you do not forgive, or do not yet forgive, it seems falsely like you have something over the other person, and it seems like a treasure to hold on to. But it is no treasure. It is a piece of Hell: nursing a grudge is drinking poison and hoping it will hurt the other person.

Repentance is stepping out of Hell, and forgiveness is stepping outside of the moment of pain and moving on to other things that do not hurt. It is not easy; it is incredibly hard for some of us; but it is the first step in a journey of healing. And the reward is simply that we step out of the moment of hurt, back in the past, and start to leave the hurt behind.

...and being blindsided by reward

Some people speak of repentance as unconditional surrender, and it is in fact unconditional surrender. My godfather spoke of repentance as the most terrifying thing a person can experience, because God demands a blank cheque of us, and does not tell us how much he will expect.

But when, and only when, we have made that surrender, we are blindsided by rewards. God may give other rewards too; but he gives rewards. In repentance you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And you let go

of Hell and grasp something much better!

Repentance is seen in Orthodoxy as awakening, and the reward is part of the awakening.

Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. To those who repent, a reward is promised!

Virtue is its own reward. And it is also the reward of repentance.

Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near!

The Angelic Letters

My dearly beloved son Eukairos;

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

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

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

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

My dear son Eukairos;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

needed, and Paradise, like the absent-minded Professor's lost spectacles, were not in any of the strange places he looked but on his nose the whole time.

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

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

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

My dear, dear Eukairos;

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

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

He has awakened a little, and I would have you do all in your power to show him the silence of Heaven, however little he can receive it yet. You know some theologians speak of a river of fire, where in one image among others, the

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

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

The Physician is at work!

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

Dear blessed Eukairos;

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

The details of the fall I will not treat here, but suffice it to say that when someone begins to wake up, the devils are

furious. They are often given permission to test the awakening man, and often he falls. And you know how the devils are: before a fall, they say that God is easy-going and forgiving, and after a fall, that God is inexorable. Do your best to aid a person being seduced with the lie that God is inexorable.

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

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

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

In Light and Life and Love,
Your Brother Angel

My dear fellow-ministering angel;

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

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

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

And that is true of a great many things in life; draw Mark to participate in faith and obedience. He expects to

understand first and participate second, but he needs to come to a point of participating first and understanding second. Many things need to start on the outside and work inwards.

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

Dear cherished, luminous son;

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

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

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

Books have a place. Homilies have a place. But they are one shadow of the silence of Heaven. And there are more

important things in the faith, such as fasting and almsgiving, repentance and confession, and prayer, the crowning jewel of all asceticism. Give Mark all of these gems.

With Deep Affection,
Your Brother Angel

My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

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

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

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

If you were a human employee, this would be the time for you to be punching in *lots* of overtime. Never mind that he thinks unconsciously that you and God have both deserted him; your strengthening hand has been invisible to him. I do not condemn you for any of this, but this time has been appointed for him to have opportunities for growth and for you to be working with him, and the fact that he does not seek growth in this trial is only reason for you to work all the harder. That he is seeking to get things back the way they were, and suffering anger and fear, is only reason for you to exercise more diligent care. God is working with him now as much as ever, and I would advise you for now to work to the point of him seeking his spiritual good in this situation, however short he falls of right use of adversity for now.

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

A good goal would be for Mark to pray for those that robbed him, and through those prayers honestly desire their good, or come to that point. But a more immediate goal is his understanding of the struggle he faces. Right now he sees his struggle in terms of money, inconveniences, and the

like. Raise his eyes higher so he can see that it is a spiritual struggle, that God's providence is not overruled by this tribulation, and that if he seeks first the Kingdom of God, God himself knows Mark's material needs and will show deepest care for him.

Your Fellow-Servant in Prayer,

**But an Angel Who Cannot Struggle Mark's Struggle
on his Behalf**

My dear, esteemed son and fellow-angel Eukairos;

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

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

At 10:30 PM that night on the dot, one of his friends was walking in the dark, in torrential rains, and fell in the street, and a car ran over his legs. This friend was someone with tremendous love for others, the kind of person you cannot help but appreciate, and now that he had two broken legs, the flow of love reversed. And Mark unwittingly found

himself in an excellent situation to care about something other than himself. He quite forgot about his money worries; and he barely noticed a windfall from an unexpected source. He kept company and ran errands for his friend.

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

With an Eternal Love,
Your Respectful Brother Angel

My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;

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

Mark is right in one way and wrong in another to realize that he has only seen the beginning of deification. He *has* started, and only started, the chief end of human life, and he is right to pray, go to confession, and see himself as a beginner. But what he is *wrong* about is imagining that the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

My dear son Eukairos;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With Deepest Affection,
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

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

Some street drugs are gateway drugs, and some temptations are temptations to gateway sins. Gluttony, greed, and vanity are among the "gateway sins", although it is the nature of a sin to give way to other sins as well. Gluttony, for instance, opens the door to lust, and it is harder by far to fight lust for a man whose belly is stuffed overfull. (A man who would fare better fighting against lust would do well to eat less and fast more.) In sin, and also in virtue, he who is faithful in little is faithful in much, and he who is unfaithful in little is also unfaithful in much. You do

not need to give Mark what he expects now, help in some great, heroic act of virtue. He needs your help in little, humble, everyday virtues, obedience when obedience doesn't seem worth the bother.

The liturgy speaks of "the feeble audacity of the demons", and Mark needs to know that that is true, and true specifically in his case. What trials God allows are up to God, and the demons are an instrument in the hand of a God who would use even the devils' rebellion to strengthen his sons. The only way Mark can fall into the demons' hands is by yielding to temptation: nothing can injure the man who does not *harm himself*. The trials Mark faces are intended for his glory, and more basically for God's glory in him—but God chooses glory for himself that glorifies his saints. Doubtless this will conflict with Mark's plans and perceptions of what he needs, but God knows better, and *loves* Mark better than to give Mark everything he thinks he needs.

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

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

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

My dear, watchful son Eukairos;

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

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

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

And hold him in your prayers.

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

My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

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

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

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

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

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

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

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

Mark is no longer your charge.

He has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

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

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

Mark is no longer your charge.

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

Go in peace.

Your Fellow-Minister,

מיכאל • MHXAEI • МИХАИЛ • MICHAEL • **Who Is Like God?**

More Than Royalty

One element I remember from a documentary video at Avery Coonley School was talking about some Native American cultures. They commented that, like Christianity, there was an origins myth in which they were placed in a garden, a Paradise. But unlike Christianity, there was no story of leaving paradise. And yet in Orthodoxy, we insist that Paradise is wherever the saints are. (*Paradise can be every bit here and now!*)

There are certain ways that this is not an obvious thing to say for Christianity, especially if Hell exists, and great saints are often sanctified through great suffering. However, I wish to say more than I said in God the Spiritual Father, in which I said that we do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but we live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that makes all the difference.

There is something more to say, but words begin to fail me.

One point where we are in paradise is that every moral injunction, insofar as Orthodox asceticism is moral, is not for God's benefit, but for ours. St. Maximus Confessor

describes three grades of sonship: *slaves* obey God out of fear of punishment, *mercenaries* obey God for Heavenly reward, but *sons* obey God out of love. And the Philokalia contains the striking statement that we owe more to Hell than to Heaven, because more people have obeyed God out of the fear of Hell than out of desire for the delights of Paradise. Nonetheless, if the highest growth is to obey God out of love for him, *we* are the beneficiaries of our obedience and love. We can be saved from Hell by fearing the torments, or we can grow to seek Heaven's rewards, or we can love as the least inadequate kind of response to God, but we do not benefit God. In the best spirit of de-mythologizing, it can be said that God is perfect from all eternity and has never had needs except in the person of your neighbor, and God is fundamentally beyond being made more perfect by our acts or our love, no matter how much we love him. We benefit *ourselves* the more we obey God out of love for him.

In something of the same sense, ambition, which includes trying to become a bishop, is a sin, but when things are rightly understood, there is a sense in which we cannot overreach and we cannot reach so high as to be guilty of overreaching ambition. Now maybe ecclesiastical office need not be sought after (but I do not condemn honorable seminarians in the world). However, when we talk about what is good for us, about humility, about prayer, about repentance, we cannot reach too far. And humility is a greater thing than the Philosopher's Stone or the Holy Grail, as I just barely graze on in *The Treasure of Humility and the Royal Race*: in short, it opens your eyes and mine to the godlike beauty with which God has imbued every single

human being. Humility transforms everything, or rather it transforms us so that we can be in Paradise anywhere. And monks may be forbidden to seek the lowest of elevations, let alone seek to be the next Ecumenical Patriarch, but there is no degree of the treasure of humility I know of that will bring a confessor's rebuke of "Do you really think such a lofty humility is fitting for someone in your undistinguished rank? Have some more pride like the rest of us!" And humility, in monastics or in the world, is a far greater treasure than any external honor that is to be had. Humility may sometimes be *followed* by ecclesiastical rank, but the real high estate doesn't wait for ecclesiastical office which may or may not come. The treasure and reward of humility is there, immediately, not just sometime later when authorities decide you are ready to bear a heavier cross and push you out of the nest for a greater service.

I would like to comment, very inadequately, on the monastic vow of wealth. It is said well enough that monastics renounce possessions and Orthodox in the world are to practice generosity and detachment, but he who renounces all possessions ends up with God Himself as pre-eminent among *many* possessions. The words "Do not store up treasure on earth" are but a shadow to "Store up treasures in Heaven," and monasticism is scarcely more nor less than a community framework for storing up still more treasures in Heaven. The Gospel may censure the man who stores up treasures on earth and tears down his barns to build bigger barns: but in and out of monasticism Orthodox are summoned to reach positions where their barns are not big enough for the treasures in Heaven they have come to possess, and they need to tear down their spiritual barns and build up bigger barns. The Gospel implies nothing

positive about the man who has great earthly wealth while considering himself much too poor and wearing himself out to acquire even more wealth, but God's fullest blessings are on the monk who considers himself to have no appreciable treasures in Heaven and lives an insatiable desire to get even more treasures in Heaven. The monk who rejects an earthly endowment of wealth is instead given an incomparable Providence that gives him treasures he didn't know to seek. Royalty have such privilege that they are not to touch money: monasticism takes this treasure to the utmost. The monk has lost two hundred and thirty-nine pounds in one vow: if you want to know true treasure, monks have the greatest treasure of all, in this world in the next. St. Constantine, equal to the apostles and great among princes, told one monk that if he had known what rewards monks have in Heaven, he would have exchanged his royal purple for a monk's robes immediately. Monasticism is a unique realm of privilege in the Church. (And the security provided by merely earthly wealth is an illusion and does not compare to the Providence given to married and monastic who do not put their trust in riches.)

What does monastic work pay for a monastic or pilgrim? The answer "100% below minimum wage" is positively misleading. The coin which monastic work pays in, and is more important to a spiritual father than getting work done, is healing from our passions, and freedom from our sins is a coin which no amount of secular money is worth. As regards what monks receive by their labor, I would appeal to the Song of Songs: Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly

be contemned.

All this and more is to be said of monasticism, but it is also to be said that monasticism is no more than the rudiments of the Gospel. If you do not have a monastic spiritual father, all that really means is that you have God for a Spiritual Father. Monastics insist that salvation is possible at every time and everywhere, and is offered to all. However spectacular the blessings of monasticism sound, God's blessings are offered everywhere. If you should be a monk, by all means become a monk. But if not, do not believe that the God who created and governs all of Creation cares for monks but does not care for you. Christ died for you, and you are made in the divine image to ascend to the divine likeness whether or not monasticism is your path. God has loved you from everlasting to everlasting, and even your ability to choose between Heaven and Hell is part of the glory he built into you.

Moreover the saints, and we are invited to this, are not dependent on their efforts succeeding. We often think of moral victory like a consolation prize, as a palliative to essential failure, but the saints don't. St. Paul at the end of his life, when he had greater external achievement than almost anyone since, wrote to St. Timothy, "I have fought the good fight. I have run the race. I have kept the faith." St. Paul, saint that he was, seemed to consider his moral victories of being faithful as more worthy of mention than external victories that included planting churches, writing half the books of the New Testament, and healing and even raising the dead. He did not need to be successful, and his gargantuan external successes were never mentioned when he claimed a faithfulness that many others can share. There is a crushing character to needing to succeed, and the

example of the saints is liberating. We don't need to *succeed*, however noble our endeavor may be. We need only pray and be *faithful*.

We live in a spiritual and visible world, and some say that man, as the recapitulation of the spiritual and visible worlds, as a microcosm of all Creation, is higher than even the angels. And in this world, there are devils and there is evil, but the devils are always and only on a leash. Meanwhile, the Church Triumphant, the Holy Trinity and every saint before, is watching and cheering us as we run the race. The Church has been called a large yet extremely close-knit family, and every saint standing before the throne of God is praying, or is willing to pray, for us.

And the world we live in is *real*. I am not the only person who has wanted to escape into another world; small literature brings escape from the world while great literature brings engagement with the world. I've wanted to be in Narnia, among other places, and C.S. Lewis says that many kids have their own little world, but for the children, it was real. And this world we are in is itself real. It may not be in its final greatness yet. But it is real and still profoundly great, and after one spiritual adventure I came to realize that being in communion with Christ, I was in a certain sense in communion with all Creation, with the stars in the sky and the starfish in the sea, and insofar as the human person is constituted in the image of the Trinity, I was more in communion with the heretics than they were with themselves. I am not sure this is officially endorsed language; but I do know that I reached the brink of death and Hell, and my salvation consisted in rejecting a passion of alienation with Creation, and that I am in fact in

communion with the Orthodox Church, in communion with God, and in communion with Creation.

Even suffering has meaning. Before I became Orthodox, as a Protestant I said that Purgatory seemed to be a spiritual reality present on earth, whether or not it was a place after death. Now Orthodoxy has been clear in not preaching that some must pass through Purgatory to reach Heaven: but we share in the sufferings of Christ, and spiritual giants suffer more. Part of this is “No servant is greater than his master,” but suffering in our lives is neither random nor meaningless. Marriage and monasticism are both intended to be a crown of thorns to help us grow up; and unlike the world assumed by certain Church Fathers, we live in a world where blessed marriage is almost as much an exceptional holy light as monasticism, and it should be recognized both that marriage and monasticism serve the same goal of self-transcendence, and are different positions on one and the same team.

In *The Orthodox Church*, Vladyka KALLISTOS compares Christians today to the Early Church in terms of what society Christians are surrounded in. He does not make the complaint in ages past, when ancient Roman persecution ended and a saint said that easy times rob the Church of her saints. Now we live in times more reminiscent in pagan terms of Ragnarok or the Kali-Yuga, where Norse paganism sided with the good gods because they wanted to go down losing on the right side. But this is precisely not the Christian situation. It is more like a business with unrestricted Facebook use, where some people spent all their work hours sunk into social media, while the worker bees became even more focused. Things are darker outside for Christians, but for many the divine

light shines more starkly. I have been blessed.

I have titled this piece “More Than Royalty” because whatever is distinctive about royalty, or giftedness, or wealth is a shadow compared to what is built into the human constitution in the divine image. The reference is obvious:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paradise is wherever the saints are!

(What more is there to say?)

God the Spiritual Father

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

The Nicene Creed

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

C.S. Lewis, paraphrased

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

Proverbs

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

Footprints, paraphrased

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

The Philokalia, paraphrased

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

Hebrews

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

Let's turn the clock back a bit, to 1755. There was a catastrophic earthquake in Lisbonne in Portugal, and its untold misery shook people's faith in the goodness of the

world we live in. In the questioning that came afterwards, Voltaire wrote *Candide* in which the rather ludicrous teacher Pangloss is always explaining that we live in "the best of all possible worlds:" no matter what misfortune or disaster befell them, the unshakable Pangloss would always find a way to explain that we still lived in the best of all possible worlds. And Voltaire's point is to rip that preposterous idea apart, giving a dose of reality and showing what the misery in Lisbonne made painfully clear: we do *not* live in the best of all possible worlds. Far from it. But there is another shoe to drop.

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

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

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

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body

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

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

- Unsought loss of goods and possessions, so that one may deliberately seek to be saved and may even be helped when incapable of shedding all one's possessions or even of giving alms.
- Ease and prosperity, so that one may voluntarily struggle and suffer to attain the virtues and thus become dispassionate and fit to save other souls.
- Trials and hardship, so that those who cannot eradicate their own will may be saved in spite of themselves, and those capable of joyful endurance may attain perfection.

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

The Philokalia

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than

this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, while the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a

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

The Philokalia

All These Things Were From Me

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

imitation of his patron saint, he prayed for a thousand nights on a rock before an icon of St. Seraphim of Sarov. He reposed in the Lord in 1949 and the Church of Russia glorified him in August of 2000.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With tiredness and anxiety I am testing how strong your faith is in My promises and your boldness in prayer for your relatives. Why is it not you who entrusted their cares to My providential love? You must leave them to the protection of My All Pure

Mother. Serious illness found you, which may be healed or may be incurable, and has nailed you to your bed. This was from Me.

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

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

Know and remember always, no matter where you are, That whatsoever hurts will be dulled as soon as

you learn In all things, to look at Me. Everything has been sent to you by Me, for the perfection of your soul.

All these things were from Me.

St. Seraphim of Viritsa

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

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

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

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

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

Romans

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

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

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

In that sense, only monks and nuns are expected to have spiritual fathers to shape them. The rest of us have God as our Spiritual Father, and we can kick against the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The life of St. Philaret the Merciful speaks volumes:

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

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

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the

house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. "I have hidden away riches and treasure," he told his family, "so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working."

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

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

him the bag, too, so he can carry it?" He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, "Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat." St Philaret did so.

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

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

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

When Philaret and Theoseba learned that these most illustrious guests were to visit their house, Philaret was very happy, but Theoseba was sad, for they did not have enough food. But Philaret told his wife to light the fire and to decorate their home. Their

neighbors, knowing that imperial envoys were expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The biggest thing we need right now is to know the point of life, which is to live the life of Heaven, not starting at death, but starting here on earth. C.S. Lewis lectured to students on the eve of World War II when it looked like

Western civilization was on the verge of permanent collapse. I won't try to repeat what he said beyond "Life has never been normal" and add that God's providence is for difficult circumstances every bit as much as when life seems normal. God's providence is how we can survive an economic depression. The Sermon on the Mount is no mere wish list only for when life that is perfect; it is meant for God's work with us even in circumstances we would not choose, *especially* in circumstances we would not choose, and speaks of the love of God the Spiritual Father who can and will work with us in an economic depression, if we will let him, and work with us no less than when life is easy.

(Some have said not only that God provides in rough times as well as easy times, but that God's providence is in fact clearer in rough times, such as an economic depression, than when things go our way and we can forget that we need a bit of help from above.)

God the Spiritual Father wants to use everything for our good. Everything he allows, everything in our lives, is either a blessing or a temptation that has been allowed for our strengthening. His purpose even in allowing rough things to happen is to help us grow up spiritually, and to make us Heavenly. *The Great Divorce* imagines a busload of people come from Hell to visit Heaven, and what happens is something much like what happens in our lives: they are offered Heaven and they do not realize Heaven is better than the seeds Hell that they keep clinging to because they are afraid to let go. Heaven and Hell are both real, but God does not send people to Hell. C.S. Lewis quotes someone saying that there are two kinds of people in this world: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "*Thy* will be done," respecting their choice

to choose Hell after Heaven has been freely offered to them. The gates of Hell are bolted and barred from the inside. Hellfire is nothing other than the Light of Heaven as experienced by those who reject the only possibility for living joy there is. And neither the reality of Heaven nor the state of mind we call Hell begins after death; their seeds grow on us in this training ground we call life. We can become saints, heavenly people like St. Philaret, or we can care only about ourselves and our own survival. God the Spiritual Father wants to shape us to be part of the beauty of Heaven, and everything he sends us is intended for that purpose. But in freedom he will let us veto his blessings and choose to be in Hell.

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

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he

will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Psalms

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

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

Isaiah

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

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

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

St. Maximus Confessor

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

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

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

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

"Life's Tapestry"

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

mistakes

there where one must give thanks and glorify.

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

And it is true. It is not just, as some have said, that *God's address is at the end of your rope*. That is where you meet God best. It may be easier, not harder, to find God and his providential care in an economic depression. God is working a plan of eternal glory. Westminster opens with the great question, "What is the chief end of man?" and answers, "To glorify God and enjoy him forever." But there is a deeper answer. *The chief end of man is to become Christ*. The chief end of man is to become by grace what Christ is by nature. God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man that man and the sons of man might become gods and the sons of God. The Son of God became a man that men might become the sons of God. The divine became human that the human might become divine. This saying has rumbled down through the ages: not only the entire point of being human, but the entire point of each and every circumstance God the Spiritual Father allows to come to us, as a blessing or as a temptation allowed for our strengthening, as God's will working through instruments or sons, is to make us share in Christ's divinity, and the saints' lives show few saints who met this purpose when everything went their way, and a great many where God worked in them precisely in rough and painful

circumstances. If we watch the news and say, "This is the day the Lord has made. Well, he's done better," try to open your eyes to the possibility that "Well, he's done better" is what people want to say when, in the words of C.S. Lewis in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "Aslan is on the move."

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

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

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

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

God the Game Changer

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

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

mainstream choice, Windows 7 instead of something more like MS-DOS.

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

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

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

God the Game Changer at work: A story

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

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

The woman asked his prayers for her shamelessness; in modern terms, she was a sorority girl who majored in men, money, and margaritas, except worse. Much worse. She went to a religious festival, got to church, and a force kept

her from going in. She tried to go around it, then prayed before an icon of Mary the Mother of God asking to be let in and then saying she would do whatever she was told. Then she was able to enter in; she worshipped, and returned to the icon and asked to be told what to do. Then a voice from on high said, "If you cross the Jordan, you will find glorious rest."

She was given some money and purchased three loaves of bread as she left, and then went, and struggled and struggled and struggled in what seemed like endless temptations and struggles. She had given free reign to her vices for seventeen years, and for seventeen years in the desert she wanted men, wanted wine and lewd songs, wanted meat, and just kept on struggling. After a time—a long, *long* time—things got easier. And she had been living for almost half a century in the desert, eating desert plants and at the mercies of the elements. It came up in the conversation that she quoted from the Bible with understanding. The monk asked her if she had read them. She said she had never seen another person since making the journey, had no one to read holy books to her, and like most people then, she didn't know how to read. Then she alluded to Scripture and suggested that Christ the Word may teach by himself.

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

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

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

He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not winnow; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours."

But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sowed, and gather where I have not winnowed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the

bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest..."

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

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

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

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

nor evil, nor pain, nor sickness, nor death, but he harvests them.

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

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

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

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

A present-day example of God's game-changing, this time not with sin but with injury, is in the life of Joni Erickson. At a young age, Erickson dove the wrong way into shallow water and broke her neck, instantly paralyzing her in all four limbs. And she assuredly prayed what everybody who has such an accident prays if prayer is even considered: "Lord, heal me." And some people are healed, miraculously. But an entirely different, in a way deeper, miracle occurred with her. She adjusted to her loss and is a woman who has not only discovered that her life is still worth living, but has become a vibrant and well-known ambassador for the claim, "Even after a tragedy like mine, *life is still worth living.*" None of this would have happened if she had not suffered an injury that cost her the use of all four limbs. For that matter, none of this would have happened if God answered her prayers by giving her the supernatural healing she wanted. Instead, God changed the game. He answered her prayers, not by giving what she asked for, but by moving the game to the next level. God did not plant her injury, but he has harvested where he did not plant and gathered in where he never scattered.

More than a game change

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

Christ's people looked for a military Messiah who would deliver the Jews from Roman domination. Christ changed the game; he did not offer salvation as military deliverance,

but salvation from sin. He didn't give people what they were looking for; he pushed the game to the next level.

Darkness reigned in the crucifixion of Christ.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Christ is risen, and thou art overthrown!
 Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

goes on to raise her son from the dead. That isn't what is happening in Christ's resurrection.

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

Christ is risen, His joy!

A Pilgrimage from Narnia (Again)

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!

Revelation and Our Singularity

My seminary has Holy Trinity Monastery's (of what jurisdiction I do not know) Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, five-star-reviewed on Amazon (a lone dissenter gave only four stars), and I decided in prayer to read the commentary on the Book of Revelation, which was translated by Fr. Seraphim and published by his St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.

It helped, in part, to help me see why Fr. Seraphim is so respected in some quarters, and it does not strike me, as do other translations from the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, as being laced with an occult dimension or TMI that monks should normally flee from exposing to laity. It was, overall, a good and lucid translation of a classic commentary, but... I'm a little bit "not surprised" that the translation of Vladyka's commentary on Revelation was the one translation that appears to be Fr. Seraphim's doing. *It has certain fingerprints.* And at risk of irony as someone who dipped into the beginning of the commentary and then

honed in on Revelation, it might gently be pointed out that Revelation is the one book of the New Testament that is intentionally not read in Orthodox services.

Among the positive points that may be mentioned, in a text that Fr. Seraphim chose to translate and that bears the Brotherhood's imprint, are that Revelation needs to be interpreted with extreme caution, and that responsible interpretation is layered. For instance, without any pretension of a single, exhaustive exegesis, he notes,

9:7-10 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

This description of the monstrous locusts causes some commentators to think that these locusts are nothing else than an allegorical description of human passions. Each of such passions, when it reaches a certain limit, has all the signs of these monstrous locusts. In describing the coming day of the Lord, the holy prophet Joel describes also the appearance before it of destroyers who in part remind one of these locusts.

I suppose that by these locusts one should likely understand the evil demons who have prepared themselves for battle with us, and as signs of victory, wear crowns when we submit to them as

having received an evil victory through pleasure. The hair of women [in cultures where women wore headdresses, out of modesty—CJSH] testifies of the demons' love of pleasure and arousal to fornication; the teeth of lions indicate their hardheartedness; their tails, which are likened to those of scorpions indicate the consequences of sins, which produce the death of the soul, for *sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death* (Jas 1:15). (St. Andrew, Chapter 26)

But then he goes on:

Contemporary commentators, not without a certain reasonableness, find a kinship of these locusts with airplanes and their bombing attack.

This notes a similarity with admitted caution; Fr. Seraphim's translation earlier quotes the reference to hail, and earlier says, without such restraint, "Does this not refer to an aerial bombardment with its destructive and incendiary bombs," and follows with "Some people see also in this frightful mounted army tanks which spurt forth fire."

What is at issue here? It has been said, "**Nothing is as dated as the future.**" And the text, should future scholars wish to date it, could date this text fairly closely by what technology it sees and what it has no hint of.

There is a counterbalance to "Nothing is as dated as the future." *Things fade in.* Prophecy collapses time without sharply distinguishing similar events that occur at different period, and when oca.org/saints, before the prophecies of St. Nilus, the party that posted St. Nilus's story wrote:

Saint Nilus has left a remarkably accurate prophecy concerning the state of the Church in the mid-twentieth century, and a description of the people of that time. Among the inventions he predicted are the telephone, airplane, and submarine. He also warned that people's minds would be clouded by carnal passions, "and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger." Men would not be distinguishable from women because of their "shamelessness of dress and style of hair." Saint Nilus lamented that Christian pastors, bishops and priests, would become vain men, and that the morals and traditions of the Church would change. Few pious and God-fearing pastors would remain, and many people would stray from the right path because no one would instruct them.

The person who assessed the text as referring to the mid-twentieth century was in fact not quoting a timeline given by St. Nilus but giving a gloss by the presumably mid-twentieth century author of his life, and St. Nilus did not in fact give any timeline or date that my historical sensitivities could recognize. I have read his prophecies, the real ones that tell what the wording of the Mark of the Beast will be, a point I have never seen on the urban legend channel. But things are fading in. The original life posted referred to the "radio," not the "telephone." As far as men being indistinguishable from women, we have far eclipsed the summary of the prophecy above, which has no concept of widespread sex-change attempts. As far as passions go, we now have a sewer's worth of Internet porn. The prophecy

could apply as much to scuba diving even better than submarines, but the oca.org/saints wording has not been changed. The prophecies stated that wisdom would be found that would let men speak in one place and be heard across the world, a prediction which has faded in in the radio, then also the telephone, then also the Zoom chat. What next? Who knows if haptics might make a “remote touch” that offers some ghastly and obscene parody of a mother touching her baby, remotely and from a phone? As far as the morals and tradition of the Church, contraception has transformed into being broadly seen as a legitimate option to Orthodox. Examples could easily be multiplied, but I think it would be better to recognize the singularity we live in, a singularity that is unfolding on many dimensions (the gender rainbow, the river of blood from black-on-black murders ever since “Black Lives Matter” took to the forefront (could we please reverse course and go for “All Black Lives Matter?”), a singularity following a century that with artists like Picasso radically transforming artistic conventions that a historian should regard as being like an eyeblink. Now changes are continuing to roll out, at an accelerating pace in a singularity. In a matter of weeks, models who were not half-starved began to be rolled out. Politically correct pictures of people usually did not show white people alone; they included a person of color. Now a further installment has been made: some pictures have a woman wearing Muslim hijabs, and increasingly common are wheelchairs to include people with disabilities (please note that most disabilities, including mine, do not have people using a wheelchair). And dominoes are falling: not only BLM, which seems to always and only be in reference to blacks needlessly killed by white police and by white

police alone, but Islam's surge (with atheislam in which the West accepts under an iron yoke what it spurned under a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light), the cyber-quarantine, vaccines that will be socially mandated, transgender being in truth a prominent and well-integrated addition to what was once really just mostly "LGB", with schoolchildren being told "There's no right or wrong age to fall in love" (one archpriest called a spade a spade and said, "Putting the P in LGBTQP+"), and so on.

Furthermore, if I may offer what may seem an overly fine distinction, I think that matching up current events to details of Revelation is best avoided, but understanding that we are in a singularity and understanding that similarity may have value.

I had conversations with an adviser who really should have known better, who asked me, in asking if I was meeting basic duty, "Do you make allowances for greater ignorance in the past?" I answered:

I don't make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable. And I would quote General Omar Bradley: "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount."

I don't want to give an uncritical endorsement of the "Nature Connection" movement, as it seemed as I went through the eight shields thinking always, "This is overall good but I'm holding my nose at the spot we are in now," and eventually "I *don't* need Coyote as a totem."

However, any serious attempt to hear out nature

connection, even as literature one does not give more than a willing suspension of disbelief, is that we have lost things that were known to past generations, and that surviving hunter-gatherers have an incredible richness in sensitivity to their surroundings and layers of patterns suburbanites can miss. And the advisor, in my opinion, had read too many ancient texts, and in the original, to have legitimate innocence in seeing the difference in knowledge as ancient Aramaic texts fail to reflect the victories of the Scientific Revolution.

I might briefly comment on the singularity we are in:

Recorded history does not really date past ten thousand years. The non-Neanderthal subspecies all living humans belong to dates back to perhaps forty times that length, and our genus dates back to two or four hundred times that length. *Less than one percent of all humans who have ever lived have ever seen a written/printed word, let alone mass produced technology even on par with a pencil or knife.*

I might comment briefly, if perhaps only to Jerry Root and other C.S. Lewis fans, that C.S. Lewis raised an objection to standard evolution that was a form of what is called self-referential incoherence. If evolution is true, then it explains why we have good enough brains to find food, avoid being eaten, and produce offspring... but not why we would have good enough brains to put together a true theory of evolution. Knowledge of evolution is no more than a biochemical reaction as romantic love is no more than a biochemical reaction, and it reflects philosophical confusion of a major order to say it is even theoretically possible that our theory of evolution could be true. This has been answered in part with a suggestion that evolution would

select for brains that could find things that were true, but if that is the case, assuming evolution is true, it is an extremely parochial elite, less than 2% of the age of civilization and less than .0001% of the time people have been around that evolution has given anyone the kind of brains that evolution selects for. In my opinion that response to an objection shows serious philosophical muddle. And, incidentally, I believe that Fr. Seraphim was right, at least as regards popular culture, that evolution is not doing the job of a scientific theory, but the job of philosophy that allows atheism to account for what over 99% of humans have ever lived have seen as the work of some form of spirit.

Now before getting back to Fr. Seraphim, let me get back to my advisor. Elsewhere in our discussion, he hypothetically mentioned ancient prophecies of “mushroom clouds” that would “flatten cities,” and benighted ancients failing to understand a reference to nuclear warfare that is neither particularly like toadstools in a forest, nor something that would make a smooth, level surface out of a city. I think I thought of, but did not mention, a suggestion that “mushroom clouds” are not the only way an ancient prophecy could describe global thermonuclear war; “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (Rev 6:14) could be read as a surprisingly straightforward ancient prophetic description of conditions of nuclear war.

And there are other comparisons that could be drawn. I intentionally don't want to belabor where tempting comparisons could be made, but the Internet and the whole

locus of electronic technology could be described as fire from Heaven in “great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,” (Rev 13:13), and “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Rev. 17:5), where a basic utility, a socially mandated technology, includes an endless sewer of porn if you want it, and really at least soft porn if you try to research innocent topics on YouTube. There is more I could belabor: SecondLife fascinates the public and has been called SecondWife, with stern moralists saying, “Fornicate using your OWN genitals!” And about Babylon being thrown into the sea, I believe that it will be at some point as easy to take down any technological Babylon as start a nuclear war, and that inadvertently. Read “The Damned Backswing” as written in fifteen feet high blinking neon about our stack of technologies.

(Fr. Seraphim quotes, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the tree of life,” and the commentary underscores that Revelation ends with “a strict warning not to distort the words of the prophecy under threat of the application of the plagues that are written in this book.” I might suggest that it may be, if not exactly clear-cut wrong, at least in a gray area to add exact historical correspondences where fire and hail simply refer to aerial bombardment—or fire from Heaven (some people believe Elijah’s “fire from Heaven” as being lightning), simply as neither more nor less than the lightning-like electricity that powers electronic gadgets.

There are some points of contact, but it is not clear to me that it is right to make such a simple and complete identification of one historic detail with one text in Revelation.)

However, I present these to illustrate a temptation. **Nothing is as dated as the future.** An archaeologist of the future, if the Lord tarries (a point on which I am unclear and perhaps must be unclear), who found this article as somehow surviving the Digital Dark Ages and/or World War III, could closely date this article based on the major technologies I call out and the major technologies I don't show a hint of imagining. I wrote, Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people. We have already with our Zoom chats laid practical foundations for George Orwell's 1984.

(And I might briefly state that I believe the examples I gave, if there is far future history to assess this article, will be much more dated than Einstein's simple prediction: "I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." That kind of statement tells scarcely less but is far less dated.)

And I would like to state now a cardinal point:

I would be very careful about recognizing prophecies fulfilled in Revelation, but I would be much faster to observe ways in which we live within a singularity, and that is a singularity on par with what is called a singularity in modern physics when a black hole is formed.

There was a classic set of AT&T ads, dated to 1993, with

the classic AT&T Death Star logo, looking like a dark vintage science fiction movie. You can see the video at <https://tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company>. And on a humor newsgroup someone followed up with:

Have you ever received an automated sales pitch, while you were still in your pajamas?

Have you ever had thousands of calls all over the world charged to your stolen account number?

Have you ever had your paycheck deleted by faceless intruders from across the globe?

Have you ever had an employer know more about your whereabouts and activities than your spouse?

Have you ever been snuffed to dust by a satellite laser while lying on the beach?

YOU
WILL

And the company that will bring this to you
is AT&T

There was one thing that AT&T wasn't straightforward: *No technology is permanently exotic.*

The AT&T commercial portrays a world of wonder. However, "YOU WILL" is not especially wondrous to those of us living in that dark science fiction reality. We do not wonder at electronic toll collection; we do not wonder at being able to access webpages on another continent. *No technology is permanently exotic*, and we can obtain momentary relief by upgrading to the newest and hottest gadget, but then, alcoholics can obtain momentary relief of the living Hell of alcoholism by getting really drunk. The short-term fix does not work in the long run, and is in fact counterproductive. **As far as (anti-)social media go, we have delivered the equivalent of a tofu virtual chicken in every pot.** And tofu does not just feel and taste gross; it is nutritionally an absolutely terrible surrogate for real, honest animal protein. And even the parody left out one point in retrospect: "*Have you ever been drained at compulsively checking your phone at least a hundred times a day?* YOU WILL, and the companies that will bring it to you include AT&T."

A Bookshelf for Our Day

Let me give a few titles that I would strongly recommend reading, preferably in paper (kids, go ask your great-grandparents):

Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience: Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity*

I'm going to open this list with a dud. I am, or at

least have been, a medievalist at heart; one of my books is a take on Arthurian legend, *The Sign of the Grail*, although I have since done something that is overdue. I have backed away from Arthurian legend as however enchanting it may seem if you don't know it, not being particularly edifying or profitable to explore.

It has been said that the singularity we live in now is the fruit of what developed in the Middle Ages. However, *The Medieval Experience* left me completely underwhelmed, and furthermore the more background knowledge I had of an area, the more hollow a failure to walk in another person's shoes the text appeared to be.

In the last real chapter, about precursors to feminism, the author quotes a non-medievalist Ibsen in words I wish to repeat in gory detail:

HELMER: To forsake your home, your husband,
and your children! And you don't consider
what the world will say.

NORA: I can pay no heed to that. I only know
that I must do it.

HELMER: This is monstrous! Can you forsake
your holiest duties in this way?

NORA: What do you consider my holiest duties?

HELMER: Do I need to tell you that? Your duties
to your husband and your children.

NORA: I have other duties equally sacred.

HELMER: Impossible! What duties do you mean?

NORA: My duties towards myself.

HELMER: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

NORA: That I no longer believe. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are—or at least that I should try to become one.

It is a sign of feminism's monstrous hegemony that at least some women, despite every effort to want a career, ask "*What is wrong with me?*" because after all feminist direction they have received, they still can't dislodge a fundamental desire to get married and have kids. This last major chapter in *The Medieval Experience* falls squarely in the "She shall be saved *from* childbearing" camp, and all accounts of the good and/or improving state of women in the Middle Ages describes precursors to feminism's desire that a woman not be a homemaker. It doesn't just say that a woman should have other options besides being homemakers; it is that precursors to the good estate of women are always in terms of dislodging women from the role of wife and mother no matter how much women should want to be homemakers. And on this

count, not a word of the book's account of proto-feminist tendencies shows the slightest acknowledgment and respect for some women wanting to be wives and mothers.

This book represents to me a missed opportunity. And for a book copyrighted in 1974, it doesn't seem to show the empathic understanding for today's singularity that it might, alongside failing to walk in a medieval mom's shoes. The original copyright year is the same year as Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and Mander's title remains salient several decades later and after profound increases in technology, but *The Medieval Experience* is as a whole forgettable and gives remarkably little insight into the medieval experience as foundations of Western cultural singularity.

C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*

This book is a little bit more of a near miss.

I do not count it as a strike against this book that it takes some effort to appreciate; I am more than willing to recommend a book that will challenge its readers. But nonetheless, I see one or two major strikes against the book. Quite simply, it leads the reader to covet magic and many of its most tantalizing passages tantalize with magic from Atlantis. Furthermore, the character of Merlin is singularly riveting. One definition that has been used to describe the difference between a flat and a rounded character is, "A rounded character believably surprises the reader." Merlin comes awfully close to delivering

nothing but believable surprises. And even if Ransom sharply limits Merlin's initiative, Merlin's presence is a problem. And I say that as someone who bore the nickname "Merlin" in high school.

However, this book is valuable in offering a sort of literary "YOU WILL" commercials, which admittedly did not portray how we are glued to mobile devices. The heroes are a delight to read about; the villains are more of a chore to read about, and the banality of evil comes through loud and clear. *Furthermore*, it is a description of a singularity, and on that point it is the closest work of fiction I know to a fictionalized telling of the singularity we are in.

On that score, *That Hideous Strength* is well worth the effort to appreciate.

Philip Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*

A couple of comments about the author of this book. First, he is an important figure in the history of English-speaking Orthodoxy and did major work rendering the Philokalia in English. Second, he is a hypocrite and an old rogue. He has blasted the Western musical tradition, which an Orthodox might legitimately do, but one friend came to visit him and found him blasting out Wagner's opera, and that's Wagner's opera as in "Wagner's opera is not as bad as it sounds." I would also comment on how he writes.

The Rape of Man and Nature deals in caricatures and not the written equivalent of photorealism.

However, this has usefulness if it is taken as caricatures and not a literal account of facts. It is a finding in psychology that people recognize someone more readily from a caricature than from a photograph, and the caricature artist's job is to take the most striking and salient features in e.g. someone's face, and then portray them in exaggeration that yields a striking clarity. And if Sherrard is a caricature artist in *The Rape of Man and Nature*, he is an excellent caricature artist.

This book really is a close "near miss," and I would readily recommend it for people who want a little bit of a feel of what was lost in the Scientific Revolution, and of what developments contributing to our ongoing singularity lost alongside scientific and technical gains.

Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*

I've mentioned other titles as near misses. This one doesn't just score a basket; it is nothing but net. (In more ways than one.)

I'm not going to try to list everything that is worth reading in this title. Buy it and read it yesterday.

C.J.S. Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*

I'm not going to write at length about why I believe my work is relevant, but my suspicion is that this book and not the overlapping *The Best of Jonathan's Corner* will be my most lasting contribution, if (of course) the

Lord tarries.

At the time of its writing, it has two stars on Amazon, two reviews, and no customer ratings. I would ask the interested reader to read what the *Midwest Book Review* has to say about it.

Looking back at C.S. Lewis

“These days of final apostasy” is not a new phrase; St. John Chrysostom in fact said that the world was breaking apart and coming to an end, but while antiquity ended, the world has continued.

The world has continued, and C.S. Lewis, on the eve of World War II, famously addressed students, “Life has never been normal. Humanity has always been on a precipice,” although it may be that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night because the end of the world has been so insistently predicted over the ages that no one takes the message seriously.

I think it is worth understanding to what extent we live in a singularity, and we have multiple things that could be apocalyptic events: apart from the obvious threat of global thermonuclear war in a world where each city and each major university has a hydrogen bomb aimed at it, the Internet could collapse like an increasingly brittle house of cards, and take the economy down with it. Or things could continue to change and new societal vulnerabilities could develop. The pace of change has been accelerating, and it might well continue accelerating until there is a step that is *sui generis*, on par with C.S. Lewis in the nonfiction

fraternal twin to *That Hideous Strength: The Abolition of Man*, in which Lewis describes the final step in “man’s victory over nature:”

The wresting of powers *from* Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature...

Man’s conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men. There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man’s side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car...

Man’s conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man. Every victory we seemed to win has led us, step by step, to this conclusion. All Nature’s apparent reverses have been but tactical withdrawals. We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on. What looked to us like hands held up in surrender was really the opening of arms to enfold us for ever.

I do not know how the world will end, or whether the apocalypse will turn out to be anything like any of the possibilities I mentioned. There has already passed a moment when a nuclear power ordered a military officer to launch global thermonuclear war. That was during the Cuban missile crisis, and all of us are alive today only in the wake of a soldier who refused to obey an unconditional

order. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” God provided a way out of global thermonuclear war then, and he may shelter us, at least for a time, from a meltdown of the Internet. We live and die as God allows, and he may sustain us still. He may give us more to repent. Since Christ’s First Coming, his Second Coming has always been imminent, and part of what I omitted from C.S. Lewis’s passage above is a reality that has not literally been fulfilled even when That Hideous Strength’s Pragmatometer is live in what is fed to us by the Internet:

The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself.

It is my own opinion that “a perfect applied psychology” is by definition a pipe dream, a materialist’s explanation of spiritual phenomena such as is discussed in “How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion.” But it is possible that Nature’s final conquest of Man as described above will come without needing all-powerful eugenics, prenatal conditioning, or a perfect applied psychology. Pipe dreams have already become real. And one world government is an increasingly real possibility on more grounds than technology.

Conclusion

I have begun with an Orthodox Fr. Seraphim of Plantina and ended with a Protestant C.S. Lewis. The turn is not expected of an Orthodox author, but I have generally had an easier time with C.S. Lewis fans than those of Fr. Seraphim.

All the same, I hope to have shed some light in the process, and introduced a useful distinction between donning X-Ray goggles that let you infallibly identify historic details cryptically referred to by the details of Revelation, and recognizing and understanding that we live in a singularity very different from that of over 99.9% of humans who have ever lived.

Much Love,
Christos

The Arena

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

cosmic coliseum, as a champion on God's behalf. Never on earth does St. Job know the reason for the catastrophes that befell him.

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

whether through God lacking authority, or wisdom, or love. The very sword blows of Satan glancing off shield and armor are ordained in God's good providence to burnish tarnishment and banish rust.

11. The Almighty laughs Satan to scorn. St. Job, faithful when he was stricken, unmasked the feeble audacity of the demons.
12. God gives ordinary providence for easy times, and extraordinary providence for hard times.
13. If times turn hard for men, and much harder for God's servants, know that this is ordained by God. Do not suppose God's providence came when you were young but not now.
14. What in your life do you wish were gone so you could be where you should be? When you look for God to train you in those very circumstances, that is the beginning of victory. That is already a victory won.
15. Look in every circumstance for the Lord to train you. The dressing of wounds after struggle is part of training, and so is live combat.
16. The feeble audacity of the demons gives every appearance of power, but the appearance deceives.

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

that God seeks to train us in the situation we are in, not the situation we wish we were in.

25. It is easier not to be angry when we recognize that God knows what he is doing in the situations he allows us to be in. The situation may be temptation and trial, but was God impotent, unwise, or unloving in how he handled St. Job?
26. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds by any means. We live instead in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods. And that is the greater blessing.
27. Some very holy men no longer struggle spiritually because spiritual struggle has worked out completely. But for the rest of us, struggle is a normal state. It is a problem for you or I to pass Lent without struggle. If we struggle and stumble and fall, that is good news. All the better if we cannot see how the thrusts and blows of the enemy's sword burnish away a little rust, one imperceptible speck at a time.
28. Do you ask, "Did it have to hurt *that* much?" When I have asked that question, I have not found a better answer than, "I do not understand," and furthermore, "Do I understand better than God?"
29. We seek happiness on terms that make success and happiness utterly impossible. God destroys our plans so that we might have the true happiness that is blessedness.

30. Have a good struggle.
31. There is no road to blessedness but the royal road of affliction that befits God's sons. Consider it pure joy when you fall into different trials and temptations. If you have trouble seeing why, read the Book of James.
32. Treasures on earth fail. Treasures in Heaven are more practical.
33. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for what good you do. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is how the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
34. If you have hard memories, they too are a part of the arena. Forgive and learn to thank God for painful memories.
35. Remember that you will die, and live in preparation for that moment. There is much more life in mindfully dying each day than in heedlessly banishing from your mind the reality. Live as men condemned to die, made a spectacle before men and angels.
36. Live your life out of prayer.
37. It takes a lifetime of faith to trust that God always answers prayers: he answers either "Yes, here is what you asked," or "No, here is something better."

And to do so honestly can come from the struggle of praying your heart out and wondering why God seemed to give no answer and make no improvements to your and others' pain.

38. In the Bible, David slew Goliath. In our lives, David *sometimes* prevails against Goliath, but often not. Which is from God? *Both*.
39. Struggling for the greater good is a process of at once trying to master, and to get oneself out of the way. Struggle hard enough to cooperate with God when he rips apart your ways of struggling to reach the good.
40. Hurting? What can you do to help others?

Apprentice gods

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

after this life our eternal choice of Life or Death is sealed.

5. Do not despise moral, that is to say eternal, victories. Have you labored to do something great, only to find it all undone? Take courage. God is working with you to wreak triumph. From his eternal providence he is working, if you will be his co-worker, in synergy, to make with you something greater than you could possibly imagine, a treasure in Heaven which you never could imagine to be able to covet.
6. The purpose of life may be called as an apprenticeship to become divine. The divine became man that man might become divine. The Scriptures oft speak of the sons of God, and of men's participation in the nature divine. This divinisation begins on earth and reaches its full stature, when the Church triumphant and whole becomes the Church of saints who have become what in God they were trying to become. And we are summoned to that door.
7. Were sportsmanship to be found only in a foreign culture, we would find it exotic. Play your best, seek to win a well-played game, but have dispassion enough to be graceful in winning and losing alike. But one of its hidden gems is that most often a team that has to win will be defeated by a team that only tries to give it their best.

8. But sportsmanship is not just for sports. Hard times are encroaching and are already here: but we are summoned, not to win, but to play our best. Hence St. Paul, at the end of a life of as much earthly triumph as any saints, spoke as a true sportsman: he said not, "I have triumphed," but that he had been faithful: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my [race]course, I have kept the faith." This from a saint who enjoyed greater earthly accomplishments than his very Lord.
9. It is said that there are three ranks among the disciples: slaves who obey God out of fear, hirelings who obey God out of the desire for reward, and sons who obey God out of love. It has also been said that we owe more to Hell than to Heaven, for more people come to the truth from fear of Hell than the desire for the rewards in Heaven. But if you want a way out of Hell, seek to desire the incomparably greater reward in Heaven; if you seek reward in Heaven, come to obey God out of love, for love of God transcends even rewards in Heaven.
10. It is said, Doth thou love life? Then do not waste time, for time is the stuff life's made of. It might be said, Seekest thou to love? Then do not shun asceticism and discipleship, for they are the stuff love is made of. Or they are a refining fire that purges all that is not silver and gold. Our deifying apprenticeship takes place through asceticism and being disciples.
11. Two thoughts are to be banished: *I am a saint*, and *I*

shall be damned. Instead think these two thoughts: *I am a great sinner, and God is merciful.* Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. You have not met Christ's dread judgment throne yet: seek each day to pursue more righteousness.

12. The sum of our status as apprentice gods is this: Love men as made in the image of God, and work in time as the womb of eternity. Fulfill your apprenticeship with discipleship as best you are able. And follow God's lead in the great Dance, cooperating in synergy with his will. And know that lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

To a Friend

[With apologies to St. Seraphim, and I really hope my adaptation doesn't come across as comparing myself to a great saint I am deeply indebted to!]

To Your Brilliance, and you know who you are:

On the topic of worry, Your Brilliance said that I was a monk and therefore not subject to worry, but you, not being a monk, have worries. And I, poor not-even-a-novice Christos, wish to open your eyes to something. I, poor Christos, have nothing that is not an open door for you.

Where to begin?

One start might begin with commercials to stimulate covetousness back in 1993:

Online at

tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company

Some of the technologies in the “YOU WILL” commercials are already obsolete; we don't need to get tickets from an ATM because we can do that with a phone in our pockets, and we don't need to carry our medical records

in our pockets because the electronic storage of records obviates the need to carry a physical device so doctors can have your records.

But in retrospect, the following “anti-commercial” could be added:

Have you ever drained yourself by compulsively checking your phone easily a hundred times a day?

Have you ever had several Big Brothers know your every every step, every heartbeat?

Have you ever had every keystroke you’ve ever typed be recorded and available to use against you for all your remaining life?

Have you ever met people from the last generation that remembers what life was like before the world went digital?

YOU
WILL

and AT&T ain’t the only company that will bring it to you!

No technology is permanently exotic. It may be the case that Jakob Nielsen said, “In the future, we’ll all be Harry Potter,” meaning we will all have gadgets that do super things. It did not, of course, mean that we will be playing Quidditch—a dated remark, given that we now have flying motorcycles.

It might be deadly difficult to use them to try and play Quidditch, or perhaps some Internet of Things technology

could make such Quidditch playing no more dangerous than in J.K. Rowling's imagination, but that important safety caveat does not change the fact that we can do things Nielsen didn't imagine... but still, no technology is permanently exotic, and none of these technologies really change the poverty that "Old Economy Steve" was privileged not to even need to fathom.

And the picture is false if it is assumed that "YOU WILL" is simply Old Economy Steve's vibrant economy with electronic tolling and other such things tacked on.

Telling of a story

There was one story poor Christos thought to write, but it has some things intended at surface level that apparently are not at surface level. "Hysterical Fiction: A Medievalist Jibe at Disney Princess Videos" was intended to be an obvious inversion of a bad habit in fantasy and historical fiction that has at least one postmodern wearing armor. The reading experience is like what it is like for an American to travel to England, enter a shop, and be greeted with the same accent as back home. However, very few people got it, so poor not-even-a-novice Christos would rather tell *of* a story than tell the imagined story itself.

The story would be set in what is treated as a dark science fiction world, and presents the shock of seeing how things really are, that we have pretty much everything promised in the "YOU WILL" commercials, if perhaps not the Old Economy Steve assumptions about basic wealth.

But amidst this darkness is something important, a light that shines in many places. It has been said that Paradise is simply where the saints are, and the well-worth-

reading story of *Fr Arseny: Priest, Prisoner, Spiritual Father* tells of a priest who carries Paradise with himself, even in a concentration camp! And the real core of the story I have wanted to tell is “Guilty as charged” for every element of dark science fiction dystopic reality, but that is really much less significant than a character of light who shines in even the deepest darkness. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness never gets it.

Peter Kreeft said that the chief advantage of wealth is that it does not make you happy. If you are poor, perhaps perennially struggling to make ends meet, it may be a difficult temptation to resist to think that if you had money, all your problems would go away. Being wealthy clips the wings of that illusion, and our science-fictionary present clips somewhat the wings of the illusion that life would be great if we could send a fax from the beach. Windows Mobile was advertised under the rubric of “When, why, where, and how you want to work,” when it should be, “You will never be free from the shackles of your job.”

I would quote the Sermon on the Mount:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be

darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

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

“And why do you worry for garments? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

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

“If thine eye be single:” a reading of this verse in translations often has the word “healthy” or “sound,” and those readings are true. However, in the middle of a real sandwich of teaching about storing up treasures in Heaven and earth, “single” is singularly appropriate. Its meaning is cut from the same cloth as the warning, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” A “single” eye is one that is undivided, that does not multitask, that as an old hymn says,

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.

What poor Christos has, and this is something monastic aspirants should aspire to, but not anything should be a “greater monasticism” monopoly, is not in any sense being better at planning; it may mean in fact being worse at planning. All of poor, not-even-a-novice Christos’s lessons about worrying have not been being better at planning for the future; experience is that trying to solve a life’s problems on a day’s resources opens the door to despair. What is needed is not greater planning but greater focus on today, and allowing tomorrow to worry for itself. “Each day has enough trouble of its own” is very *practical* advice. Poor Christos is no better at solving all problems in a day than Your Brilliance; poor Christos is just a little bit better at *letting go* and trusting in Divine Providence.

That Providence orders the Dance. Blessed Augustine said that if a master sends two slaves along paths that will

cross, their meeting is a coincidence from the slaves' perspective but intended by the master as planned. One thing we find in escaping the Hell of self is that that is how God opens our eyes to a broader world.

And really, refraining from worry is the outer layer where there are many layers underneath. People who delve deeper may have no plans; trusting God that if they obey God today, God will plan for them tomorrow. Identity as we understand it today is another treasure on earth we are to let go of, and digging deeper is something of an opposite of magic. I remember as the Hell of self when I had a job and an extended stay hotel room, and I was able to set up technology exactly as my poor self wanted. It might as well have been magic. G.K. Chesterton famously said, "The poet only asks to get his head into the Heavens. The logician tries to get the Heavens into his head, and it is his head that splits." Magic is an attempt to reduce things to the point that we will have more control, while dancing with the Lord of the Dance opens our hands instead of closing them. C.S. Lewis says that we want God to change our circumstances, where God wants our circumstances to control us. Right now poor less-than-a-novice Christos has been working on the *Classic Orthodox Bible* and trying to publish it in hardcover with larger text when it is cramped as an Amazon paperback. And I wanted to have it ready for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, but it is not appearing like it will be ready; but there may be something in publishing it the next Sunday, the Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas. All concrete hopes, with an 'S' as in 'Shit', will be disappointed. Hope proper, Hope in God, will be fulfilled.

TED talks have made a great deal out of the Stoicism that is a secret weapon in the National Handegg League,

with observations like “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” And it is a blinding flash of the obvious that philosophy could make a difference to real people. But what we have here is something more than Stoicism. Stoicism’s strengths are preserved in the *Philokalia*, and there is more. Stoicism is of some benefit, but it does not tell us to follow the Lord of the Dance. It is worth noting, and practical in benefit, but eclipsed by a living exegesis of the Sermon on the Mount:

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

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

One day Ishmaelites [Arabs] attacked Paphlagonia, devastating the land and plundering the estate of Philaret. There remained only two oxen, a donkey, a cow with her calf, some beehives, and the

house. But he also shared them with the poor. His wife reproached him for being heartless and unconcerned for his own family. Mildly, yet firmly he endured the reproaches of his wife and the jeers of his children. "I have hidden away riches and treasure," he told his family, "so much that it would be enough for you to feed and clothe yourselves, even if you lived a hundred years without working."

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

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

him the bag, too, so he can carry it?” He gave him the bag. The exasperated wife said, “Just to spite me, why not give him all the wheat.” St Philaret did so.

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

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

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

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

expected, brought everything required for a rich feast.

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

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

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

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

He returned home and became ill. On the tenth

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

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

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

St. Philaret did not just refrain from worry; he played his part in the Great Dance, and God gave him a wonderful story.

As far as all these things that his wife Theoseba could not see, his trust reached the level of, really, an arrogance, the same arrogance whose hymn I wrote:

Song VIII.

A HYMN TO ARROGANCE.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
‘There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not ere were created,

The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, "Michael,"
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth
therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that
shaketh it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it
up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,

And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample
under feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your
feet.

Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the
Devil himself:
“Blow, and spit on him.”

The Consolation of Theology tells in part the author’s worries and wishing to be in control, and learning something that is the very opposite of what we both reach for.

There was a simple “game” on Macintoshes when poor Christos was in high school, called “Global Thermonuclear War,” with a “Launch” button. Press the button, and all kinds of missiles launch worldwide and destroy the earth. The lesson is articulated in words: “The only way to win the game is not to play at all.” And so it is with worry.

“Do not store up treasures on earth.” The further we grow into this, the more we discover we have treasures on earth to give up... and the more we give them up, the more treasures in Heaven our hands are empty enough to receive.

St. Seraphim had a remarkable dialogue with a pilgrim about the meaning of life, and he said it was one thing: the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Good works do not reach their full stature unless they are relational, done to connect with God. And really, what greater treasure in Heaven is there to have than the Holy Spirit? The expurgation seems painful, and it is painful, but the pain does not last. Or rather it is transcended, like the saint in the story posited above transcends a dark science fiction dystopia. But there is tremendous freedom in letting go.

God wants to open us up to a larger world. Once poor Christos confessed to not being open to God, and was instead of a usual correction was advised to be mindful of

the fact that God and the saints are open to us.

But to give a sudden close, poor Christos will reread St. John, “A Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself,” online at tinyurl.com/st-johns-treatise. He needs it, and you might too.

A Cantic to Holy, Blessed Solipsism

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

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

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

My Motherland is Heaven,
And so I go and seek pilgrimage,

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

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

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

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

Sin.

The pagans all around worshipped among the cacophonous
 din of a treacherous junior high:
 There was no reckoning of sin,

Only appeasement of arbitrary, bickering gods,
Who were not much more than overclocked men,
And truth be told, sometimes far less.
And what appeased one god,
Might well offend anger another.
Are you a Christian?
Then why do you appease so many bickering gods,
And why do you worry with it?
Be thou a solipsist, *please!*

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

And lastly become truly a solipsist,
No longer know that you are you and God is God:
For the wall between created nature and Uncreated God
only exists that we may rise above it;
The Son of God became a man that men might become the
Sons of God!
God and the Son of God became Man and the Son of Man
that men and the sons of men,
Might become gods and the sons of God!
Adam, trying to be God, failed to be god;

Christ became Man that he might make Adam god:
The whole purpose of human life is to become by Grace
What Christ is by nature:
Be nothing before God and take down the curtain
separating “You” and “me.”

Amen! Amen! Amen!

Who Is Rich? He who is Content.

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

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

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

Whatever your opinion of Star Trek may be, I regard

this specific lesson (which I don't remember meeting in any Star Trek TV show or movie that I've watched), as an unfortunate lesson. Possibly there is more pleasure in starting to covet something than being in contentment before; twentieth century critiques offering conservative warnings about capitalist society where people like corporations because they sell them such desirable and coveted things; advertising perennially creates a spirit of discontent with whatever one has. And here what is a great good appears small and what is small in its merits appears great: the greatness of being content with what you have appears a trivial thing, and the triviality of things that can be acquired by chasing covetousness appears deceptively great.

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

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

What did St. Paul have in mind when he called a form of covetousness "*the root of all evil?*" Let me give one educated guess about two people who coveted more than

reigning as lords in Paradise. Adam and Eve did not fall because they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; God's Plan A had always been for them to eat that fruit, *in the right way, and when they were ready for it*. The ban was only meant to be temporary while they grew. Adam and Eve fell because they went behind God's back and had the fruit on their own terms, not God's. And that is why what God intended as a profound blessing was received as the venomous sting of death, that opened the door to every sin, suffering, and sorrow known to man.

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

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

When I was getting ready to study theology, I had some money and used it to buy a computer that ended up lasting me for several years: an IBM ThinkPad (a respected brand, for good reason), with 15" of screen real estate, having 1GB

RAM and a 1GHz processor. That's still plenty for running Linux, and it was quite respectable for a laptop when I bought it in 2002 and several years after.

When I was working out buying a computer that I would have last me for a long time, I worked out the details of a practical investment, but there was something holding me back. My conscience wasn't quiet. I didn't see why this wouldn't be an optimal solution to a rational problem, but my desire was in part what I call *sacramental shopping*. Not too far in meaning from mediating humanity, *sacramental shopping* is an ersatz sacrament, a sacrament made much dumber. Not that we are not to live by consuming: the Holy Mysteries are quite specifically there for us to feed on and live by consuming. But we are missing something if we shop for merchandise to give us life. And, finally, I repented of my seeking sacramental shopping and accepted my conscience's "No," whole cloth. And then my conscience surprised me by changing, and I purchased the computer as a careful investment, but only a rational choice and not sacramental shopping.

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

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

But in all this, and in "A Pet Owner's Rules," the bit about not drinking out of the toilet is only a footnote to the #1, central rule: "I am your owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have provided for your good!" We are perhaps content to feed a dog canned or dry pet food and water, but

“eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has any heart imagined” what the Pet Owner in Heaven has for us, beginning not after the Last Judgment but here and now. I remember a time visiting a monastery where I was bowled over by humility by a layman who was not even a novice, just one of the people who worked in the kitchen, and I came back and wanted to see him, not because he was kind to me (although I assure you that he was very warm and kind), but because I wanted to catch some crumbs from under the table of his humility. My two thoughts were that I had not dreamed there were such things in Heaven or on earth, and a perhaps brash thought, “I want the mint [spiritual money-printing machine]!” because his humility really had reached that degree, and I wanted the source of such money. (Perhaps we are commanded in the Sermon on the Mount, “Do not store up treasures on earth,” but that is a #2 helper, a footnote, to “Store up treasures in Heaven,” and humility is one such treasure, legitimate to have and legitimate to desire and seek.) And let us ascend!

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

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

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

perhaps forbidden to seek fame before my fellow laity, or the Readers, or the Subdeacons, or the Deacons, or the Priests and Archpriests, or my Archbishop, or ROCOR's Metropolitan, or the Patriarch of Moscow, but that is only because all of us are summoned to seek fame before God himself, a God who Wonders at our slightest act or thought of good. I may be forbidden to be impressed with myself: but that is so that God may be eternally impressed.

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

Perhaps some day we may speak of love.

Fire in the Hole

The professor continued his reading.

In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments which he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The*

Symbolic Theology. The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument this downward path from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.

Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involves assertions, we begin now from the lowest category involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to truth to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air or stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought?

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any

place and can be neither seen nor touched. It is neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of this can either be identified with it nor attributed.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or any other being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name or knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the

perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial.

Prof. Sarovsky slowly and reverently closed the book.

“St. Dionysius says elsewhere that God is known by every name and no name, and that everything that is is a name of God. And in fact in discussing symbols which have some truth but are necessarily inadequate to reality, crude symbols are to be preferred to those which appear elevated, since even their ‘crassness’ is a ‘goad’ spurring us to reach higher.”

“So now I’d like to have an exercise. Could somebody please name something at random, and I can tell how it tells the glory of God?”

A young man from the back called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “Ha ha, hysterical. Could I have another suggestion?”

Another young man called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “I’m serious. Porn, when you start using it, seems to be a unique spice. But the more you use it, the more it actually *drains* spice from everything else, and eventually drains itself, and when pornography can only go so far, you find yourself not only jailed but charged with *rape*. Lustfulness is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. And much as I disagree with feminists on important points, I agree with a feminist dictionary: ‘Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.’ Could I have a *serious* suggestion?”

A couple of cellphones started playing, “Internet is for Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky called on the class’s most vocal feminist. “Delilah! Would you pick a topic?”

Delilah grinned wickedly and said, “I’m with the boys on this one. *Porn.*”

Prof. Sarovsky paused briefly and says, “Very well, then, porn it is. The famous essay ‘I, Pencil’ takes the humble pencil up and just starts to dig and dig at the economic family tree of just what resources and endeavors make up the humble lead pencil. So it talks about logging, and all the work in transporting the wood, and the mining involved in the graphite, and the exquisite resources that go just to make the blue strip on the metal band, and so on and so forth, and the ‘rubber’ eraser and whatnot. The conclusion is that millions of dollars’ resources (he does not calculate a figure) went into making a humble wooden pencil, and he pushes further: only God knows how to make a pencil. And if only God knows how to make a pencil, *a fortiori* only God knows how to make a porn site...

“And, I suppose, a pencil must be a phallic symbol.”

Then he paused, and said, “*Just kidding!*”

The room was silent.

Prof. Sarovsky bowed deeply and grinned: “I’ll see you and raise you.”

And this is what he said.

I, Porn, want to tell you about myself. There are options that eclipse me, but I can make my point more strongly if I speak for myself, Porn, who represent myriads of wonders.

It is not my point in particular that only God knows

how to make a Porn site. The point has been well enough made that only God knows how to make a pencil, and is a less interesting adjustment to acknowledge that only God knows how to make a Porn site.

Nor do I suggest that the straight-laced print off a Porn image and frame and hang it on the wall. Though if they understood my lineage, the question would then become whether they were worthy to do so.

I have a magnificent and vaster lineage than “I, Pencil” begins to draw out. A brilliance in economics, the author simply underscores a great interdependent web of economic resources in the humble pencil’s family tree. Equipment, mining, logging, transportation: the economic underpinnings of a humble pencil amount to millions of dollars, and the details mentioned only scratch the surface even of the economics involved.

I have a vaster lineage, including such things as war in Heaven. Now the war in Heaven is over, and was over when the Archangel Michael only said his name, which in the Hebrew tongue says, “Who is like God?” and with that, the devils were cast down, sore losers afflicting the Royal Race one and all. And even then, it was only angelic spirits that could come anywhere close to their war against God. Even then, they are limited. They are on a leash. Perhaps someday I will tell you of why you are summoned to a holy and blinding arrogance towards that whole camp.

What is the Royal Race? I get ahead of myself.

I, Porn, don’t merely share a universe with the divine virtues. In my production there is the cutting off of self-will, long suffering, and as little lust as might be found in a monastery. Dostoevsky offers the image of the chaste

harlot; I can add only that if Christ were walking today, Porn models would be among the first he would associate with.

The core impulse I, Porn, draw on, is good. It is a testament to the human spirit that nine months after a natural disaster, there is a wave of babies born. The core impulse is the impulse for the preservation of the species, the possibility by which a community of mortals has itself no automatic end.

It is closer to my point to say that God is not just good and divine; he has created a world that in every way reflects his grandeur. There are no small parts: only actors who are not really small. Every superstring vibration in the cosmos is grander and vaster than all the pagan gods of all worlds put together.

Or as G.K. Chesterton said, “Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.”

It is still closer to my majesty to observe Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag that Hitler sent observers for inspiration for Nazi concentration camps, “Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either — but right through every heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unrooted small corner of evil.”

The Heavens declare the glory of God—*and so do I, Porn.*

Perhaps the most beautiful doctrine in Origen that Orthodox must condemn is the final and ultimate salvation of all Creation: that the Devil himself will be a last prodigal son returning to home in Heaven. But the Orthodox teaching is more beautiful: a teaching that every spiritual being, every man, every fallen or unfallen angel, is given an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell and not one of these will God rape, however much he desires their salvation. To quote *The Dark Tower*: “A man can’t be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.” God has made a rock he could not move, and that rock is man and angel.

The rising crescendo that practically seals C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” is:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we

joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—
immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Which brings us to the messy circumstances of your
lives.

George Bernard Shaw said, “There are two tragedies in
life. One is not to get your heart’s desire. The other is to get
it.” We can see it, perhaps in a fantasy setting, in a passage
from C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, has Lucy
tiptoe to a room with a spellbook and see a singular spell:

Then she came to a page which was such a blaze of
pictures that one hardly noticed the writing. Hardly—
but she *did* notice the first words. They were, *An
infallible spell to make beautiful she that uttereth it
beyond the lot of mortals*. Lucy peered at the pictures
with her face close to the page, and though they had
seemed crowded and muddlesome before, she found
she could now see them quite clearly. The first was a
picture of a girl standing at a reading-desk reading in a
huge book. And the girl was dressed up exactly like
Lucy. In the next picture Lucy (for the girl in her
picture was Lucy herself) was standing up with her
mouth open and a rather terrible expression on her
face, chanting or reciting something. In the third
picture the beauty beyond the lot of mortals had come
to her. It was strange, considering how small the
pictures had looked at first, that the Lucy in the
picture now seemed quite as big as the real Lucy; and
they looked into each other’s eyes and the real Lucy
was dazzled by the beauty of the other Lucy; though
she could still see a sort of likeness to herself in that

beautiful face. And now the pictures came crowding on her thick and fast. She saw herself throned on high at a great tournament in Calormen and all the Kings of the world fought because of her beauty. After that it turned from tournaments to real wars, and all Narnia and Archenland, Telmar and Calormen, Galma and Terebithinia, were laid waste with the fury of the kings and dukes and great lords who fought for her favor. Then it changed and Lucy, still beautiful beyond the lot of mortals, was back in England. And Susan (who had always been the beauty of the family) came home from America. The Susan in the picture looked exactly like the real Susan only plainer and with a nasty expression. And Susan was was jealous of the dazzling beauty of Lucy, but that didn't matter a bit because no one cared anything about Susan now.

The temptation, patterned after real temptation of the real world, is to want a horror. It is because Lucy is bewitched that she even wants what the spell promises. The destruction of kingdoms when lords vie for her beauty? Women may want to feel like the most beautiful woman in the world, but the count in stacking dead bodies like cordwood is no true metric for beauty. As a faithfully portrayed temptation by C.S. Lewis, what is being desired is not something Heavenly. *It is a vision of Hell, pure and simple.* While in the grips of temptation, she could not be happy without casting that spell until she let go of it from a strong warning from Aslan. But even if she succeeded, she would be even more unhappy. Her success would rival world wars or nuclear wars in its destruction of beautiful

worlds, and if it didn't bring her death, she would live on in a wrecked world, knowing for the rest of her life that it was her petty self-absorption that obliterated the majesty of worlds.

Even if we scale from back from undisguised fantasy, we can look at what is a practical possibility for some people in the real world. Cameron Russell's Looks Aren't Everything. Believe me, I'm a model. The TED talk eloquently explains that being a supermodel is not all sunshine and not the solution to all life's problems. For that matter it isn't even the solution to *body image* problems, and the final point she shares is that as a model she has to be *more*, not less, insecure about her body, no matter how lovely she may appear to others. It turns out that supermodels are intimidated by... other supermodels. Being a model is not a way to be exempt from body image struggles.

And this is in no way a solely a phenomenon about body image. There is one man where professional opinion is that he is smarter than most geniuses, and that the average Harvard PhD has never met someone so talented. And his work history, given that he's tried to give his best? Here's something really odd. One job assistant said, "You don't want your boss figuring out you're smarter than him." When he hands in his first piece of work, only some bosses respond kindly to work that is beyond the boss's wildest dreams. Most of them find themselves in unfamiliar social territory, and strike out or retaliate. He's been terminated a dozen times and is now retired on disability, the best financial arrangement he has had yet. It may be true, up to a point, that there's something likable about being smart. That doesn't mean in any sense that the smarter you get, the

more people like you, or that your life is easy.

There is a portal that far excels entering another world, entering Narnia, Hogwarts, or Middle Earth. And this portal is much harder to see or look for than Narnia. It is entering the here and now you have been placing.

Spiritual masters have said to want what you have, not what you don't have, and want things to be for you just the way they are. Now there is such a thing as legitimately seeking to solve, lessen, or improve a problem, and wishing you had a better-paying job, a car, or a nicer house. Wishing never runs out, and if you get the Apple Watch you want, wishing will just wish for newer or different things. Buy something you don't need but will make you enchanted for a month. *I dare you.*

Oh, and by the way, I, Porn, know all about wishing. I know *everything* about it, and I know everything it *can't* do.

When you let go of escape, soon you may let go of relating the here and now as the sort of thing one should flee, and some thick, sticky grey film will slowly melt away from your eyes and they will open on beauty all around you, and you will have crossed a threshold no fantasy portal even comes close. And you will have every treasure that you have. And perhaps, in and through ancient religion or postmodern positive psychology, cultivate a deep and abiding gratefulness for all the blessings you have.

In the Way of Things, there are two basic options one can pursue. One is the Sexual Way, and the other is the Hyper-Sexual Way. Let me explain.

Study after study has been launched to investigate which group of mavericks has the best sex, and they have been repeatedly been dismayed to find that the overlooked

Sexual Way has the most pleasure. The overlooked Sexual Way is that of a contest of love, for life, between one lord and one wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, grateful for children, and knowing that the best sex *ever* is when you are trying to make a baby. After the first year or two some outward signs get quiet and subdued, but the marriage succeeds because the honeymoon has failed. It deepens year after year and decade after a decade, and a widowed senior can say, “You don’t know what love is when you’re a kid.” And here, like no other place, *beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder*. Here, unlike fashion magazines, sweaty fitness regimens, and dieting, and weighing, and accursed “bodysculpting,” a woman can and should be made to feel like she is the most beautiful woman in the world, to a husband to whom she really is the most beautiful woman in the world, as naturally as the Church on Sunday. As Homer and Marge humbly and quietly sing to each other, “You are so *beautiful* to me!”

If the sexual impulse is spent wisely in the Sexual Way, it is invested at exorbitant interest on the Hyper-Sexual Way. Wonder what all that curious monastic modesty about? It compounds an essential sexual condition, by which a monastic, man or woman, becomes a transgendered god and his sexual desire is entirely fixed on God. Does this seem strange? Let us listen to St. Herman of Alaska:

Further on Yanovsky writes, “Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the

colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We were lost for an answer before him.'

"Father Herman gave them all one general question: 'Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?' Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. 'It is not true,' Father Herman said to them concerning this, 'that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?' They all answered, 'Yes, that is so!' He then continued, 'Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?'

"All said, 'Why, yes! That's self-evident!' Then the Elder asked, 'But do you love God?' They all answered, 'Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?'

‘And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,’ Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. ‘If we love someone,’ he said, ‘we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?’ They had to admit that they had not! ‘For our own good, and for our own fortune,’ concluded the Elder, ‘let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!’ Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.’

Fr. Herman had something better than pixels on a screen. *Much* better.

Perhaps the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy is by Anselm of Canterbury, who said, “If God exists, nothing greater than him could exist. Now God either exists in reality and also in our minds, or only as a concept in our minds. But to exist in reality as well as our minds is greater than to exist only in our minds. Therefore, God must have the higher excellence of existing in reality as well as our minds.”

I am not specifically interested in bringing agreement or disagreement to this argument. First, most people first meeting this argument feel that something has been slipped past them, but they can’t put a finger on where the error is.

However, I did not exactly include this argument to discuss what it *asserts*, but what it *assumes*: if God is greater than anything else that can be thought, then we have something that pierces deeply into the Christian God.

The joke is told that four rabbis would get together to discuss Torah, and one specific rabbi was the odd man out, every single time. And they said, “Three against one.” Finally, the exasperated odd rabbi out knelt down, prayed, “Gd, I’ve worked very hard, and they never listen. Please send them a sign that I’m right.” It was a warm day out, but a sudden chilly wind blew by, and some clouds appeared in the sky. The other three rabbis said, “That’s odd, but it’s still three against one.” Then the rabbi knelt down, prayed, “Please make a clearer sign,” and the wind grew more bitter and it began sleeting. The rabbi said, “Well?” The other rabbis said, “This is quite a coincidence, but it’s still three against one.” Then before the rabbi could begin to pray, bolts of lightning splintered a nearby tree, there was an earthquake, the earth opened, and a deep voice thundered, “*HE’S RIGHT!*” The rabbi said, “Well?” Quick as a flash, another rabbi said, “Well? It’s still three against two!”

The humor element in this element extends beyond, “If God has spoken, the discussion is over.” The humor element hinges on the fact that counting does not go from “one, two, three, four” to “one, two, three, four, **Five**”: there is infinite confusion in adding one God to four men. As written in Doxology:

Thou who art One,
Eternally beyond time,
So wholly One,

That thou mayest be called infinite,
 Timeless beyond time thou art,
 The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 The Three who are One,
 No more bound by numbers than by word,
 And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
 The Word,
 Divine ordering Reason,
 Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
 Way pre-eminent of all things,
 Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
 Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
 The Creator entered into his Creation,
 Sharing with us humble glory,
 Lowered by love,
 Raised to the highest,
 The Suffering Servant known,
 The King of Glory,
 Ο ΩΝ....

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

But thou art beyond all thought,
 All word, all being,
 We may say that thou existest,
 But then we must say,

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

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

The Trinity does not represent a weaker or less consistent monotheism than Islam. The Trinity represents a stronger and more consistent monotheism than Islam, and that is why it can afford things that are unthinkable to a Muslim.

A Hindu once asked a Christian, "I can accept the truth

of the incarnation, but why only one?” And in that conversation, where the Christian defended only one incarnation, both were wrong. Or rather, the Christian was *wrong*; the Hindu was merely *mistaken*.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to BECOME him forever.

One theology professor tried to explain to a Muslim that the Trinity is how Christians get to the absolute Oneness of God. The men who first articulated the doctrine looked with some horror on the concept of using the word “Trinity” as a handle for the doctrine.

Regarding the Hindu mentioned, I would say that there have been many, many true incarnations of God, and they still continue. Now the Hindu concept of an Avatar can be what Christianity rejected as docetic, with Christ not recognized to have real flesh. However, what I would rather have been said is this: No one besides Christ enters the world with part or all of God as part of them. However, the reason for the coming of the Son of God is to destroy the devil’s work. An ancient hymn states, “Trying to be god, Adam failed to be God. Christ became man, to make Adam god.” And the vast company of Saints that God keeps on giving are in fact the gift of a company of Avatars; we just have a different understanding of how one reaches a very similar goal.

The Philokalia says, “Blessed is the monk who regards each man as God after God.”

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Scripture: “We

beheld," he says, "His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

Having declared that we were made "sons of God," and having shown in what manner namely, by the "Word" having been "made Flesh," he again mentions another advantage which we gain from this same circumstance. What is it? "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father"; which we could not have beheld, had it not been shown to us, by means of a body like to our own. For if the men of old time could not even bear to look upon the glorified countenance of Moses, who partook of the same nature with us, if that just man needed a veil which might shade over the purity⁷ of his glory, and show to them have face of their prophet mild and gentle; how could we creatures of clay and earth have endured the unveiled Godhead, which is unapproachable even by the powers above? Wherefore He tabernacled among us, that we might be able with much fearlessness to approach Him, speak to, and converse with Him.

But what means "the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father"? Since many of the Prophets too were glorified, as this Moses himself, Elijah, and Elisha, the one encircled by the fiery chariot (2 Kings vi. 17), the other taken up by it; and after them, Daniel and the Three Children, and the many others who showed forth wonders; and angels who have appeared among men, and partly disclosed to beholders the flashing light of their proper nature; and since not angels only, but even the Cherubim were seen by the Prophet in

great glory, and the Seraphim also: the Evangelist leading us away from all these, and removing our thoughts from created things, and from the brightness of our fellow-servants, sets us at the very summit of good. For, “not of prophet,” says he, “nor angel, nor archangel, nor of the higher power, nor of any other created nature,” if other there be, but of the Master Himself, the King Himself, the true Only-Begotten Son Himself, of the Very Lord of all, did we “behold the glory.”

For the expression “as,” does not in this place belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition; as though he said, “We beheld glory, such as it was becoming, and likely that He should possess, who is the Only-Begotten and true Son of God, the King of all.” The habit (of so speaking) is general, for I shall not refuse to strengthen my argument even from common custom, since it is not now my object to speak with any reference to beauty of words, or elegance of composition, but only for your advantage; and therefore there is nothing to prevent my establishing my argument by the instance of a common practice. What then is the habit of most persons? Often when any have seen a king richly decked, and glittering on all sides with precious stones, and are afterwards describing to others the beauty, the ornaments, the splendor, they enumerate as much as they can, the glowing tint of the purple robe, the size of the jewels, the whiteness of the mules, the gold about the yoke, the soft and shining couch. But when after enumerating these things, and other

things besides these, they cannot, say what they will, give a full idea of the splendor, they immediately bring in: "But why say much about it; once for all, he was like a king;" not desiring by the expression "like," to show that he, of whom they say this, resembles a king, but that he is a real king. Just so now the Evangelist has put the word As, desiring to represent the transcendent nature and incomparable excellence of His glory.

Elsewhere we are asked to consider what things would be like if a King were to take up residence in one of the houses of a city. Would not the entire city, and each house in it, be forever honored? And the Son of God is now one of our homeboys. He ascended into Heaven and brought us with him, enthroned in Heaven with him.

We are the Royal Race. We are made in the image of God, and made to reach unimaginable glory.

And there may be named three laws that are the Constitution of the Royal Race, three laws which are one and the same.

The first law is the Law of the Canoe, as C.S. Lewis summarized his friend Charles Williams:

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—

did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little, is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

The second law is the Law of the Long Spoon. As one telling goes from a liberal enough source:

One day a man said to God, "God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the

handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, “You have seen Hell.”

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man’s mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, “I don’t understand.”

God smiled. “It is simple,” he said, “These people share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves...”

The last law is the Law of Narcissus’s Mirror. It states that the Royal Race are absolutely *forbidden* to stand and gaze at themselves in Narcissus’s Mirror, entranced at their own beauty, and *commanded* to gaze at other members of the Royal Race, entranced at *their* beauty.

These three laws are one and the same. One joke, about “communio” theologians who hold the Trinity to mean that God himself is a community, ran:

Q: How many communio theologians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but he thinks he is a community.

But we are *not* communities. We are *part* of a community, and the full grandeur of being a member of the

Royal Race is that you are no *island*, but a connected and beautiful part of a *continent*.

And furthermore, God has ordered Heaven and Earth for the benefit of us as the Royal Race.

Though this may be more subtle in the Sexual Way than in the Hyper-Sexual Way, but the behavior enjoined on the Hyper-Sexual Way is that of a spiritual miser, who constantly thinks his Heavenly wealth is too little and he must spare no effort to get more, and no matter how much treasure in Heaven he acquires, he never rests on his laurels, but keeps on storing up more and more and more.

Men each have one interest, one *real* interest, and only *one* interest: a good answer before the Dread Judgment-Throne of Christ. This life is inestimably precious, and in treasures such as repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, we can only store up these treasures before this fleeting life is over. Now the Church Triumphant is no terrible place to be, but there are profound goods that are only open to us, the living, for as long as we live. And the various strange prescriptions of the Philokalia and the Orthodox Way, about believing oneself to be the worst of sinners, about giving oneself no credit for any good actions, about believing "All the world will be saved and I will be damned," about repenting as if one will die tomorrow but treating your body as if it will last for many years, are in fact braces to support being one hoarding spiritual miser for the rest of one's life, and crossing the finish line, in triumph, and with treasure after treasure after treasure in your hoard. It is explained that God conceals from us the day of our death, because if we knew we would not die for some decades, we would put off repentance and be incorrigible. Not that God is absolutely unwilling to reveal to people the day of their

death: it is in fact considered a mark of holiness to know that, because a person is in a good enough state for the secret not to need to be hidden. But the *Philokalia's* discussion, perhaps here most clearly of all, explains that things are ordered this way because God has stacked the deck, in *our* favor. And as regards the Sexual Way, the path is said not to be an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for parents to grow up.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, fields an objection which was apparently on people's minds but I have not heard brought up live in my lifetime. However, the answer says everything to a world in disintegrating economy, COVID, Jihad, and more:

I'd like to deal with a difficulty some people find about the whole idea of prayer. Somebody put it to me by saying: "I can believe in God alright, but what I can't swallow is this idea of Him listening to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment." And I find quite a lot of people feel that difficulty. Well, the first thing to notice is that the whole sting of it comes in the words "at the same moment." Most of us can imagine a God attending to any number of claimants if only they come one by one and He has an endless time to do it in. So what's really at the back of the difficulty is this idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time. Well that, of course, is what happens to us. Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what

Time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series — this arrangement of past, present and future — isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that. I think it was the Theologians who first started the idea that some things are not in Time at all. Later, the Philosophers took it over. And now some of the scientists are doing the same. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call "ten-thirty." Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames. That's difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I'm writing a novel. I write "Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door." For Mary, who's got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there's no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour's walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary. I know that's not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention,

infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn't have to take us in the line. You're as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He'd ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you'd been the only man in the world.

And God's Providence is not just Providence in great things. It is Providence in the small. It is not just Providence in a career, or entering the Sexual Way. It is also Providence when you are stuck in traffic and the light seems never to be turning green and that still, small voice urges you to grow just a little as a person so you can be as happy in your car as in a lounge chair at home. And it is the mighty arm of Providence all the more powerfully revealed when we are persecuted, or lose money, or any number of other things. And it is a Providence that gives you the here and now, a here and now chosen for you from all eternity, and will, if you cooperate, help you appreciate the gift.

And if you are one of the many who believe that I, Porn, am the only interesting spice in a fatally dull world, I, Porn, can only say this:

Watch me when I am Transfigured.

To quote your own age's little reflection of *The Divine Comedy*:

I saw coming towards us a Ghost who carried something on his shoulder. Like all the Ghosts, he was unsubstantial, but they differed from one another as smokes differ. Some had been whitish; this one was dark and oily. What sat on his shoulder was a little red lizard, and it was twitching its tail like a whip and

whispering things in his ear. As we caught sight of him he turned his head to the reptile with a snarl of impatience. 'Shut up, I tell you!' he said. It wagged its tail and continued to whisper to him. He ceased snarling, and presently began to smile. Then he turned and started to limp westward, away from the mountains.

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my body too (for there was heat coming from him as well as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

'Yes. I'm off,' said the Ghost. 'Thanks for all your hospitality. But it's no good, you see. I told this little chap' (here he indicated the Lizard) that he'd have to be quiet if he came—which he insisted on doing. Of course his stuff won't do here: I realise that. But he won't stop. I shall just have to go home.'

'Would you like me to make him quiet?' said the flaming Spirit—an angel, as I now understood.

'Of course I would,' said the Ghost.

'Then I will kill him,' said the Angel, taking a step forward.

'Oh—ah—look out! You're burning me. Keep away,' said the Ghost, retreating.

'Don't you *want* him killed?'

'You didn't say anything about *killing* at first. I hardly meant to bother you with anything so drastic as that.'

'It's the only way,' said the Angel, whose burning

hands were now very close to the Lizard. 'Shall I kill it?'

'Well, that's a further question. I'm quite open to consider it, but it's a new point, isn't? I mean, for the moment I was only thinking about silencing it because up here—well, it's so damned embarrassing.'

'May I kill it?'

'Well, there's time to discuss that later.'

'There is no time. May I kill it?'

'Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance.'

Please—really—don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now. Thanks ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

'Honestly, I don't think there's the slightest necessity for that. I'm sure I shall be able to keep it in order now. I think the gradual process would be far better than killing it.'

'The gradual process is of no use at all.'

'Don't you think so? Well, I'll think over what you've said very carefully. I honestly will. In fact I'd let you kill it now, but as a matter of fact I'm not feeling frightfully well today. It would be most silly to do it *now*. I'd need to be in good health for the operation. Some other day, perhaps.'

'There is no other day. All days are present now.'

'Get back! You're burning me. How can I tell you to kill it? You'd kill *me* if you did.'

'It is not so.'

'Why, you're hurting me now.'

'I never said it wouldn't hurt you. I said it wouldn't

kill you.'

'Oh, I know. You think I'm a coward. But isn't that. Really it isn't. I say! Let me run back by to-night's bus and get an opinion from my own doctor. I'll come again the first moment I can.'

'This moment contains all moments.'

'Why are you torturing me? You are jeering at me. How *can* I let you tear me in pieces? If you wanted to help me, why didn't you kill the damned thing without asking me—before I knew? It would be all over by now if you had.'

'I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?'

The Angel's hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

'Be careful,' it said. 'He can do what he says. He can kill me. One fatal word from you and he *will!* Then you'll be without me for ever and ever. How could you live? You'd be only a sort of ghost, not a real man as you are now. He doesn't understand. He's only a cold, bloodless abstract thing. It may be natural for him, but it isn't for us. Yes, yess. I know there are no real pleasures now, only dreams. But aren't they better than nothing? And I'll be so good. I admit I've sometimes gone too far in the past, but I promise I won't do it again. I'll give you nothing but really nice dreams—all sweet and fresh and almost innocent. You might say, quite innocent . . .'

'Have your permission?' said the Angel to the Ghost.

‘I know it will kill me.’

‘It won’t. But supposing it did?’

‘You’re right. It would be better to be dead than to live with this creature.’

‘Then I may?’

‘Damn and blast you! Go on, can’t you? Get it over. Do what you like,’ bellowed the Ghost; but ended, whimpering, ‘God help me. God help me.’

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

‘Ow! That’s done for me,’ gasped the Ghost, reeling backwards.

For a moment I could make out nothing distinctly. Then I saw, between me and the nearest bush, unmistakably solid but growing every moment solider, the upper arm and the shoulder of a man. Then, brighter still, the legs and hands. The neck and golden head materialized while I watched, and if my attention had not wavered I should have seen the actual completing of a man—an immense man, naked, not much smaller than the Angel. What distracted me was the fact that the something seemed to be happening to the Lizard. At first I thought the operation had failed. So far from dying, the creature was still struggling and even growing bigger as it struggled. And as it grew it changed. Its hinder parts grew rounder. The tail, still flickering, became a tail of hair that flickered between huge and glossy buttocks. Suddenly I started back,

rubbing my eyes. What stood before me was the greatest stallion I have ever seen, silvery white but with mane and tail of gold. It was smooth and shining, rippled with swells of flesh and muscle, whinneying and stamping with its hoofs. At each stamp the land shook and the trees dindled.

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse's neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed into each other's nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his seats he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

An Orthodox would realize in the Burning Angel a clearest reference to the fiery Seraphim, the highest of the

nine angel choirs, and the one for whom St. Seraphim of Sarov came, the most beloved Orthodox saint in centuries, the St. Seraphim whose extraordinary conversation with the pilgrim Motovilov reveals the purpose of human life.

We live in interesting times. There is a singularity, or rather has been but keeps growing exponentially, and this singularity may turn in to the end of the world: a strange Ragnarok where the forces of Good resound with apocalyptic triumph. And I, Porn, am part of the singularity, an important part.

Did you know that I, Porn, am not the only thing in life?

Remember: “Every man who visits a Porn site is looking for God.”

Delilah's friend turned back. “Yep, dear, he does that sort of thing in practically every class.”

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

How shall I praise Thee,
For making man a microcosm,
A human being the summary,
Of creation, spiritual and material,

Created to be,
A waterfall of divine grace,
Flowing to all things spiritual and material,
A waterfall of divine life,
Deity flowing out to man,
And out through man,
To all that exists,
And even nothingness itself?

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

How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Whose eyes overlook a transformation,
Next to which the transmutation,
Of lead to gold,
Is dust and ashes?
How shall I speak to an alchemist,
Of the holy consecration,
Whereby humble bread and wine,
Illumine as divine body and blood,
Brighter than gold, the metal of light,
The holy mystery the fulcrum,
Not stopping in chalice gilt,

But transforming men,
To be the mystical body,
The holy mystery the fulcrum of lives transmuted,
Of a waterfall spilling out,
The consecration of holy gifts,
That men may be radiant,
That men may be illumined,
That men be made the mystical body,
Course with divine Life,
Tasting the Fountain of Immortality,
The transformed elements the fulcrum,
Of God taking a lever and a place to stand,
To move the earth,
To move the cosmos whole,
Everything created,
Spiritual and material,
Returned to God,
Deified.

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

How shall I tell an alchemist?

The Best Things in Life Are Free

1. The best things in life are free.
2. The best things in life are free. But what does this mean?
3. The best things in life are free. But we do not understand the truth of these words if we think they are filled out by hugs and friendship, or even love: *If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.*
4. A better lens comes from the condemnation of the Pharisees: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!* for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

5. It appears in Orthodoxy that the outside of the chalice is all feasts and beautiful liturgies, even during Lent: but on the inside is all repentance, deprivation and hardship, and being blindsided by rebukes. All of this falls under "The best things in life are free," the one as much as the other.
6. Well enough it may be said that sin is the forerunner of sorrow: *The wages of sin is death*, and that death's sorrow begins here and now. Sin ultimately kills pleasure: It takes humility to enjoy even pride. It takes sobriety to enjoy even drunkenness. It takes chastity to enjoy even lust.
7. But this is not all. The outside of the cup is beautiful and its beauty is true and real. But the real treasure is inside. Repentance is a spiritual awakening; it terrifies because it seems that when we repent we will lose a shining part of ourselves forever, but when we repent we suddenly realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" and are free to flee the stench. What feast compares to the grandeur of real repentance?
8. The Great High Priest said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." The best things in life are free, and this pruning is a very big free gift.
9. It is when we are cleansed inside the cup that the outside is clean. Let Christ cleanse us inside the cup,

and then inside and outside will both bear proper fruit.

10. The things in life that are free are persecutions, and we have on the highest authority: Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.
11. St. Paul goes so far to say, But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.
12. We may approach the outside of the chalice first, but it is a loss to stop there. We need the joyful sorrow of compunction and all that is within the chalice, and then what is on the outside of the chalice will be clean, and what is more, will reach its proper stature.
13. Every day take a little less, and pare down a little more. The Fathers do warn, "Do not engage in warfare beyond your strength," and the praxis is to crawl before we try to walk. But *The Way of the Ascetic* pares down, little by little, in humor, in

luxury, in eating for a purpose other than nourishment, and aims to have none of it left.

14. By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. And by faith we wean ourselves even from a life centered on innocent pleasures, knowing that they do not hold a candle to the spiritual pleasure that is inside the chalice.

15. The cutting of of one's own will is free. And it is the experience of monasticism that this is one of the best things in life: a monk's will is cut off, not for the primary benefit of his brother monks, but for his own benefit. And the voluntary and involuntary cutting off of one's will extends far outside the monastery. It is one of the best things in life, whether we accept it as a blessing or resent it because we do not wish to grow up in the spiritual life.

16. Do you wish that this chalice be taken from you? Christ prayed the same, but he also prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." For some prayers are impossible.

17. There are two answers to prayer: "Yes," and "No, please ask for something better." St. James writes, You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. Passions are sinful habits that warp us, and when we ask for

something to satisfy our passions, God only ever says "No" because he wants better for us.

18. Those things that are obviously good are nothing compared to the terrible goods: the gilded artwork outside the chalice is beautiful enough, but it is nothing next to what is inside the chalice.
19. The Maximum Christ wishes the maximum for our lives, and that comes through repentance and the royal road of affliction.
20. Rejoice and dance for joy when men slander you and revile you and curse you for Christ's sake. This is a sign you are on the royal road; this is now the world heralds prophets and sons of God. This earthly dishonor is the seal of Heavenly honor.
21. No one can harm the man who does not injure himself. Nor can any circumstance. So therefore let us not be governed by circumstances, or think the less of our God when he allows us rougher circumstances.
22. We do not live in the best of all possible worlds, but there is another shoe to drop. We live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods, and that is a greater good.
23. Perhaps we are entering a time of struggle. (Entering?) Perhaps we are seeing the end of exceptionally prosperous and easy days we have no

right reason to expect. The same truths apply. The same God who reigns in easy times, reigns in hard times.

24. "Give us this day our daily bread:" it is normal not to know where your next meal is from.

25. The arm of the Lord is more visible, not less, in hard times. God's providence is stronger when you know you need it.

26. The chalice offered us indeed looks easy on the outside but is full of pain within. But the sufferings are part of the treasure. And the best things in life reach deeper than the golden ornaments that belong on the outside, but extend to the joyful sadnesses within. Those who shed at least some entertainment and seek repentance and compunction for their sins find repentance an awakening and compunction to be joyful and cleansing. And that is not all. Everything inside the cup runs deep. And everything inside the cup is free.

27. The divine sovereignty is never purchased at the expense of human freedom. Human freedom is limited, but this is not where divine sovereignty comes from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely choice has been made, and the divine sovereignty shapes joy after every draught of the inexhaustible cup.

28. The joy of the best things in life is not purchased at the expense of the chalice of suffering. Suffering is limited, but this is not something the divine sovereignty is purchased from. The divine sovereignty has the last word after every creaturely suffering has been entered, and the divine sovereignty leaves people in a better place than had they not met their sufferings.
29. The divine life is now. The divine energies are now. Not later, once some difficulties are resolved, but now.
30. In ancient times the holiday of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection were celebrated together; even now there is not a separation between them, and we speak of a three-day Pascha. There is no real separation between bearing a cross and being crowned with a crown, even if it takes time to gain the eyes of faith to see such things.
31. Orthodox are iconodules, but God is both iconodule and iconoclast: he takes things in our life and makes them icons of himself, and he also keeps on destroying and removing things to make us more free to breathe. Heaven and Hell are both inside us, and God seeks to inhabit Heaven inside of us and uproot Hell.
32. God the Father is the maker of all things visible and invisible. God is spirit, and even among created

things the first excellence belongs to the invisible. Who can buy or sell invisible things? This is one reason the best things in life are free.

33. In the Incarnation, Heaven kissed earth and the visible now has a share in the excellence of the invisible. But still *if a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned*: the sale of relics is forbidden.

34. Do you believe the best things in life are free? Excellent, but *the demons believe—and shudder*. Do you *live* as if the best things in life are free?

35. It is more blessed to give than receive. *What do you have to give?*

36. If you covet something and you gain it, it will bring misery once the pleasure melts away, and the greater the covetousness, the greater the misery. Covetousness is the inverse of what is inside the cup.

37. We want to have things our way. But the Lord has other plans. And what we will find if we yield is that he has other plans for us that are not what we would have chosen, but are far better. This is at once an easy and a hard thing to do.

38. In the Bible a chalice is both a cup of suffering to drink and a cup which fills with excellent joy. The suffering is as bad as we fear—no, worse— but if we drink of it we will be drinking of the very best things

in life. The divine life in the chalice immeasurably eclipses the gilt ornament outside of it. Remembrance of death, compunction, and repentance dig deeper than the music of liturgy.

39. The best things in life are not just an ornament for when our material needs are well taken care of. It is true ten times more that they are lifeblood in hard times and harder times. And the chalice is inexhaustible.

40. The best things in life are free.

All Orthodox Theology Is Positive Theology

The state of psychology

Martin Seligman, a giant in the psychological community, kicked off a major TED talk by talking about how a TV station wanted a sound bite from him, and it should be one word. He said, “*Good.*” Then they decided that as the president of the American Psychological Association he was a figure of such stature that they would let him have two words, and he said, “*Not good.*” Finally, they decided he was of such stature that he would be allowed *three* words, and his three words were, “*Not good enough.*”

What he was getting at was essentially as follows: clinical psychology had a goal which was remarkably well accomplished: the complete classification of behavioral health condition, along with effective psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy that could take pretty miserable people and bring them up to feeling basically OK. He didn’t really underscore the magnitude and implications of this goal;

apart from the fact that public figures know they at least need to act humble publicly, sometimes greatness brings real humility and he was trying to lead people to see there was more to ask for than just getting someone to feel merely adequate, and he did not suggest that clinical psychology is the kind of tool that lets people of all kinds to thrive in every way. He called for a positive psychology to help people thrive, have fulfilling and delightful living, and enable high talent not to go to waste. And the point that I know him for is his calling for positive psychology.

What is systematic theology?

What is mystical theology?

What is positive theology?

One distinction between Eastern Orthodoxy and Rome is that in Rome, all theology is systematic theology, and in Orthodoxy, all theology is mystical theology. This much is true to point out, however it invites confusion.

Thomas Aquinas, were he alive today, couldn't cut it for "publish or perish" academia. He is revered as one of the greatest giants in history, but he would not obviously be welcome as an academic today. While there are many ideas in his *Summa Theologiae*, few if any have the faintest claim to originality. Some people, including me, don't think that a single original idea is to be found. Others think that there are a few, very few: I have not read anyone attribute even a dozen original ideas in his quite enormous work. But what he did provide was a system: an organized set of cubbyholes with a place for everything and everything in its place. And

the claim that all Roman theology is systematic theology means that everything fits somewhere in the system, whether Thomas Aquinas's or something else.

The claim that all theology in Orthodoxy is mystical theology is a different sort of claim. It is not a claim that everything fits under some kind of classification scheme. It says that all true theology meets a particular criterion, like saying that all true fire brings heat. Systematic theology as such is not allowed, and trying to endow the Orthodox Church with its first systematic theology is a way to ask the Church hierarchy for a heresy trial. "Mystical" in mystical theology means theology that is practiced, experienced, and lived. The claim to "study" a martial art can involve reading, especially at the higher levels, but if you are going to study karate, you go to a dojo and start engaging in its practices. In that sense, while books may have some place in martial arts mastery, but "studying" ninjutsu is not something you do by burying your nose in books. It is a live practice.

All theology is positive theology, and my assertion is like saying that all theology is mystical theology, and not that all theology is part of systematic theology.

As to the relationship between positive psychology and positive theology, I honestly hope for an interesting conversation with some of the positive psychology community. I do not assert that positive theology contains positive psychology as we know it, or that positive psychology contains positive theology. I do, however, wish to suggest that something interesting and real is reflected in the claim that all theology is positive theology.

A wonderful old world

I wish to make one point of departure clear in the interest of framing what I am attempting.

There is a certain sense that this work could be seen as novel; for all I know it may be the first work discussing all Orthodox theology as being positive theology, but I follow Chesterton's footsteps here (or rather fall short of them). **I am not seeking to *invent* a positive theology.** I am in fact attempting no novelty of any sort other than a new articulation of timeless truths that are relevant to the conversation. And I am seeking to offer something better than something wonderful I invented. I want to talk about wondrous things that I believe God invented, as old as the hills.

A deliberately *jarring* example

What is positive in the psychology of the Orthodox Church? To get off to a good start, I would like to say "repentance from sins." And one of my articles unfolds "Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret."

The Philokalia says that men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them. Repentance is terrifying. It is an unconditional surrender. But once you have made that surrender, you receive a reward. You realize that you needed that sin like you need a hole in the head—and you are free of a trap. It is something like a spiritual chiropractic massage, that you walk away from in joy with a straighter spine. And in my own experience, I'm not sure I am ever as joyful as when I am repenting. And the effect is cumulative; repentance represents a rising spiritual standard of living.

Monasticism, which I discuss in *A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop*, represents a position of supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church. Now I love my Archbishop dearly and wouldn't want to take him down one whit, but part of the point of the piece is that if you are given a choice between being the greatest bishop in the world and being an ordinary monk, "ordinary monk" is hands down the better choice to choose. The overriding concern in that environment is the spiritual, human profit of its members. Poverty, obedience, and chastity are all conditions to one of two routes to salvation, and however wonderful marriage may be, monasticism is even better. And as well as other terms, monasticism is spoken of as "repentance." To live in a monastery is to work at a place that is minting spiritual money and giving all members as copious pay as possible.

The Utopia that is nowhere absent

Robert Goudzward, in *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, talked about Old Testament law as representing a paradise, and part of the picture is that it represented a paradise in which it was hard to get rich. A sage in the Bible asks, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," and there is a sense that having more and more money is not good for us as humans.

This world was created to be a paradise. The Old Covenant represented a paradise. The New Covenant represents a paradise. Marriage represents a paradise. Monasticism represents a paradise.

We were made for human flourishing, and part of what the Church attempts is to provide for each person to flourish as that person should flourish. Abbots (and

everyone else) are not to colonize and clone; the authority is profound, but it is a profound authority in restoring a damaged icon—and helping the icon look like itself, not like something it isn't. If you read the saints' lives over time, all the saints represent Christ, but there is incredible diversity among how the saints represent Christ.

What does God ask from us?

If we look at the question of what God commands and what he requests, there is fundamental confusion in thinking God is asking us to fill his needs. God in Heaven is perfect, and has no conceivable needs except in the person of our neighbor. God makes demands of us, not to fill his needs like an incompetent therapist, but to give *us* what is best. St. Maximus the Confessor divides three classes of obedience: *slaves*, who obey out of fear, *mercenaries*, who obey to obtain benefits, and *sons*, who obey out of love. Now all obedience is in at least some sense obedience and sometimes obedience out of fear is just what the doctor ordered, but if you obey as a slave you can be saved, if you obey as a mercenary you do better, and if you obey as a son even better than that. However, none of this is a setup to fill God's needs. The point is not that it is best for God if we obey out of love; the point is that it is best for *us* if we obey out of love.

A better kind of affirmation

This may come across very strangely to a psychologist who endorses affirmations, but the two main affirmations in Orthodoxy are "Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am

first,” and “All the world will be saved, and I will be damned.”

Part of this stems from beliefs that I will explain but I do not ask you to subscribe to. Religion has enough of a reputation for focusing on the afterlife that it is provocative for a social gospel poster to say, “We believe in life before death.” This life is of cardinal and incomparable significance; it is a life in which inch by inch we decide whether we will embrace Heaven or Hell when our live ends and no further repentance is available. But it has also been said that birth and death are an inch apart whilst the ticker tape goes on forever, and reform is only possible before we die. What the “affirmations” (of a sort) that I have mentioned do is prepare people like plaintiffs to press forth for maximum awards in their favor. The statements are for our good, and they help before death. Furthermore, it is believed that God doesn’t do everything in our good works for us, but he allows a genuine cooperation of combined powers where we do part of it. We are told, though, that we are not to take credit for one single achievement in our life, but give all the merit to God... but come Judgment Day, all good deeds we have done our part to are reckoned as if we did them entirely ourselves and without any help from God. I do not ask you to believe this or think it makes sense, but I suggests it is a part of a picture where an overriding concern is God blessing us as much as we will accept.

Dr. Seligman’s lecture linked at the beginning of this article talked about how French vanilla ice cream tastes exquisite for the first bite, but by the time you get to the fifth or sixth bite, the flavor is gone. In the first candidate for the good life, people habituate quickly.

I have slightly opposite news about Orthodox

affirmations: when you make them central to your life, the sting crumbles. Furthermore, if you see yourself as the worst sinner in a parish, or a monastery, or all prehistory and prehistory, that's the time that real growth and even real joy appear. Orthodoxy's affirmations unlock the door to repentance, and there is no end of treasure to be mined from that vein.

Stoicism and virtue

I've seen TED talks about how stoicism is being taken as some sort of ultimate power tool, and secret weapon, within the professional handegg community.

Part of my thought was, "Duh!" and with it a thought that it is a mischaracterization of philosophy to assume it's just something for odd and eccentric people, including yours truly, who have their noses in books. Stoicism is legitimately a power tool, but it is one of many power tools that have garnished quite a following and have been as powerful to their practitioners might have been.

I have said elsewhere, "Orthodoxy is pagan. Neopaganism isn't," and *The Philokalia* preserves the very best of pagan philosophy with its profound endowment of virtues. N.B. the same word in Greek means "virtue" and "excellence," and if you want to help people thrive and develop giftedness, the four-horsed chariot of courage, justice, wisdom, and moderation has really quite a lot to go for it, and all the more if these are perfected by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. All of these are called "cardinal" or "hinge" virtues, meaning that not only are they good, but they are positive "gateway drugs" to other and perhaps even

greater virtue.

And I would like to say one thing that the authors of *The Philokalia* simply can't much of ever stop talking about. This does not seem an view of yourself that you would want to have, but I've had some pretty arrogant and abrasive people try pretty hard to teach me about humility. But I will say this: humility is the Philosopher's Stone and maybe the Elixir of Life. It opens your eyes to beauty pride may not see, and I need humility in my daily living more than I need air. I'm not going to try to further argue for an unattractive virtue, but I will say that it looks tiny and constricted from the outside, and vast and spacious from the inside. And for another Chesterton name drop: "It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride."

If we are going to look at world traditions, the Greek term for virtue, *arete* also meant excellence, and *arete* (I both mean 'virtue' and 'excellence') represents a tradition well worth heeding. Bits and pieces have been picked up on TED talks; Stoicism is a power tool among the professional handegg community, and another TED talk talks about how "grit" (also known as fortitude or courage) makes a big difference in success. But the tradition of virtue itself, and virtue philosophy, is worth attention.

Value-free spirituality?

I haven't read the title, but I have read Fr. Richard John Neuhaus talk about his title *The Naked Public Square*, in which he argues essentially that a religiously neutral public square is an impossibility, and the attempt to produce a naked public square will, perhaps, result in a statist religion.

If serious inner work without the resources of religious

tradition is a possibility, I haven't seen it. Present psychotherapy has changed much faster than core humans have changed, and uses yoga practices from Hinduism, mindfulness of a sort (whether a traditional Buddhist would recognize Western exhilaration at mindfulness as Right Mindfulness I do not know), and a couple of other usual suspects like guided imagery (alleged to be known from Graeco-Roman times and known to some traditional medicines, although the pedigree seems to be copied and pasted across websites).

In my Asian philosophy class, I was able to sympathize with some element of almost everything that was presented. In terms of Hindu claims that inside each of us is a drop of God, I could sympathize, believing we are made in the image of God. But the one point I recoiled from is Buddhism's *anatta*, or *an-atman*: the claim that we, and everything that "exists", are an empty illusion. Or as Chesterton put it: "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt."

Right Mindfulness, in its context in the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path, is a cardinal virtue, and I count that as a positive. However, I do not see the need for the West to turn to India as a maternal breast. It is a microaggression that treats Orthodox Christianity as bankrupt of resources. The same goes to turning to Buddhist "self-compassion." I also don't like being advised to practice yoga. I am already participating in a yoga, or a spiritual path: that of Orthodox Christianity, and it is a complete tradition.

My point, however, is not to attack the medicinal use of Indian tradition (whether or not Indians would recognize their land's spiritualities), but to say that value-free counseling is something I have never seen, and while it may

be politically correct to foist Indian spirituality but not Orthodox Christian, I wish to offer a word on my drawing on my religious tradition. Whether you accept it is not up to me, but Orthodoxy is a therapeutic tradition. And the claim has been explicitly made, in a book called *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, that if Orthodox spiritual direction were to appear new on the scene today, it might well not be classified as “religion,” but as “therapeutic science.”

I have not been directly involved with that therapeutic science. I’ve tried to reach monasticism, and am still trying, and therapeutic science is included in monasticism. So I cannot directly speak from experience about its fruit. But other things—virtue, repentance from sin and the like, I can directly attest to as positive theology.

A few more words about humility

Humility seems at the start something you’d rather have other people have than have it yourself. It looks small on the outside, but inside it is vaster than the Heavens, and it is one of two virtues that the virtue-sensitized Fathers of the *Philokalia* simply cannot ever stop talking about.

Perhaps what I can say is this. I don’t know positive psychology well, but one of the first lessons, and one of the biggest, is to learn and express gratitude. And what I would say as someone who believes in gratitude is this: what gratitude is to positive health, humility is *more*.

Let me ask a question: which would you rather spend time with: someone horrible and despicable, or someone wonderful and great? The latter, of course. How it relates to humility is this: if you are in pride, you see and experience others as horrible and despicable, while if you are in

humility, you see others as wonderful and great. Church Fathers talk about seeing other men as “God after God.” **That is a recipe for a life of delight.**

Eyes to see

There is more to be said; I am quite fond of St. John Chrysostom's “A Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself.” In connection with this, there are constant liturgical references to “the feeble audacity of the demons.” The devils are real, but they are on a leash, and we are called to trample them. It has been said that everything which happens has been allowed either as a blessing from God, or as a temptation. (In Orthodoxy, “temptation” means both a provocation enticing to sin, and a situation that is a trial). As has been said, the faithful cannot be saved without temptations, and the temptations that pass are provided by God so we can earn a crown and trampling them. St. John here frames things in a very helpful way.

Here I am starting to blend into something other than positive theology, and making assertions about positive theology and how they have similar effects to positive psychology. But really, all is ordained for us by a good God, a point for which I would refer you to God the Spiritual Father. There is profound providence, and profound possibility for profit, if only we have eyes to see it and be grateful for a God who has ordained Heaven and Earth for the maximum possible benefit for each of us. Does this strain credibility? Yes, but I believe it, and I believe it makes a world of difference.

Thomas Dixon on secularism and psychology

The article form of my advisor's thesis offered a case study for an understanding of secularity, and his case study was in psychology. He talked about how an older religious concept of passions was replaced by what was at first a paper-thin concept of emotions which you were just something you felt at the moment, then how the concept of emotions filled out and became emotions that could be about something, and then they filled out further and you could have an emotional dimension to a habit. The secular concept remains alienated from its religious roots, but the common Alcoholics Anonymous concept of being an alcoholic has almost completely filled out what was in the older concept of a passion. And here clinical psychology is modernized and secularized pastoral theology.

I'm not completely sure secularism is possible; it returns to Hinduism, at least for yoga, and Buddhism, at least for Right Mindfulness, as maternal breasts, and Hinduism has something there as Buddhism does not. Chesterton comes again to mind: "The problem with someone who doesn't believe in God is not that he believes nothing; it's that he believes anything!" I believe the Orthodox Church's bosom offers a deeper nourishment. I'm not sure I have much to back this claim other than by the extent by which this article does (or does not) make sense, or whether it is more desirable to pursue one virtue (giving that virtues are stinkin' awesome things to have), or pursue a panoply of virtues. But I would hope that the reader would by now be able to make sense of my assertion that all Orthodox theology is positive psychology, even if the claim

is more superficial than the assertion that all Orthodox theology is mystical theology.

For further reading without a moment's thought to positive psychology as such, **see *The Consolation of Theology***, a work of Orthodox theology, and one steeped in virtue philosophy.

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, '*Good God!*
That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things
Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,

From, *'God and the Son of God,
Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,'*
By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,
Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
The Luddite's Guide to Technology,
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,

But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Partiarth were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **X**, and **A**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, “I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?”

The master said, “Inside your heart.”

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?’

‘Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my “Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?” How the three children, my son,

in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and

immature to seek years' training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day's tribute to the professorial ascesis of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from ascesis, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, "Wisdom is justified by her children," of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.'

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:

'What then? How is this man,
 A second rich young ruler become?
 He who bore not a watch on principle,
 Even before he'd scarce more than
 Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
 Weareth a watch built to stand out,
 Even among later Apple Watches.
 He who declined a mobile phone,
 Has carried out an iPhone,

And is displeased to accept,
 A less fancy phone,
 From a state program to provide,
 Cell phones to those at poverty.
 Up! Out! This will not do,
 Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
 But that when it happened, he were sad.
 For the rich young ruler lied,
 When said he that he had kept,
 All commandments from his youth,
 For unless he were an idolater,
 The loss of possessions itself,
 Could not suffice to make him sad.
 This man hast lost a cellphone,
 And for that alone he grieveth.
 Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
 Would that he would recall,
 The heights from which he hath fallen,
 Even from outside the Orthodox Church.'

II.

Then the great Saint said, 'But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the

warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’
 Said Seneca the Younger,
 Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
 That full and ancient philosophy,
 Can speak, act, and help today,
 Among athletes and business men,
 And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
 And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,

An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a

troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.’

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, ‘Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the *Philokalìa*:

We ought all of us always to thank God for both the universal and the particular gifts of soul and body that He bestows on us. The universal gifts consist of the four elements and all that comes into being

through them, as well as all the marvellous works of God mentioned in the divine Scriptures. The particular gifts consist of all that God has given to each individual. These include:

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

one's possessions or even of giving alms.

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

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

‘And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. ‘My son,’ says Scripture, ‘if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently

endure' (Eccles. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

Hemp, unless it is well beaten, cannot be worked into fine yarn, whilst the more it is beaten and carded the finer and more serviceable it becomes. And a freshly moulded pot that has not been fired is of no use to man. And a child not yet proficient in worldly skills cannot build, plant, sow seed or perform any other worldly task. In a similar manner it often

happens through the Lord's goodness that souls, on account of their childlike innocence, participate in divine grace and are filled with the sweetness and repose of the Spirit; but because they have not yet been tested, and have not been tried by the various afflictions of the evil spirits, they are still immature and not yet fit for the kingdom of heaven. As the apostle says: 'If you have not been disciplined you are bastards and not sons' (Heb. 12 : 8). Thus trials and afflictions are laid upon a man in the way that is best for him, so as to make his soul stronger and more mature; and if the soul endures them to the end with hope in the Lord it cannot fail to attain the promised reward of the Spirit and deliverance from the evil passions.

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores *of* math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the ascesis of a mathematician or a member of the Ultranet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

'The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

Have you ever thought that everything that

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

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

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

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

I allowed this frustration to touch you so that you

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

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

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

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

Because then you were sunk in your own works

and plans and I wouldn't have been able to draw your thoughts to Me. But I want to teach you the most deep thoughts and My lessons, so that you may serve Me. I want to teach you that you are nothing without Me. Some of my best children are those who, cut off from an active life, learn to use the weapon of ceaseless prayer. You were called unexpectedly to undertake a difficult and responsible position, supported by Me. I have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

'The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

'What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with

thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written “Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret,” and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

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

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.**Virtue Unconquerable.**

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
 And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
 But what a painful road it has been,
 What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
 Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
 I only think so in moments of pride,
 With my grandeur only in repentance.
 And the circumstances around me,
 When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one

might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the *Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three,

but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the *Philokalia*: the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours’ practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through

flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the

hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the *Philokalia* is *The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*. If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the *Philokalia* hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the

Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition.

When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

‘Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one’s own poor, miserable demographic.

‘But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled “Love Without Boundaries,” and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it—on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father’s love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble,

everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of ανθρωπος (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new,

it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced,

“DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one’s inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul’s purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What *is* the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst

it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensauple of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.**O Holy Mother!**

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst'ry?
Art Thou the Myst'ry untold?
For I have written much,
And spent much care,
In *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*,
And looked all the whilst,
Down the wrong end,
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
I have written of man and creation defiled,
Yet for all my concerns,
Of so-called 'space-conquering technologies,'
Which it beseemeth me 'body-conquering technologies,'
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
Of our embodied state,
Where better to seek healing,
For an occult-free simulation,
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
Than in the perfect creaturely response,
'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.
Be it unto me according to thy word.'
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
'Behold thy Mother!'
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:

But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading
humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminèd teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest a Fluxx deck to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their

moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed the game of Fluxx, though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou

hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for the royal race of men. Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home, and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be

comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

‘The word translated, “blessed,” μακαριος (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including *Young’s Literal Translation*:

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the

land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness' sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the *Amplified Bible* naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was εὐδαιμονία, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was

taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one's spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all,

past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.**Crossing the Great Threshold.**

The tale were told,
 Of a child starkly scant of mind,
 Who received a glittering package, a gift,
 And kept the glittering package,
 Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
 And after long time,
 When the disposable wrapping paper,
 Were well battered and now dingy,
 An adult asked,
 ‘Aren’t you going to open the package?’
 The child exclaimed with joy,
 Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
 And squealed with joy, saying,
 “Oh, there’s *another* present!”
 My Lord and my God!
 Perhaps I will never open,
 The Sermon on the Mount.

VI.

I said myself then, ‘O John! O glorious Saint John!
 Canst thou lead me on a path into the The Sermon on the
 Mount? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well
 nigh destroyed me.’

Then the Saint said to me, ‘Thanks to thee, son, for thy
 request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou
 mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.

‘That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes;
 let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse

only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the Sermon on the Mount, poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our

needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were

martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.

My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original 'fat Mac',
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of
RAM.
My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
And a simple video game, had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without
frequent \$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of
Unix.
When I asked about one cardinally important open source
project,

I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.
I sing a song to my late iPhone,
Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my

budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained
completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,

Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices
with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the *Philokalia*,
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.
St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,
But we may not yet be in the clear.
And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under
surveillance,"

Where No Such Agency has received every email,
 It is now clear and open knowledge,
 To those that will reflect,
 That among most most Americans,
 ‘Every breath and step Americans take,’
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*? It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets, Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze, And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, ‘I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas’s famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.

4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.

18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.

34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.

48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, ‘As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.’

He spoke again and asked me, ‘And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?’

I said, ‘A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.’

He said, ‘And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?’

I said, ‘Nay.’

He said, ‘Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if “surveillance from Hell” in an obviously figurative sense might also be “surveillance from Hell” far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

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

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,

“There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, “Michael,”
Which is, being interpreted,
“Who is like God?”
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?
Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?
As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
As if it were no wood.
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,

And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,
And the devout are immune to magic.
Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under
feet.
The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,

But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil himself:

“Blow, and spit on him.”

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the *Philokalia* describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.’

The Saint told me, 'Thou hast read part of *Prayers by the Lake*, in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

'Rememberest thou also that in the *Philokalia* we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediates to some degree.'

I said, 'May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?'

He said, 'Speak on.'

I said, 'I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.'

He said, 'Hast thou not been astonished at God's perfect Providence of years betimes?'

I said, 'Yes.'

He said, 'What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.'

I asked, 'Will I reach monasticism?'

He smiled at me, and said, 'Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

He said, 'Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

'With death cometh a realization of, "I shall not pass this wise again."

'Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God's champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

'Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?

'Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?

'The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term "apocalyptic" its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou

faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”“

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where paten and chalice glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...’

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, ‘Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.’

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I had been in my life.

Eastern Orthodoxy: Disorganized Religion at Its Finest

People often have concerns, and Orthodoxy is about as disorganized as is presently available. A thousand years ago, we lost our most esteemed member, the Pope or Patriarch of Rome. Now we've lost our second most prestigious member: the Ecumenical Patriarch, Patriarch of Constantinople.

But when people raise concerns about “organized religion,” what they tend to mean is that they won't have someone in authority over them who can make decisions they don't like. But that is of key benefit. Not only are there “checks and balances” within Orthodoxy so that even in the highest authority relationship, that of monastic, the authority figure is bound to fully respect a subordinate's freedom. And in my own life I have explicitly sought to be under real authority. But not, ever, the bane of young men who rally behind Fr. Seraphim of Platina who warned of crazy converts who “having become converts, believe they

have become infallible” and assume as much authority over their victims as they want.

But there is more to it than authority over you existing for a major goal of being liberating to you. Trying to be Orthodox without being involved with the Orthodox Church is kind of like trying to be married without a spouse. It’s a contradiction in terms.

Attending Orthodox services will let you understand Orthodoxy better than any book. See if you can find a Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (“ROCOR”) parish, if you can. Everything I have tried to unveil about happiness in an age of crisis is a plant that grows best in its own native soil.

There is a parish and clergy locator at [https://**directory.saintinnocentpress.com**](https://directory.saintinnocentpress.com).

Would you attend one Orthodox service, for my sake?

Paradise (Again)

O Lord,
Have I not seen,
How thou hast placed me in Paradise?

And how have I said,
That a first monastic command,
Is, “Go home and spend another year with your family?”
While I have spent a few?
The obedience is not limited,
By a count of years,
But by obedience,
This being a first *obedience*.

Gifts I have fought as chance left me,
Bloodied, but more deeply bowed:

Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?
It hurteth thee to kick against the goads.

I stand, or sit,
Not scholar, nor user experience professional,

Making use of a life of leisure,
 Learning leisure well, to lord it over leisure,
 Once I made a vow before a wonder-working icon in
 Brooklyn,
 That I might receive a doctorate,
 Earned or honorary,
 And since then have prayed that my vow not be granted,
 An honorary doctorate not to receive,
 Because I do not want it enough to even travel,
 To give the icon a kiss of veneration!

An Invitation to the Game is an icon,
 Of children in a proletariat of excessive leisure,
 Excessive leisure being a training ground,
 Before a new life in a new world begins.

God the Spiritual Father looks after,
 Each person he has made,
 As a spiritual father looks after each disciple,
 God looketh after each,
 In the situations he placed each:

“Life’s Tapestry”

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

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

What have I to add,
To words such as these?
This time is a time of purification and training,
And as in times past,
In an instant, I may be taken to a monastery,
As I was taken to study theology,
Six months' work to obtain student loans,
Falling into place one business day before leaving.
Thou teachest me,
And I know thou art willing to save:
Whether or not my plans are the best.
Whether I ever reach monasticism,
Thou art potent to save.
I might need to seek monasticism:
God can save me with or without.

So I learn patience,
Fly through FluentU and learn Russian,
And here I sit,
In a place thou hast opened my eyes to see as Paradise,
And with lovely food pantries,
And visits to pets at a lovely cat shelter,
And thou ever ministerest to me.

Though thousands around me be addicted to television,
And ten thousands can't stop checking their cell phones,
Thou hast delivered me,
And taught me to lord it over technologies,
Perchance a prophet in the way,
To the technology user who still suffers,
To those who remain entangled in the Web.
Thou hast delivered me from mortal danger:
Perhaps thou givest me more time to repent.
Or perhaps thou givest merely,
More time to repent.
Glory to God for all things!

Thou givest me simple pleasures,
Who knew tidying up a besmudged keyboard could be fun?
Whither I go, thou art with me;
Thou preparest a table before family and friends.

“World” refers not to God’s creation,
But to our collections of passions,
Seeing through a glass, darkly,
What bathes in the light of Heaven:
Hell is a state of mind,
But Heaven is reality itself.

I am perhaps not worthy of praise,
To say such things in middle-class comfort.
I seek monasticism, to be a novice,
Which is meant to be exile,
Yet an abbot’s work,
Is to help me reach freedom from my passions,
And what true joy I have in luxury,

Only know further in monastic exile.
Years I have waited:
Now I am willing to wait years more.
Only if I may pursue repentance,
On such terms as it is offered me.
Glory to God who has allowed me such luxury!
Glory to God who has allowed me such honors!
Glory to God who has shown me that these avail nothing,
And seek the true fame,
Fame before God himself!

Be thou glorified, O God, in me,
Though I know nothing,
Though I am nothing,
Be none the less glorified in me.
The Infinite can do the Infinite in the finite:
Be thou therefore glorified and praised in me,
Though I am nothing before thee,
Yet thou grantest me breath and life,
Joy,
And ever offerest me salvation.

Glory be to God on high!
Glory be to God for Paradise!
Which Paradise is in all things!
Glory to God for all things!

Amen.

Epilogue:

For Further Reading

Some of my other recommended books include:

C.J.S. Hayward in Under 99 Pages, cjshayward.com/chu9p. This book draws together in one short volume the very best I have written on any topic.

The Luddite's Guide to Technology, cjshayward.com/lgt. A look at “Everything is permitted—maybe, but not everything is beneficial” in our use of technology. A big book, but probably my most interesting conclusion. Probably a good next step after *Happiness in an Age of Crisis*.

“St. Clive:” An Eastern Orthodox Author Looks Back at C.S. Lewis, cjshayward.com/sc. For C.S. Lewis fans interested in Holy Orthodoxy.

Orthodox Theology and Technology, cjshayward.com/ott. A glimpse at the person behind the writing.

The Best of Jonathan's Corner, cjshayward.com/bjc. A collection of works in theology, and my top-reviewed title.