

"St. Clive:" An Orthodox Author Looks Back at C.S. Lewis

From the "Major Works" series

CJS Hayward

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The cover portrait was composed from pictures taken in front of C.S. Lewis's wardrobe, believed to be the wardrobe that inspired *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, at Wheaton College's Wade Center. Used by the gracious permission of Wheaton College and the Wade Center. (Not endorsed by Wheaton College or the Wade Center unless they say so.)

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Introduction:

An Odd Sort of Book

C.S. Lewis, Han Urs von Balthasar, and Martin Marty met together to go fishing in a small rowboat.

C.S. Lewis said, "Please excuse me. I forgot something I left in the car." He* stepped out of the boat, walked on the water, and soon returned, carrying a lure.

Han Urs von Balthasar said, "Please excuse me too. I forgot something I left in my car," and he also stepped out of the boat, walked on the water, went over to the shore, and soon returned, carrying a many-angled hook.

Martin Marty thought, "If they can do it, I can do it!" stepped on the water, and fell in with a big splash.

Von Balthasar looked at C.S. Lewis, and said, "Think we should show him where the stepping stones are?"

C.S. Lewis blinked. "What stepping stones?"

* As it is now solidly established practice to add an a footnote skittishly defending one's own choices regarding "gendered pronouns," I would like to quote a couple of tweets. In response to a fellow user tweeting, "Nobody is safe in today's society, man. It's like walking on eggshells constantly. Someone will be offended, will be out to get you. It's exhausting... and, I think somewhat that social media is to blame," Titania McGrath coolly answered, "The phrase

'walking on eggshells' is a microaggression against vegans. Reported and blocked. [Emoji depicting a white woman tending to her nails.]"

C.S. Lewis was an influential character in the Evangelicalism I had growing up, enough so that at Wheaton it was provocative for one teacher to kvetch about Lewis being over-quoted. Some decades after I studied at Wheaton, a chapel speaker I saw on television quoted Lewis, immediately followed by the comment, "obligatory quotation from St. Clive," and it is my understanding that at Wheaton C.S. Lewis is more referred to, perhaps quizzically, as "St. Clive" more often than as "C.S. Lewis." And he really is the sort of person that people relate to as a saint.

What is odd about this book?

This is an odd or unusual book by the standards of most books mentioning C.S. Lewis:

1. It is not a work of scholarship, and,
2. It offers an apparent miscellany of collected works.

What this book offers is not someone trying to comment like Lewis, but someone who has tried to write like Lewis, extending the biosphere of works that attract people's works as C.S. Lewis's works are liked. It is a book for common people, and not only scholars engaged in formal academic study of Lewis. This is true of the opening work, about which one reader wrote,

The work that stands out most among the creative pieces, perhaps among all of them, is that which opens the book, "The Angelic Letters." I have had the pleasure of reading nearly all of Hayward's writings, and I was delighted that he undertook to write such a work. Readers who are familiar with C. S. Lewis' "The Screwtape Letters" will recognize at once that this is the very book which that author desired, but felt unable, to write in order to balance the demonic correspondence. It is a mark of Hayward's skill, knowledge, and spiritual insight that he has successfully written something that such a theologian as Lewis did not wish to attempt. He has of course accomplished this work with God's help, but one must realize the spiritual struggle, mental effort, careful study, and deep prayer that has gone into every piece in this anthology. Hayward has done much work for us. He has grappled with questions and problems that many of us face, but we may not feel that we have the resources to confront them. We therefore can find within these pages words that will perhaps directly answer some of our questions and certainly facilitate the difficult but necessary task of learning and discerning that we all must carry out, each as he is able. I am privileged to introduce some of the fruit that has come from the author's efforts to complete this task himself so that all may

benefit from both its example and its contents. May it leave seeds of knowledge in all who read. This author has gathered pearls for us, and may we gladly look upon them. They hold glimmers that can reflect our lives.

This is perhaps a tall order. It is not a scholarly work even in pretension, but it does something connected with Lewis that scholars do not do even in pretension: make the list of books like those C.S. Lewis wrote an open collection.

But the reality of the situation is one that is difficult to even guess at, even to the author. I asked the Founder of International Christian Mensa if I could possibly on par with C.S. Lewis, his response caught me completely off guard.

He said, in a word, that I am better than C.S. Lewis, something that wasn't even on my radar as a C.S. Lewis fan. The note itself is a bit crude, but only to tell me, "Hello? Wake up! Wake up! Hallo! You don't *need* a PhD to do first-class intellectual work!"

I think you are good enough to be described as the next C.S. Lewis, but why would you want to be? Surely you are better than that. From what I can gather, neither Lewis nor Tolkien got beyond a first degree, although Lewis had three of them. If it were not for the First World War I doubt they would have attained their academic positions on personal merit. That war killed off many, many great minds plus potential great careers and contributions. Had it not been for the war Lewis and Tolkien might have had to have worked for a living and not had the time, opportunity or encouragement to write. In my view they might realistically be called cheap B movies. They only get A status because all the real A writers were killed off...

Professor Donald Wiseman likewise only had a Master of Arts degree but his contributions to evangelical Bible study and archaeology are immense. I visited him at his house a few times and corresponded with him a fair amount about keeping alive his compilation of his father's books on Genesis. That is how I came to

convert Clues to Creation in Genesis into an eBook.

John Milton, likewise an MA.

I think it's quite an American thing to view a PhD as an essential qualification. You might remember the movie *The Karate Kid* and the part where Mr Miyagi takes The Kid to a competition. At the entrance one jobsworth tells him the competition is only for black belts. Miyagi 'borrows' a black belt from the back of a chair where it had been left, holds it up and says, 'he black belt' and they go in. The Karate Kid of course wins.

I may also have previously mentioned a student of economics in Canada who failed his PhD in 1928 because in his thesis he predicted the stock market crash of 1929. The university tried to get him to accept it after the crash but he declined.

In many respects, intellect is above academics I've known many Doctors, Reverend Doctors and Distinguished Professors who were two short planks. Nevertheless they made their contributions. When all is said and done, a PhD is a research degree. What are you sufficiently passionate about to research? Where could you go to do such research? Personally, I would like to see you continue your writing and let others get their doctorates researching your stuff. This point of view might help you focus your work better...

Anyhow, this is a start.

Cheers,

The first section, in various ways, engages C.S. Lewis's written work. It quotes him, builds on him, and challenges him to draw conclusions he may not have liked. It references Lewis's work in the fashion described about "The Angelic Letters" above, as an unmistakable reference to C.S. Lewis's (unfortunately) most popular and remembered work, *The Screwtape Letters*. Or it offers various commentary that does not reach scholarly standard.

The second section is not in particular about Lewis and what he has

written, but shows the trajectory of my writing in areas where my debt to Lewis is incalculable as a writer. He formed me, and his presence in my writing is simply not limited to when he is the topic. The last work in the list is a committing to paper what I had intended to be my Ph.D. thesis in a program that was cut short.

The third section is a longer single work that does not address one of Lewis's works, but his favorite book, a little gem called *The Consolation of Philosophy* which was a favorite among educated Europeans for over a millennium. *The Consolation of Philosophy* serves, as Lewis said of *Till We Have Faces*, a source but not a model. My debt may be great, but I do not recreate the original.

The fourth and last, brief section offers a commencement of sorts, and a suggestion of next steps for what you might do if your heart is stirred by the works in these pages and you want more of where these works come from.

My understanding of C.S. Lewis is that he clearly considered Orthodoxy to be a legitimate member of mere Christianity, but he only really knew a couple of Orthodox. He was, however, a great fan of such mystics as he knew, on which point I would recall a friend's conversation twenty or so years back; his story is not mine, but he said he was trying to discern whether he should be a Christian or an Eastern mystic, and the conclusion he reached was both: he should be an Eastern Orthodox Christian. The mystical tradition of the Orthodox Church is bedrock to what I write in these pages, whether or not it is explicit.

In all this I do not mean to stake out a scholarly thesis or offer eight or ten chapters of analysis on one single and essential point; my effort has been to delight readers and invite them into truth along lines worthy of C.S. Lewis. I would mention in particular, regarding the second section, that the two greatest compliments I have received as an author are:

1. "You write verbal icons!"
2. "You write like an Englishman."

Enjoy!

Most Cordially Yours,

C.J.S. Hayward

cjshayward.com

[amazon.com/author/cjshayward](https://www.amazon.com/author/cjshayward)

Ascension, 2019

This book is dedicated to all my wonderful, furry friends, at my friendly local cageless, no-kill pet shelter. (Adult shelter pets can really be so sweet!) May all my favorite pets find new homes!

Part 1:
Engaging C.S. Lewis

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 in which he offers such godly participation, and watch for his asceticism 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.

And remember, always, that we do not know what mysteries lie hidden for mark in the heart of God the Father Almighty.

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 take 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

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 new 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 greater than many saints have contended with; the *answer* is the same. The answer is, "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 him *through* his pain to health, wholeness, and joy.

The Physician is at work!

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

Dear blessed Eukairos;

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

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

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

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

Open up his repentance; it too 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

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 pain, that poison

Mark began to console himself with the deep pit of pain, 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 smouldering ember is now a fire burning brightly. Work as you can to billow it into a blaze.

With an Eternal Love,
Your Respectful Brother Angel

My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;

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

Mark is right in one way and wrong in another to realize that he has

only seen the beginning of deification. He *has* started, and only started, the chief end of human life, and he is right to pray, go to confession, and see himself as a beginner. But what he is *wrong* about is imagining that the proof of his fledgling status is that his wishes are not fulfilled in the circumstances of his life: his unconscious and unstated assumption is that if he had real faith like saints who worked miracles, his wishes would be fulfilled and his life would be easier. Those saints had *less* wishes fulfilled, not more, and much harder lives than him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

overstated emphasis on how important or helpful logical reasoning is.

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

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

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

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

Do what you can to draw him to repeat the [Jesus Prayer](#), to let it grow to a rhythm in him. If the question is, "What should I start thinking when I catch myself?", the answer is, "[The Jesus prayer](#)."

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

With Deepest Affection,
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

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

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

The liturgy speaks of "the feeble audacity of the demons", and Mark needs to know that that is true, and true specifically in his case. What

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

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

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

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

My dear, watchful son Eukairos;

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

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

Work on him in this peace. Work on him in the joy of friendship. Even if he does not realize that he has food for today and clothing for today and that this is the providence he is set to ask for help him to

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 remember that there are things we angels long to look into in the battleplans of God.

And hold dear Mark 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

take one step into this journey is still something. The time 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;

Your charge has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

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

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

Mark is no longer your charge.

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

Go in peace.

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

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 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!

"The Hydra:" A Narnian Escape?

"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 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."

When I read this, many times, I never was amped up to find Christ. I didn't want Christ, at least not then. I wanted to be in Narnia with Aslan. And stay there in Narnia. And this relates to a recurring thread of what might be called my "sin life" that I found entirely deadly. And there is a spiritual poison I found in the Chronicles of Narnia that I have reproduced to varying degrees of my own work. [Within the Steel Orb](#) contains much real wisdom, but is laced with escapism.

On the point of escapism, I would briefly comment that monks, in the ancient world, were perennially warned about the perils of escape, which when they were tempted, were advised to pray through the

temptation until they were through it. And without further ado, I quote below a work that already expresses my concern about escape and Narnia:

A Surprise About "Joy"

Before beginning a critique that begins with C.S. Lewis, I should stop to pause and state that the choice of C.S. Lewis is deliberate and intended to be provocative. C.S. Lewis is considered by many Christians to be their chief spokesman in the modern age; though it would unfairly impute to him an unworthy calculating approach, he made deliberate choices to try to stay within what he called "mere Christianity," meaning classic, little 'o' (o)rthodoxy, the Christianity of orthodox Christians, who might be described in Oden's turn of phrase as "people who can say the Creed without crossing their fingers." Most of people somewhere within the confines of Lewis's mere Christianity, can look at most of what Lewis says and find that there are mostly things they can accept. Different groups of Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestants who remain in continuity with historic roots and recognizable Christianity may believe things Lewis doesn't say, but a snatch of Lewis from almost anywhere attracts most real Christians. And needless to say, this is not the only thing Lewis had going for him. He was a brilliant author yet able to communicate clearly and simply; he was an able expositor; and he had a formation in much of what is best in Western literature, a formation that enriched first of all his fiction and fantasy but also affected his nonfiction. And he was, himself, a person who could say the Creed without crossing his fingers, and a good deal more than that. If one is going to look for an able spokesman for any spiritually alive form of 20th century Christianity, C.S. Lewis is at least one of the front runners, and depending on the circles you move in, it might be said that choosing anyone else is a choice that requires justification.

And that is why I would like to begin my investigations with him.

C.S. Lewis, in one pivotal passage in his autobiography [Surprised by Joy](#), wrote:

...The first is itself the memory of a memory. As I stood beside a flowering currant bush on a summer day there suddenly arose in me without warning, and as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my

the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's "enormous bliss" of Eden (giving the full, ancient meaning to "enormous") comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. 'Τουλιανποθω [Oh, I desire too much]—and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had taken only a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.

The second glimpse came through *Squirrel Nutkin*; through it only, though I loved all the Beatrix Potter books. But the rest of them were merely entertaining; it administered the shock; it was a trouble. It troubled me with what I can only describe as the Idea of Autumn. It sounds fantastic to say that one can be enamored of a season, but that is something like what happened; and, as before, the experience was one of intense desire. And one went back to the book, not to gratify the desire (that was impossible—how can one *possess* Autumn?) but to reawake it. And in this experience also there was the same surprise and the same sense of incalculable importance. It was something quite different from ordinary life and even from ordinary pleasure; something, as they would now say, "in another dimension."

The third glimpse came through poetry. I had become fond of Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*: fond of it in a casual, shallow way for its story and its vigorous rhythms. But then, and quite different from such pleasures, and like a voice from far more distant regions, there came a moment when I idly turned the pages of the book and found the unrhymed translation of *Tegner's Drapa* and read

*I heard a voice that cried,
Balder the Beautiful
Is dead, is dead—*

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale, and remote) and then, as in the other examples, found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.

The reader who finds these three episodes of no interest need read this book no further, for in a sense the central story of my life is about nothing else. For those who are still disposed to proceed I will only underline the quality common to the three experiences; it is that of an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction. I call it Joy, which is here a technical term and must be sharply distinguished from both Happiness and from Pleasure. Joy (in my sense) has indeed one characteristic, and one only, in common with them; the fact that anyone who has experienced it will want it again. Apart from that, and considered only in its quality, it might almost equally well be called a particular kind of unhappiness or grief. But then it is a kind we want. I doubt whether anyone who has tasted it would ever, if both were in his power, exchange it for all the pleasures of the world. But then Joy is never in our power and pleasure often is.

I know that desire. I know it intimately, and it has been called one of the central defining characteristics. And, as is said in *Ostrov*, "I know [the demon] personally." It is a form of covetousness, one that dwarfs the mere covetousness inspired by car ads, which portray luxury cars as mysterious, sensual, and intimate, and are in their own way "a particular kind of unhappiness or grief", and which are in their own lesser way "a kind we want." So far as I know, the [Philokalia](#), which is (more than any other collection I've read, including the Bible) the science of interior struggle and spiritual warfare) says nothing of this secular enrapturement in its description of human beatitude. It does, perhaps, discuss something like this in the demon of noonday; today monks are perennially warned of the passion of escaping the here and now in which God has placed us, and the strict monastic is ordinarily to stay in one's cell and fight the demon of noonday. One classic story tells of a monk who said he defeated the

demon of noonday by visiting an elder, and another monk sharply corrected him: far from *defeating* the demon of noonday, his trip was *giving in* to the demon of noonday. This longing, called *Sehnsucht* by the Romantics (and remember that C.S. Lewis's first work after returning to Christianity was [The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Defense of Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism](#), is eloquently given voice in a work connecting conservative Christianity with Jungian psychology in Brent Curtis's [Less-Wild Lovers: Standing at the Crossroads of Desire](#), which was published in Mars Hill Review, republished along with [First Things](#) and other heavyweights in the conservative Christian [Leadership University](#), and been gobbled up by complementarians (I am one) with works such as John Eldredge's [Wild at Heart](#). But there is an issue, not with complementarianism as such (though complementarians may jump at a literate voice saying something out of [lock]step with feminism), but with what is *not* present in [Less-Wild Lovers](#). And I would challenge the reader to look at the compelling, *haunting* picture in [Less-Wild Lovers](#), and ask what is not there for something that complains to be Christian: where, in the entire piece, is the human plight described in terms of the sin and evils condemned by Christian tradition? For the moment let's set aside the question of whether sin is understood, as in [Pilgrim's Progress](#), through the paradigm example of a judicial crime, or whether it is understood as in Orthodoxy through the paradigm example of a disease. John Bunyan and an Orthodox Christian can alike say that judged by the paradigm of the Ten Commandments, we don't stack up, and the Ten Commandments provide a yardstick of something seriously important in human living. Where in the entire article is the yardstick of human failing associated with such things as are in the Ten Commandments? And once a problem is admitted, where does God stand with regard to the center of things? Admittedly one is invited to a larger spiritual world, but when does the advocated "way of the heart" revolve around Christ? Admittedly the differences here between Protestant and Orthodox are significant, but even with these differences where does the thesis that we are marred by sin and saved by Christ ever shape the outlook in the article? [Less-Wild Lovers](#) compellingly concentrates something that diluted C.S. Lewis's Christianity, something that helps make the [The Chronicles of Narnia](#) compelling, and a clue to something that is rotten in the state of Denmark. The longing C.S. Lewis appeals to is a form of covetousness,

one I am too familiar with, and seriously not-cool.

The question of whether Lewis's ardent longing is covetousness is not purely academic. If you ask, "If it is sin, and it makes his life happier, does it really matter?" then my answer will be, "It didn't make Lewis's life happy, or at least it didn't make my life happy. The moment of haunting is sweet, whether or not one appreciates it at the time. But it darkens the overall picture. The times in my life when I have been most governed by 'Joy,' as Lewis calls it, have been the times when I was more unhappy, and times when I made others unhappy." But I am getting ahead of myself. The question of whether something is sin is in fact closely related to whether it will make us more unhappy.

In [A Pet Owner's Rules](#), I said, God is like a pet owner who only has two rules:

1. *I am your owner.* Receive freely of the food and drink I have given you.
2. Don't drink out of the toilet.

And, I argued, all sin is drinking out of the toilet. For example, getting drunk may feel enticingly nice the first time or two. But being drunk all the time, as any recovering alcoholic will tell you, is suffering you wouldn't want on your worst enemy. And covetousness as a whole is drinking out of the toilet. Pornography, with its lustful shade of covetousness, begins by being very enticing, but lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first pornography disenchants everything that is not porn, and then it progressively disenchants itself. And it also fits to add that ordinary covetousness is pleasant at first. Watching a really enticing commercial may help you understand the words, "Having is not as pleasing as wanting. It is not logical, but it is often true." But the cost of covetousness is a loss of contentment. One begins by not being satisfied by what one has, and ends by not being satisfied by what one can get. Buying things may get momentary satisfaction, but the ultimate delivery, if you can buy what you covet, is nicer things and with them less contentment than one had before. And in these lines, it matters a great deal whether the intense longing of "Joy" or

Sehnsucht is in fact covetousness. If it makes the human person settled in happiness, this is news to the Orthodox spiritual person. Everything that is like it is deemed unhelpful in the ascetical literature; avarice is poison, and obeying the demon of noonday is poison. I don't see that my own extensive experience with Joy has made me happy, and even its advocate in Lewis openly says that it can be seen as an intense joy or an intense wounded unhappiness. Admittedly we are to yearn for Christ God, perhaps in a sublimation of the impulse to yearn for created things, and some authors use 'eros' or 'yearning' in relation to God: but neither Lewis nor Curtis finds this desire to be particularly a desire for God. The cost of yearning for something that, unlike cars and chewing gum, I cannot have no matter how much money I have, is like the more vulgar yearning stimulated by commercials. It seems palatial from the inside, like a doorway to a larger space, and it costs me something, namely contentment with what God has given me now. Some times I have recognized that my actions when I have been in the service of such yearning have been toxic. I now remember not a single time in my life when I have been happy that such yearnings have been prominent. If, as Lewis says, these yearnings are such that in their service one would choose them over happiness, perhaps this is not a mark of how wonderfully good they are. Perhaps it is a mark of how *foul* they are.

The hydra, or one end of a fallen tree branch

I have written a fair amount of what is more or less nonmagical fantasy (short stories: [The Spectacles](#), [Stephanos](#), [Within the Steel Orb](#); novellas: [Within the Steel Orb](#), [Firestorm 2034](#), [The Sign of the Grail](#)), enough so that one fellow author, in a conversation where someone said the first three books by an author establish his brand, suggested that my brand might itself be nonmagical fantasy. And it is something I would not like to be my brand now, but it is a clue to something significant.

I had stepped away from most fantasy with its portrayal of magic; in response to friends who said, "Why can't we have fantasy with different physical laws?" I said (besides a bit about physics) that they were asking not for fantasy with different *physical* laws, but different *moral* laws, and I asked why they didn't want fantasy in which other unlawful things besides magic were all kosher. The "different physical laws" seemed to always mean laws that would allow life as we know it (which is astronomically improbable: for physical constants alone, getting things right enough to allow us to live would require precision in excess of a marksman who could hit a proton from the opposite side of the universe), but in addition allow occult activity without what Christianity has regarded as occult sin. And why, I asked, if one could allow such things under the heading of different physical laws, why not envision universes in which sexual sins were innocent and harmless? And amidst all this, I sought to recreate fantasy, but without magic... which is to say that I sought to excise portrayal of magic from a fabric woven from the same root. I removed the picture but kept the frame on the wall. What fantasy offers is an alternative to the here and now, an alternative that crystallizes in the portrayal of magic. And I had removed magic from fantasy but retained the ambient orientation that powers magical fantasy.

What I am interested in here is a nexus that is something like a many-headed hydra: it appears in different places and different ways, but it is connected to the same reality (or, perhaps, unreality) underneath. People have said, "You pick up one end of a stick, you pick up the other," and while this nexus is perhaps more like a branch that keeps forking, with many places one can pick it up, it is still aspects of the same thing.

with many places one can pick it up, it is still aspects of the same thing.

Magic as an unnatural vice

My most recent haunting of "Joy" came with a desire for spring greenery and nature, by assumption in a neo-Pagan light. There are a couple of issues here; for one issue, our worship of nature is a worship of an idealized nature that cuts away plants that grow naturally because they are "weeds" (the definition of a "weed" is a *plant I don't want*, and the kinds of plants that intrude on our gardens as weeds tend to be those best suited to the local ecology), and puts plants that are ill-suited to grow in the area, perhaps needing extensive fresh water in an environment where fresh water is scarce. But the other, deeper issue has to be that when we reach for natural religion our eyes search for neo-paganism, perhaps Druidry. It was always with a faintly guilty conscience that in looking for wallpaper for my computer, I grasped for wallpapers of Stonehenge. Now I do not object to nature wallpaper as such; I have a waterfall wallpaper on my computer now and a clean conscience with it. But the Stonehenge wallpaper has to do with imagining nature in a pagan light. Perhaps this is a pagan light that neo-pagans and Druids would recognize; perhaps they would call it an outsider's conception. But in either case, as with the recent haunting of Joy, my reaching for nature was a grasping that had Romantic, pagan, or occult resonance.

But the Fathers regard occult sin as an unnatural vice. (There are other unnatural vices besides queer sexuality.) Our more ordinary adoration of nature seems to express itself in wanting to make it something it is not, culling plants that grow naturally as weeds and then trying hard to make "better" plants grow outside of their normal operating range. My haunting mentioned before was for spring greenery; I didn't respect that where I live, at this time of year, it is right and proper for everything green (besides evergreens) to be buried beneath a thick mantle of snow. (At least I didn't go to shovel the yard to make it like my idealization.)

But there is a deeper sense in which nature-worship, or nature-magic, is unnatural. It is a bit like getting into a test-taking strategy where the only live question is how to best go about cheating on a test, and discussion of taking test is not about any legitimate method of test

discussion of taking test is not about any legitimate method of test-taking, but only of how to cheat.

If there is anything that is natural for us to have, it is the here and now, and the plain sense of the here and now. This "here and now" may be out of doors, or it may be inside a house, or it may in an even more artificial environment like Antarctica or an airplane cockpit. But regardless of which of these possibilities we are actually in, "Your cell will teach you everything you need to know," and escape from the here and now is unnatural cheating on a test. It's not learning the main lesson brought by the here and now. And if nature is looked to as providing the substance of an escape, then nature is being looked to for something unnatural. Stepping out of a house into something green may momentarily provide escape; but the nature of "out of doors" is no more permanently exotic than "indoors." If the out of doors appears to us to have a shimmer of something magical, a shimmer of exotic escape from the here and now, then we are using nature to dodge the chief lesson that nature is intended to teach us. We are being unnatural in our use of nature herself.

I have mentioned Lewis's "Joy" and my "nonmagical fantasy" as heads of this many-headed hydra. It is also the poison that animates unnatural occult use of nature; for other heads, look at "metaphysics" in the occult sense, which is not (like the "metaphysics" of philosophy proper) a discipline of delving into the roots of existence as we know it, but using mental gymnastics, acrobatics, contortions to dodge the plain sense of existence as we know it. Gnosticism is seductively appealing, but there is a catch. The Gnostic appeal hinges on a spiritual climate of despair in the here and now; its good news is a salvation from the here and now. To someone who is genuinely happy, who appreciates the here and now, gnosticism will fall on deaf ears; it is like offering completely free chemotherapy to someone who has no trace of cancer. Video games, iPhones, special effects in movies, and an almost limitless array of technical options obviate the need to pursue the spiritual discipline of Gnosticism or occult practice to escape the here and now, also provide a way out of the dull here and now—and make the here and now duller in the process! The list is open-ended and seemingly limitless; one of the characteristics of pride to the degree of prelest (which has been called

“spiritual illusion” and “spiritual lust”) is a progressive disengagement from the here and now, absorbed in funhouse mirrors.

Awakening

There were many years when I read [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), and wished to be in another world, wished to be in Narnia and contradictorily wished to have in this world something from another world. The desire is self-defeating: in my case, not coveting something like a watch or a car that I could perhaps buy if I could spare the money, nor for something like the Mona Lisa that physically exists even if it's not for sale, but a desire for something that, almost by definition, "If I can have it, by that very fact it is not what I want." It's a bit like wanting to drink wine from an unopened bottle: as soon as the bottle is open and the wine available to drink, it ceases to be what I want.

More recently, after years of struggling against this kind of coveting, which was in turn after decades of struggling to satisfy this kind of coveting, I remember thinking of Narnia as something I didn't want—I wanted things that were *real*. And I started to less want things I *don't* have, and more want things I *do* have. One saint said that we should desire whatever conditions we have, instead of desiring other conditions.

And it may turn out in the end that happiness was, like a pair of glasses, on our nose the whole time. If we let go of paganism as a way to connect with nature, we may find that Orthodoxy has held this connection with nature all the time, in details like the flowers adorning icon stands and the saying that if you have two small coins you should use one to buy prosphora and the other to buy flowers for the icons, to the status of the Orthodox Church as the vanguard of the whole visible Creation returning to her Lord, to monastics who cultivate a connection with God and end up having a connection to the natural world as well, to everything discussed in [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#). It turns out that the idea of paganism and Romanticism as the way to connect with nature was a decoy, but the good news is that the decoy is not needed. We have better.

Creation is both angle worm and angel host. It is not just rocks and trees, or even rocks, trees, and men, for the race of mankind has always been part of nature but spiritual and visible: ministering spirits sent to

seen part of nature, but spiritual and visible. ministering spirits sent to serve the elect, seraphim, cherubim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangel, and angel. And in all of this man is microcosm and mediator, the recapitulation and ornament of spiritual and visible creation alike. "In Christ there is no... male nor female," sounds today like a drop of feminism woven into the Bible today and correcting its fabric, but the ancients knew something greater. Deification leads to the transcendence of the difference between male and female, between paradise and the inhabited world, between Heaven and earth, between the spiritual and visible creation, and finally between uncreated and created nature. All these differences are transcended in the Dance. And we dance the Great Dance with Nature, not when we submit to her lead, but when we properly lead her.

An ancient hymn says, "Adam, trying to be god, failed to be god; Christ became man, that he might make Adam god." C.S. Lewis well enough said that though the journey to Heaven may cost us our right hand and our right eye, if we persevere through Heaven, we may find that what we have left behind is precisely *nothing*. If we left behind Romanticism and its by-definition-impossible quest for its harmony with nature, and all the occult hydra's heads offering escape from the here and now, we may find that when we have really and truly repented, repentance being the most terrifying moment in Christian experience, once we have opened our hands and let all their necessary-seeming contents fall away as far as God wants, what we have left in our hands is all the good we did not choose, together with all the good we did choose. Letting go of that perennially seductive wish for a moment of deep harmony with nature, deepens our harmony with nature: for indeed, in terms of true harmony with nature that is continuous with virtue, being at peace with one's surroundings, even in a skyscraper or even a space station, is more than a vacation where one is overwhelmed by hills and trees. And when we have repented of the escape that seems like our only real salvation given our circumstances, we are given real salvation in our circumstances: not wine from an unopened bottle, but appreciated wine from a bottle opened the usual way.

We have nothing to lose but our bondage to sin.

The Magician's Triplet: Magician, Scientist, Reformer

I would like to take a Protestant church's electronic sign for a starting point. The sign, with a portrait of Martin Luther to the right, inviting people to an October 31st "Reformation Day potluck." When I stopped driving to pick up a few things from ALDI's, I tweeted:

I passed a church sign advertising a "Reformation Day" potluck.

I guess Orthodox might also confuse Halloween with the Reformation...

Those words, if one steps beyond a tweet, may be taken as a witty jibe not obviously connected with reality. Some people might ask an obvious question: "*What train of thought was behind **that** jab?*" And I'd like to look at that, and answer that real or imagined interlocutor who might wonder.

[The Abolition of Man](#) and [The Magician's Twin](#)

When I first read [The Abolition of Man](#) as a student at [Calvin College](#), I was quite enthralled, and in my political science class, I asked, “Do you agree with C.S. Lewis in *The Abolition of Man* abâ€”” and my teacher, a well-respected professor and a consummate communicator, cut me off before I could begin to say which specific point I was inquiring about, and basically said, “Yes and amen to the whole thing!” as brilliant analysis of what is going on in both modernist and postmodernist projects alike.

C.S. Lewis’s [The Abolition of Man](#) (available online in a [really ugly webpage](#)) is a small and easily enough overlooked book. It is, like [Mere Christianity](#), a book in which a few essays are brought together in succession. In front matter, Lewis says that the (short) nonfiction title of [The Abolition of Man](#) and the (long) novel of [That Hideous Strength](#) represent two attempts to make the same basic point in two different literary formats. It isn’t as flashy as [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), and perhaps the first two essays are not captivating at the same level of the third. However, let me say without further argument here that the book is profoundly significant.

Let me bring in another partner in the dialogue: [The Magician's Twin: C.S. Lewis, Science, Scientism, and Society](#). The title may need some explanation to someone who does not know Lewis, but I cannot ever read a book with so big a thesis so brilliantly summarized in so few words. There are allusions to two of his works: [The Abolition of Man](#), which as discussed below calls the early scientist and the contemporary “*high noon of magic*” to be twins, motivated by science, but science blossomed and magic failed because science worked and magic didn’t. (In other words, a metaphorical Darwinian “survival of the fittest” cause science to ultimately succeed and magic to ultimately fail). In [The Magician's Nephew](#), Lewis has managed to pull off the rather shocking feat of presenting and critiquing the ultimately banal figures of the Renaissance magus and the Nietzschean *Äœbermensch* (and its multitude of other incarnations) in a way that is genuinely appropriate in a

children's book. The title of "The Magician's Twin," in three words including the word "The", quotes by implication two major critiques Lewis provided, and one could almost say that the rest, as some mathematicians would say, "is left as an exercise for the reader."

The book has flaws, some of them noteworthy, in particular letting [Discovery Institute](#) opinions about what Lewis *would* say trump what in fact he clearly **did** say. I detected, if I recall correctly, collisions with bits of [Mere Christianity](#). And the most driving motivation is to compellingly argue Intelligent Design. However, I'm not interested in engaging origins questions now (you can read my muddled ebook on the topic [here](#)).

What does interest me is what [The Magician's Twin](#) pulls from [The Abolition of Man's](#) side of the family. On that point I quote Lewis's last essay at length:

Nothing I can say will prevent some people from describing this lecture as an attack on science. I deny the charge, of course: and real Natural Philosophers (there are some now alive) will perceive that in defending value I defend inter alia the value of knowledge, which must die like every other when its roots in the Tao [*the basic wisdom of mankind, for which Lewis mentions other equally acceptable names such as "first principles" or "first platitudes"*] are cut. But I can go further than that. I even suggest that from Science herself the cure might come.

I have described as a 'magician's bargain' that process whereby man surrenders object after object, and finally himself, to Nature in return for power. And I meant what I said. The fact that the scientist has succeeded where the magician failed has put such a wide contrast between them in popular thought that the real story of the birth of Science is misunderstood. You will even find people who write about the sixteenth century as if Magic were a medieval survival and Science the new thing that came in to sweep it away. Those who have studied the period know better. There was very little magic in the Middle Ages: the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are the high noon of magic. The serious magical endeavour and the serious scientific endeavour are twins: one was sickly and died, the

other strong and throve. But they were twins. They were born of the same impulse. I allow that some (certainly not all) of the early scientists were actuated by a pure love of knowledge. But if we consider the temper of that age as a whole we can discern the impulse of which I speak.

There is something which unites magic and applied science while separating both from the wisdom of earlier ages. For the wise men of old the cardinal problem had been how to conform the soul to reality, and the solution had been knowledge, self-discipline, and virtue. For magic and applied science alike the problem is how to subdue reality to the wishes of men: the solution is a technique; and both, in the practice of this technique, are ready to do things hitherto regarded as disgusting and impious — such as digging up and mutilating the dead.

If we compare the chief trumpeter of the new era (Bacon) with Marlowe's Faustus, the similarity is striking. You will read in some critics that Faustus has a thirst for knowledge. In reality, he hardly mentions it. It is not truth he wants from the devils, but gold and guns and girls. 'All things that move between the quiet poles 'shall be at his command' and 'a sound magician is a mighty god'. In the same spirit Bacon condemns those who value knowledge as an end in itself: this, for him, is to 'use as a mistress for pleasure what ought to be a spouse for fruit.' The true object is to extend Man's power to the performance of all things possible. He rejects magic because it does not work; but his goal is that of the magician. In Paracelsus the characters of magician and scientist are combined. No doubt those who really founded modern science were usually those whose love of truth exceeded their love of power; in every mixed movement the efficacy comes from the good elements not from the bad. But the presence of the bad elements is not irrelevant to the direction the efficacy takes. It might be going too far to say that the modern scientific movement was tainted from its birth: but I think it would be true to say that it was born in an unhealthy neighbourhood and at an inauspicious hour. Its triumphs may have been too rapid and purchased at too high a price: reconsideration, and something like repentance, may be required.

Is it, then, possible to imagine a new Natural Philosophy, continually conscious that the natural object' produced by analysis and abstraction is not reality but only a view, and always correcting the abstraction? I hardly know what I am asking for. I hear rumours that Goethe's approach to nature deserves fuller consideration "that even Dr Steiner may have seen something that orthodox researchers have missed. The regenerate science which I have in mind would not do even to minerals and vegetables what modern science threatens to do to man himself. When it explained it would not explain away. When it spoke of the parts it would remember the whole. While studying the It it would not lose what Martin Buber calls the Thou-situation. The analogy between the Tao of Man and the instincts of an animal species would mean for it new light cast on the unknown thing. Instinct, by the only known reality of conscience and not a reduction of conscience to the category of Instinct. Its followers would not be free with the words only and merely. In a word, it would conquer Nature without being at the same time conquered by her and buy knowledge at a lower cost than that of life.

Perhaps I am asking impossibilities.

I'm drawing a blank for anything I've seen in a life's acquaintance with the sciences to see how I have ever met this postulate as true.

In my lifetime I have seen a shift in the most prestigious of sciences, physics (only a mathematician would be insulted to be compared with a physicist), shift from an empirical science to a fashionable superstring theory in which physics abdicates from the ancient scientific discipline of refining hypotheses, theories, and laws in light of experiments meant to test them in a feedback loop. With it, the discipline of physics abdicates from all fully justified claim to be science. And this is specifically physics we are talking about: hence the boilerplate Physics Envy Declaration, where practitioners of one's own academic discipline are declared to be **scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics.**

I do not say that a solution could not come from science; I do say

that I understand what are called the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) disciplines after people started grinding a certain very heavy political axe, I've had some pretty impressive achievements, and C.S. Lewis simply did not understand the science of his time too far above the level of an educated non-scientist: probably the biggest two clues that give away [The Dark Tower](#) as the work of another hand are that the author ineptly portrays portraiture gone mad in a world where portraiture would never have come to exist, and that the manuscript is hard science fiction at a level far beyond even Lewis's science fiction. Lewis may have written [the first science fiction title in which aliens are honorable, noble beings instead of vicious monsters](#), but [The Dark Tower](#) was written by someone who knew the hard sciences and hard science fiction much more than Lewis and humanities and literature much less. (The runner-up clue is anachronous placement of Ransom that I cannot reconcile with the chronological development of that character at any point in the [Space Trilogy](#).)

However, that is just a distraction.

A third shoe to drop

There are three shoes to drop; one prominent archetype of modern science's first centuries has been hidden.

Besides the figure of the Renaissance Magus and the Founding Scientist is the intertwined figure of the Reformer.

Now I would like to mention three reasons why Lewis might have most likely thought of it and not discussed it.

First of all, people who write an academic or scholarly book usually try to hold on to a tightly focused thesis. A scholar does not ordinarily have the faintest wish to write a 1000-volume encyclopedia about *everything*. This may represent a shift in academic humanism since the Renaissance and Early Modern times, but Lewis has written a small, focused, and readable book. I don't see how to charitably criticize Lewis on the grounds that he didn't write up a brainstorm of every possible tangent; he has written a short book that was probably aiming to tax the reader's attention as little as he could. Authors like Lewis might agree with a maxim that software developers quote: "*The design is complete, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing more to take away.*"

Second of all, it would cut against the grain of the Tao as discussed (the reader who so prefers is welcomed to use alternate phrasing like "first platitudes"). His appendix of quotations illustrating the Tao is relatively long and quotes Ancient Egyptian, Old Norse, Babylonian, Ancient Jewish, Hindu, Ancient Chinese, Roman, English, Ancient Christian, Native American, Greek, Australian Aborigines, and Anglo-Saxon, and this is integrated with the entire thrust of the book. If I were to attempt such a work as Lewis did, it would not be a particularly obvious time to try to make a sharp critique specifically about one tradition.

Thirdly and perhaps most importantly, C.S. Lewis is a founder

of ecumenism as we know it today, and with pacifism / just war as one exception that comes to mind, he tried both to preach and to remain within “mere Christianity”, and it is not especially of interest to me that he was Protestant (and seemed to lean more Romeward to the end of his life). **C.S. Lewis was one of the architects of ecumenism as we know it (ecumenism being anathematized heresy to the Orthodox Church as of 1987)**, but his own personal practice was stricter than stating one’s opinions as opinions and just not sledgehammering anyone who disagrees. There is a gaping hole for the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary in the Chronicles of Narnia; Aslan appears from the Emperor Beyond the Sea, but without any hint of relation to any mother that I can discern. This gaping hole may be well enough covered so that Christian readers don’t notice, but once it’s pointed out it’s a bit painful to think about.

For the first and second reasons, there would be reason enough not to criticize Reformers in that specific book. However, this is the reason I believe C.S. Lewis did not address the third triplet of the *Renaissance Magus*, the *Founder of Science*, and the *Reformer*. Lewis’s words here apply in full force to the Reformer: “*It might be going too far to say that the modern scientific movement was tainted from its birth: but I think it would be true to say that it was born in an unhealthy neighbourhood and at an inauspicious hour.*”

You have to really dig into some of the history to realize how intertwined the Reformation was with the occult. Lewis says, for one among many examples, “In Paracelsus the characters of magician and scientist are combined.” Some have said that what is now called Lutheranism should be called Melanthonism, because as has happened many times in history, a charismatic teacher with striking influence opens a door, and then an important follower works certain things out and systematizes the collection. *In Melanthon the characters of Reformer, Scientist, and Astrologer are combined.* Now I would like to address one distraction: some people, including Lewis ([The Discarded Image](#)), draw a sharp distinction between astrology in the middle ages and the emptied-out version we have today. He says that our lumping astrology in with the occult would have surprised practitioners of either:

Renaissance magic asserted human power while astrology asserted human impotence. [The Magician's Twin](#) interestingly suggests that astrology as discussed by C.S. Lewis is not a remnant of magic but as a precursor to present-day deterministic science. And there is an important distinction for those who know about astrology in relation to Melancthon. Medieval astrology was a comprehensive theory, including cosmology and psychology, where “judicial astrology”, meaning to use astrology for fortune-telling, was relatively minor. But astrology for fortune-telling was far more important to Melancthon. And if there was quite a lot of fortune-telling on Melancthon's resume, there was much more clamor for what was then called *natural philosophy* and became what we now know as science.

Another troubling weed in the water has to do with Reformation history, not specifically because it is an issue with the Reformation, but because of a trap historians fall into. Alisdair McGrath's [Reformation Theology: An Introduction](#) treats how many features common in Protestantism today came to arise, but this kind of thing is a failure in historical scholarship. There were many features present in Reformation phenomena that one rarely encounters in Protestant histories of the Reformation. Luther is studied, but I have not read in any Protestant source his satisfied quotation about going to a bar, drinking beer, and leering at the barmaids. I have not seen anything like the climax of [Degenerate Moderns: Modernity as Rationalized Sexual Misbehavior](#), which covers Martin Luther's rejection of his vow of celibacy being followed by large-scale assault on others' celibacy (“liberating” innumerable nuns from their monastic communities), Luther's extended womanizing, and his marriage to a nun as a way to *cut back* on his womanizing. For that matter, I grew up in the Anabaptist tradition, from which [the conservatism of the Amish](#) also came, and heard of historic root in terms of the compilation of martyrdoms in [Martyr's Mirror](#), without knowing a whisper of the degree to which Anabaptism was the anarchist wing of the Reformation.

Questions like “Where did Luther's *Sola Scriptura* come from?”, or “Where did the Calvinist tradition's acronym TULIP for ‘Total Depravity’, ‘Unconditional Election’, ‘Limited Atonement’, ‘Irresistible Grace’, and

the ‘Perseverance of the Saints?’ come from?” are legitimate historical questions. However, questions like these only ask about matters that have rightly or wrongly survived the winnowing of history, and they tend to favor a twin that survived and flourished over a twin that withered and died. This means that the chaos associated with the founders of Anabaptism do not linger with how truly chaotic the community was at first, and in general Protestant accounts of the Reformation fail to report the degree to which the Reformation project was connected to a Renaissance that was profoundly occultic.

A big picture view from before I knew certain things

In [AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking among Skeptics](#), one of the first real works I wrote as an Orthodox Christian, I try to better orient the reader to the basic terrain:

We miss how the occult turn taken by some of Western culture in the Renaissance and early modern period established lines of development that remain foundational to science today. Many chasms exist between the mediaeval perspective and our own, and there is good reason to place the decisive break between the mediaeval way of life and the Renaissance/early modern occult development, not placing mediaeval times and magic together with an exceptionalism for our science. I suggest that our main differences with the occult project are disagreements as to means, not ends” and that distinguishes the post-mediaeval West from the mediaevals. If so, there is a kinship between the occult project and our own time: we provide a variant answer to the same question as the Renaissance magus, whilst patristic and mediaeval Christians were exploring another question altogether. The occult vision has fragmented, with its dominion over the natural world becoming scientific technology, its vision for a better world becoming political ideology, and its spiritual practices becoming a private fantasy.

One way to look at historical data in a way that shows the kind of sensitivity I'm interested in, is explored by Mary Midgley in *Science as Salvation* (1992); she doesn't dwell on the occult as such, but she perceptively argues that science is far more continuous with religion than its self-understanding would suggest. Her approach pays a certain kind of attention to things which science leads us to ignore. She looks at ways science is doing far more than falsifying hypotheses, and in so doing observes some things which are important. I hope to develop a similar argument in a different direction, arguing that science is far more continuous with the occult than its self-understanding would suggest. This thesis is intended

neither to be a correction nor a refinement of her position, but development of a parallel line of enquiry.

It is as if a great island, called Magic, began to drift away from the cultural mainland. It had plans for what the mainland should be converted into, but had no wish to be associated with the mainland. As time passed, the island fragmented into smaller islands, and on all of these new islands the features hardened and became more sharply defined. One of the islands is named Ideology. The one we are interested in is Science, which is not interchangeable with the original Magic, but is even less independent: in some ways Science differs from Magic by being more like Magic than Magic itself. Science is further from the mainland than Magic was, even if its influence on the mainland is if anything greater than what Magic once held. I am interested in a scientific endeavour, and in particular a basic relationship behind scientific enquiry, which are to a substantial degree continuous with a magical endeavour and a basic relationship behind magic. These are foundationally important, and even if it is not yet clear what they may mean, I will try to substantiate these as the thesis develops. I propose the idea of Magic breaking off from a societal mainland, and sharpening and hardening into Science, as more helpful than the idea of science and magic as opposites.

There is in fact historical precedent for such a phenomenon. I suggest that a parallel with Eucharistic doctrine might illuminate the interrelationship between Orthodoxy, Renaissance and early modern magic, and science (including artificial intelligence). When Aquinas made the Christian-Aristotelian synthesis, he changed the doctrine of the Eucharist. The Eucharist had previously been understood on Orthodox terms that used a Platonic conception of bread and wine participating in the body and blood of Christ, so that bread remained bread whilst becoming the body of Christ. One substance had two natures. Aristotelian philosophy had little room for one substance which had two natures, so one thing cannot simultaneously be bread and the body of Christ. When Aquinas subsumed real presence doctrine under an Aristotelian framework, he managed a delicate

balancing act, in which bread ceased to be bread when it became the body of Christ, and it was a miracle that the accidents of bread held together after the substance had changed. I suggest that when Zwingli expunged real presence doctrine completely, he was not abolishing the Aristotelian impulse, but carrying it to its proper end. In like fashion, the scientific movement is not a repudiation of the magical impulse, but a development of it according to its own inner logic. It expunges the supernatural as Zwingli expunged the real presence, because that is where one gravitates once the journey has begun. What Aquinas and the Renaissance magus had was composed of things that did not fit together. As I will explore below under the heading '[Renaissance and Early Modern Magic](#),' the Renaissance magus ceased relating to society as to one's mother and began treating it as raw material; this foundational change to a depersonalised relationship would later secularise the occult and transform it into science. The parallel between medieval Christianity/magic/science and Orthodoxy/Aquinas/Zwingli seems to be fertile: real presence doctrine can be placed under an Aristotelian framework, and a sense of the supernatural can be held by someone who is stepping out of a personal kind of relationship, but in both cases it doesn't sit well, and after two or so centuries people finished the job by subtracting the supernatural.

What does the towering figure of the Reformer owe to the towering figure of the Renaissance Magus?

However little the connection may be underscored today, mere historical closeness would place a heavy burden of proof on the scholar who would deny that the Reformation owes an incalculable debt to the Renaissance that it succeeded. Protestant figures like Francis Schaeffer may be sharply critical of the Renaissance, but I've never seen them explain what the Reformation directly inherited.

The concept *Sola Scriptura* (that the Bible alone is God's supreme revelation and no tradition outside the Bible is authoritative) is poured out from the heart of the Reformation cry, "*Ad fontes!*" (that we should go to classical sources alone and straighten out things from there). The term "Renaissance" / "Renascence" means, by mediation of two different languages, "Rebirth", and more specifically a rebirth going back to original classic sources and building on them directly rather than by mediation of centuries. Luther owes a debt here even if he pushed past the Latin Bible to the Greek New Testament, and again past the revelation in the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament (the patristic Old Testament of choice) to the original Hebrew, dropping quite a few books of the Old Testament in the process. (He contemplated deeper cuts than that, and called the New Testament epistle of James a "letter of straw," fit to be burned.)

The collection of texts Luther settled on is markedly different to the Renaissance interest in most or all of the real gems of classical antiquity. However, the approach is largely inherited. And the resemblance goes further.

I wrote above of the Renaissance Magus, one heir of which is the creation of political ideology as such, who stands against the mainland but, in something approaching Messianic fantasy, has designs to tear apart and rebuild the despicable raw material of society into something truly worthwhile and excellent by the power of his great mind. On this

point, I can barely distinguish the Reformer from the Renaissance Magus beyond the fact that the Reformer's raw material of abysmal society was more specifically the Church.

[Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion](#) was something I wrote because of several reasons but triggered, at least, by a museum visit which was presented as an Enlightenment exhibit, and which showed a great many ancient, classical artifacts. After some point I realized that the exhibit as a whole was an exhibit on the Enlightenment specifically in the currents that spawned the still-living tradition of museums, and the neo-classicism which is also associated that century. I don't remember what exact examples I settled on, and the article was one where examples could be swapped in or out. Possible examples include the Renaissance, the Reformation, Enlightenment neo-classicism, various shades of postmodernism, neo-paganism, the unending Protestant cottage industry of reconstructing the ancient Church, unending works on trying to make political ideologies that will transform one's society to be more perfect, and (mumble) others; I wrote sharply, "**Orthodoxy is pagan. Neo-paganism isn't,**" in [The Sign of the Grail](#), my point being that if you want the grandeur of much of any original paganism (and paganism *can* have grandeur), you will do well to simply skip past the distraction and the mad free-for-all covered in even pro-paganism books like [Drawing Down the Moon](#), and join the Orthodox Church, submitting to its discipline.

The Renaissance, the founding of modern science, and the Reformation have mushy, porous borders. This isn't how we conceptualize things today, but then you could have pretty much been involved one, or any two, or all three.

The Renaissance Magus, the Founder of Science, and the Reformer are triplets!

Halloween: The Second U.S. National Holiday: *Least Successful Christianization Ever!*

There has been some background noise about Christianity incorporating various pagan customs and transforming them, often spoken so that the original and merely pagan aspect of the custom appears much more enticing than anything else. My suspicion is that this has happened many times, although most of the such connections I've heard, even from an Orthodox priest, amount to urban legend.

For example, one encyclopedia or reference material that I read when I was in gradeschool talked about how, in the late Roman Empire, people would celebrate on December 21st or 22nd, and remarked briefly that Christians could be identified by the fact that they didn't bear swords. The Roman celebration was an annual celebration, held on the solstice, and Christians didn't exactly observe the pagan holiday but timed their own celebration of the Nativity of Christ so as to be celebrated. And along the centuries, with the frequent corruptions that occurred with ancient timekeeping, the Nativity got moved just a few days to the 25th. However, ever recent vaguely scholarly treatment I have read have said that the original date of the Nativity was determined by independent factors. There was a religious belief stating that prophets die on an anniversary of their conception or birth, and the determination that placed the Nativity on December 25th was a spillover calculation to a date deemed more central, the Annunciation as the date when Christ was conceived, set as March 25th.

I do not say that all claims of Christianization of pagan custom are bogus; probably innumerable details of Orthodoxy are some way or other connected with paganism. However, such claims appearing in the usual rumor format, much like [rumor science](#), rarely check out.

However, Halloween is a bit of anomaly.

Of all the attempts to Christianize a pagan custom, Halloween is the most abject failure. In one sense the practice of

Christmas, with or without a date derived from a pagan festival, does not seem harmed by it. The Christmas tree may or may not be in continuity with pre-Christian pagan customs; but in either case the affirmative or negative answer does not matter that much. It was also more specifically a custom that came from the heterodox West, and while Orthodox Christians might object to that or at least not see the need, I am not interested in lodging a complaint against the custom. Numerous first-world Christians have complained about a commercialization of Christmas that does in fact does matter and poisons the Christmas celebration: C.S. Lewis, one might mention here, [sounds off with quite a bit of success](#). My own college-day comment in [Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#) went:

Christmas, *n.* A yearly holiday celebrating the coming of the chief Deity of Western civilization: Mammon.

And commercial poisoning of the Christmas spirit was also core to my [The Grinch Who Stole Christmas](#). One might join many others and speak, instead of a Christianization of a pagan custom, of the commercialization of a Christian custom.

However, Halloween, or various archaic spellings and names that are commonly dug up, has kept its original character after a thousand years or so, and the biggest real dent in its character is that you don't need to dress up as something dead or occult (or both); the practice exists of dressing up for Halloween as something that is not gruesome. Celebrities and characters from treasured TV shows and movies are pretty much mainstream costumes. But it is a minority, and the Christmas-level escalating displays in people's front yards are, at least in my neck of the woods, *all* gruesome.

Martin Luther is in fact believed by many to have published his 95 theses (or at least made another significant move) on October 31, 1517, and people have been digging it up perhaps more than ever, this year marking a 500th anniversary. I only heard of "Reformation Day" for the first time as a junior in college, and the wonderful professor mentioned above asked me, "What do you think of celebrating Reformation Day?" and probably expecting something pungent. I answered, "I think

celebrating *one* ghastly event per day is enough!”

Christianization attempts notwithstanding, Halloween seems to be growing and growing by the year!

Alchemy no longer needs to come out of the closet

Today the occult is in ascendancy and alchemy is coming out of the closet, or rather has been out of the closet from some time and still continuing to move away from it. Now there have been occult-heavy times before; besides the three triplets of Renaissance Magus, Founder of Science, and Reformer several centuries back, the Victorian era was at once the era of Romanticism and Logical Positivism, and at once an era with very strictly observe modesty and of a spiritualism that posited a spiritual realm of “Summer-land” where gauzy clothing could quickly be whisked away. Alchemy is now said to be more or less what modern science arose out of, and people are no longer surprised to hear that Newton’s founding of the first real physics that is part of the physics curriculum was given a small fraction of the time he devoted to pursuing alchemy. I haven’t yet gotten all the way through Owen Barfield’s [Saving the Appearances: A History of Idolatry](#) as it reads to me as choking antithesis to an Orthodox theology that is pregnant with icon. However, one of the steps along the way I did read was one talking about the heart, and, characteristic of many things in vogue today, he presents one figure as first introducing a mechanistic understanding of the heart as a pump that drives blood through the system of vessels: that much is retained at far greater detail in modern science, but in that liminal figure, such as alchemists love, the heart was still doing major alchemical jobs even if his successors may have abandoned them.

Today there are some people who have made some sharp apologetic responses. Books endorsed on Oprah may treat alchemy as supreme personal elevation. However, conservative authors acknowledge some points while condemning others as barren. It is perhaps *true* that alchemy represents a tradition intended to transform the practitioner spiritually. But alchemy is *false* in that spiritual transformation is approached through master of technique and “sympathetic magic” as Bible scholars use the term. We do not need a *technique* to transform us spiritually. We may need *repentance, faith, spiritual discipline* that is

neither more nor less than a cooperation with God, and *communion*, and in the Holy Mysteries we have a transformation that leaves gold in the dust. And alchemy is in the end positively **anemic** when it stands next to full-blooded religion. And really, what person in any right mind would crawl on broken glass to create gold when Someone will give you the [Providence of the true Dance](#) and make the divine Life pulse through your blood?

A while ago, I wrote a poem, [How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?](#) which is I think where I'll choose to end this section:

How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

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

To an icon 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

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?

Most of us are quite clueless, and we are just as much clueless as people in the so-called “hard science” like physics!

If one begins to study not exactly physics *itself*, but the *people* who best contributed to 20th century physics, the first and most popular name will likely be Albert Einstein. However, if one extends the list of names, Nobel Prize laureate Richard P. Feynman will come up pretty quickly. He provided a series of lectures now known as [the Feynman lectures](#), which are widely held as some of the most exemplary communication in the sciences around. He also gave a graduation lecture called “Cargo Cult Science” in which he demonstrates a lack of understanding of history. Its opening sentences read,

During the Middle Ages there were all kinds of crazy ideas, such as that a piece of rhinoceros horn would increase potency. (Another crazy idea of the Middle Ages is these hats we have on today” which is too loose in my case.) Then a method was discovered for separating the ideas” which was to try one to see if it worked, and if it didn't work, to eliminate it. This method became organized, of course, into science. And it developed very well, so that we are now in the scientific age.

Sorry. *No*. This gets an **F**. Parts are technically true, but this gets an **F**. It is not clear to me that it even reaches the dignity of cargo cult history. (On Feynman’s account, cargo cults usually managed to make something *look like* real airports.) If you don’t understand history, but leap centuries in a single bound, don’t presume to summarize the whole of it in a short paragraph. Feynman’s attempt to summarize as much of the sciences as possible in a single sentence is impressively well-done. *This is not*.

I wish to make use of Darwin, and what I will call “Paleo-Darwinism”, which I would distinguish from any version of Darwinism and evolution which is live in the academy.

What is called “Darwinism” or “evolution” has changed markedly from anything I can meaningfully connect with the theory Darwin articulated in [The Origin of Species](#).

*Some of the terms remain the same, and a few terms like “natural selection” even keep their maiden names. However, Darwin’s theory was genuinely a theory of **evolution**, meaning that life forms slowly **evolve**, and we should expect a fossil record that shows numerous steps of gradual transitions. There are multiple live variations of evolution in biology departments in mainstream academics, and I don’t know all the variations. However, my understanding is that part of the common ground between competing variations is that the fossil record is taken at face value and while there is common ancestry of a form, all the evidence we have is that there long periods of extreme stability with surprisingly little change worthy of the name, which are suddenly and miraculously interrupted by the appearance of new forms of life without preserved record of intermediate forms.*

For this discussion I will be closer to Darwin’s theory in the original, and I wish to explicitly note that I am not intending, or pretending, to represent any theory or concept that is live in the biological sciences. By “Evolution” I mean Paleo-Evolution, an ongoing acquirement of gradual changes. And I would furthermore want to note the distinction between *natural selection*, and *artificial selection*.

Artificial selection, meaning breeding, was presumably a readily available concept to the 19th century mind. It was, or at least should have been, a readily available concept thousands of years older than the dawn of modern science. Farmers had controlled mating within a gene pool to increase certain traits and diminish others. To an economy that was at least a little closer to farming, breeding was the sort of concept well enough available that someone might use it as a basis for an analogy or metaphor.

It appears that Darwin did just that. He introduced a concept of *natural selection*, something that might seem odd at first but was intelligible. “Natural selection” meant that there was something like breeding going on even in the absence of a breeder. Instead of farmers

breeding (I think the term *ecosystem* may be anachronism to place in Darwin's day and it apparently does not appear in his writing, but the term fits in Paleo-Darwinism as well as in newer forms like a glove), natural selection is a mechanism by which the natural environment will let organisms that survive continue to propagate, and organisms that can't survive won't propagate either. There is a marked difference between animals that are prey animals and those that aren't. Animals that contend with predators tend to have sharp senses to notice predators, the ability to flee predators, and the ability to put up a fight. None of these traits is absolutely essential, but mice that do not evade cats cease to exist. Dodos in Darwin's day, or field chickens in the 19th century U.S., did not face predators and at least the dodos were quickly hunted to extinction when humans discovered the place.

I wish to keep this distinction between two different methods and selections in saying that artificial selection is not the only selection and the scientific method is not the only selection either.

What else is there? Before a Paleo diet stopped some really nasty symptoms, I read [Nourishing Traditions](#). That book documents, in scientific terms, ways and patterns of eating that are beneficial, even though those dishes appeared well before we had enough scientific understanding to dissect the benefits. Buttered asparagus, for instance, provides a nutritionally beneficial that is greater than the nutritional value of its parts. And there are many things; the author, celebrating fermentation, says that if you have a Ruben, you are eating five fermented foods.

The point I would make about (here) diet is that independently of scientific method, societies that had choices about what to eat tended by something like natural selection to optimize foods within their leeway that were beneficial.

Science has a very valuable way to select theories and laws that is really impressive. However, it is not the only winnowing fork available, and the other winnowing fork, analogous to natural selection, is live and powerful. And, though this is not really a fair comparison, a diet that has been passed down for generations in a society is almost certainly better

than the industrial diet that is causing damage to people worldwide who can't afford their traditional cuisine.

There exist some foods which were scientifically engineered to benefit the eater. During World War II, experiments were run on volunteers to know what kind of foods would bring the best benefits and best chance of survival to liberated, starving concentration camp prisoners. Right now even my local government has gotten a clue that breast milk is vastly better for babies than artificial formula, but people have still engineered a pretty impressive consolation prize in baby formulas meant to be as nourishing as possible (even if they still can't confer the immune benefits conferred by mother's milk). However, 99% of engineered foods are primarily intended to make a commercially profitable product. Concern for the actual health of the person eating the food is an afterthought (if even that).

Withered like Merlinâ€™”and, in a mirror, withered like me!

I would like to quote [That Hideous Strength](#), which again was an attempt at a novel that in fictional format would explore the same terrain explored in the three essays of the nonfiction [The Abolition of Man](#); it is among the book’s most haunting passages to me.

“...But about Merlin. What it comes to, as far as I can make out, is this. There were still possibilities for a man of that age which there aren’t for a man of ours. The earth itself was more like an animal in those days. And mental processes were much more like physical actions. And there wereâ€™”well, Neutrals, knocking about.”

“Neutrals?”

“I don’t mean, of course, that anything can be a *real* neutral. A conscious being is either obeying God or disobeying Him. But there might be things neutral in relation to us.”

“You mean eldilsâ€™”angels?”

“Well, the word *angel* rather begs the question. Even the OyÃ©resu aren’t exactly angels in the same sense as our guardian angels are. Technically they are Intelligences. The point is that while it may be true at the end of the world to describe every eldil either as an angel or a devil, and may even be true now, it was much less true in Merlin’s time. There used to be things on this Earth pursuing their own business, so to speak. They weren’t ministering spirits sent to help fallen humanity; but neither were they enemies preying upon us. Even in St. Paul one gets glimpses of a population that won’t exactly fit into our two columns of angels and devils. And if you go back further . . . all the gods, elves, dwarves, water-people, *fate*, *longaevi*. You and I know too much to think they are illusions.”

“You think there are things like that?”

“I think there were. I think there was room for them then, but the universe has come more to a point. Not all rational beings perhaps. Some would be mere wills inherent in matter, hardly conscious. More like animals. Others”but I don’t really know. At any rate, that is the sort of situation in which one got a man like Merlin.”

“It was *rather* horrible. I mean even in Merlin’s time (he came at the extreme tail end of it) though you could still use that sort of life in the universe innocently, you couldn’t do it safely. The things weren’t bad in themselves, but they were already bad for us. They sort of withered the man who dealt with them. Not on purpose. They couldn’t help doing it. Merlinus is withered. He’s quite pious and humble and all that, but something has been taken out of him. That quietness of his is just a little deadly, like the quiet of a gutted building. It’s the result of having his mind open to something that broadens the environment just a bit too much. Like polygamy. It wasn’t wrong for Abraham, but one can’t help feeling that even he lost something by it.”

“Cecil,” said Mrs. Dimble. “Do you feel quite comfortable about the Director’s using a man like this? I mean, doesn’t it look a bit like fighting Belbury with its own weapons?”

“No. I *had* thought of that. Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He’s at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our modern point of view, confused. For him every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one’s horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something to be dead”a machine to be worked, and taken to bits if it won’t work the way he pleases. Finally, come the Belbury people who take over that view from the modern man unaltered and simply want to increase their powers by tacking on the aid of spirits”extra-natural, anti-natural spirits. Of course they hoped to have it both ways. They thought the old *magia* of Merlin which worked with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with the new *goetia*”the brutal surgery from

without. No. In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way. Do you know that he is forbidden by the rules of order to use any edged tool on any growing thing?"

I find this passage to speak a great truth, *but coming the opposite direction!* Let me explain.

I might briefly comment that the virtues that are posited to have pretty much died with Merlin are alive and kicking in Orthodoxy; see ["Physics."](#) The Orthodox Christian is in a very real sense *not* just in communion with fellow Orthodox Christians alive on earth: to be in communion with the Orthodox Church is to be in communion with Christ, in communion with saints and angels, in communion with Creation from stars to starlings to stoplights, and even in a certain sense in communion with heterodox at a deeper level than the heterodox are in communion with themselves. This is present among devout laity, and it is given a sharper point in monasticism. It may be completely off-limits for a married or monastic Orthodox to set out to be like Merlin, but a monastic in particular who seeks first the Kingdom of God and his perfect righteousness may end up with quite a lot of what this passage sells Merlin on.

Now to the main part: I think the imagery in this passage brings certain truths into sharper contrast if it is rewired as a parable or allegory. I do not believe, nor do I ask you to believe, that there have **ever** been neutral spirits knocking about, going about on their own business. However, the overall structure and content work quite well with technologies: besides apocalyptic prophecies about submarines and radio being fulfilled in the twentieth century, there is something very deep about the suggestion that technology "sort of withers" the person dealing with it. I think I represent a bit of a rarity in that I have an iPhone, I use it, but I don't use it all that much when I don't need it. In particular I rarely use it to kill time, or when I know I should be doing something else. *That's an exception!* The overall spiritual description of Merlin's practices fits our reception of technology very well.

I have [a number of titles on Amazon](#), and I would like to detail what I consider the most significant three things I might leave behind:

1. [The Best of Jonathan's Corner](#): This is my flagship title, and also the one I am most pleased with reception.
2. ["The Seraphinians: "Blessed Seraphim Rose" and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts](#): More than any other of my books this book is a critique, and part of its 1.4 star review on Amazon is because Fr. Seraphim's following seems to find the book extremely upsetting, and so the most helpful review states that the book is largely unintelligible, and casts doubt on how sober I was when I was writing it. I'm a bit more irritated that the title has received at least two five-star reviews that I am aware of, and those reviews universally vanish quickly. (I tried to ask Amazon to restore deleted reviews, but Amazon stated that their policy is that undeleting a censored review constitutes an unacceptable violation of the reviewer's privacy.)
3. [The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#): At the time of this writing, I have one review, and it is kind. However, I'm a bit disappointed in the book's relative lack of reception. I believe it says something significant, partly because it is not framed in terms of "religion and science", but "technology and faith". Right and ascetically-based use of technology would seem to be a very helpful topic, and if I may make a point about Merlin, he appears to have crossed the line where if he drove he could get a drunk driving conviction. We, on the other hand, are three sheets to the wind.

**"They sort of withered the man who dealt with them:"
*Mathematician and Renaissance Man***

I ranked 7th in the nation in the 1989 MathCounts competition, *and that is something to be very humble about*. There's more than just jokes that have been floating around about, "How can you tell if a mathematician is an extravert?" "He looks at *your* feet when he talks to you!"

In the troubled course of my troubled relationship with my ex-fiancée, I am not interested in disclosing my ex-fiancée's faults. I am, however, interested in disclosing my own faults in very general terms. The root cause in most cases came from acting out of an overly

mathematical mind, very frequently approaching things as basically a math problem to solve and relating to her almost exclusively with my head rather than my heart, and really, in the end, not relating to her as properly human (and, by the same stroke, not relating to myself as properly human *either*).

I do not say that the relationship would have succeeded if I had avoided this fault and the blunders that came up downwind of it. I am also not interested in providing a complete picture. I mention this for one reason: to say that at a certain level, a very mathematical mind is not really *good* for us!

This is something that is true at a basic level; it is structural and is built into ourselves as persons. Some vices are in easier reach. The Orthodox understanding is that the *nous* or spiritual eye is the part of us that should guide us both; the *dianoia* or logic-related understanding has a legitimate place, but the relation between the nous and the dianoia should ideally be the relationship between the sun and the moon. One Orthodox figure characterized academic types as having a hypertrophied or excessive, out-of-check logic-handling dianoia, and a darkened nous. *I plead guilty on both counts, at least in my mathematical formation.*

I might also recall a brief point from [Everyday Saints](#), a book that has managed to get a pretty long book hold waitlist at some libraries. A Soviet government agent commented, rather squeamishly, that highly educated prisoners were the *first* to crack under torture.

Prayerful manual labor is considered normative in Orthodox monasticism, and in a monastery, the novices who are asked to do extensive manual labor are being given a first choice offering. The fact that abbots do less labor than most other monks is not a privilege of authority. Rather, it is a deprivation. The reduced amount of manual labor is a concession to necessities, and many abbots would exchange their responsibilities with those of a novice *in a heartbeat*.

(I have been told, “Bishops wish they were novices!”)

Along more recent lines, I have been called a Renaissance man, or

less often a genius. I felt a warm glow in being called a Renaissance man; I took the term as a minor social compliment recognizing broad-ranging interests and achievements, and not really much more than that, or much more important. Then I pulled up the Wikipedia article for “polymath,” read the section on Renaissance men, and *my blood ran cold*.

The article does not even pretend to list detail of what was expected of Renaissance men, but as I ran down the list of distinctions, I realized that I had pretty much every single achievement on the list, and education, and a good deal more. And what came to me was, “I’m coming down on the side of Barlaam and not St. Gregory Palamas!” (For non-Orthodox readers, Barlaam and St. Gregory were disputants in a controversy where Barlaam said that Orthodox monks chiefly needed lots of academic learning and what would today be called the liberal arts ideal, and St. Gregory said that monks chiefly need the unceasing prayer usually called “prayer of the heart.”)

There was one executive who said, “I climbed to the top of the corporate ladder only to find that it was leaning against the wrong building,” and that’s pretty much where I found myself.

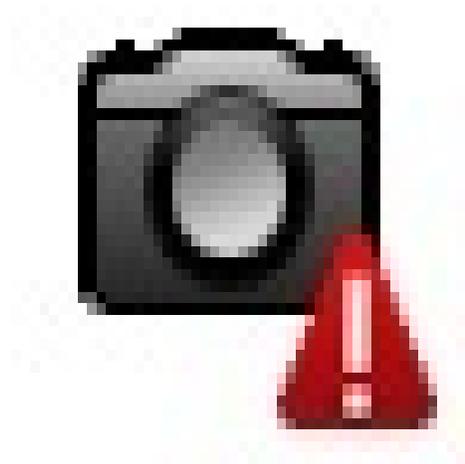
I have had less of a mathematical mind by the year, and I am hoping through monasticism to let go of things other than thoroughly seeking God, and let go of my Renaissance man chassis. My hope in monasticism is to try and follow the same path St. Gregory Palamas trod, and spend what time I have remaining in repentance (*better late than never*).

I now have a silence somewhat like the silence of a gutted building.

I seek the silence of hesychasm.

One wise priest said again and again, “*The longest journey we will take is the journey from our mind to our heart.*”

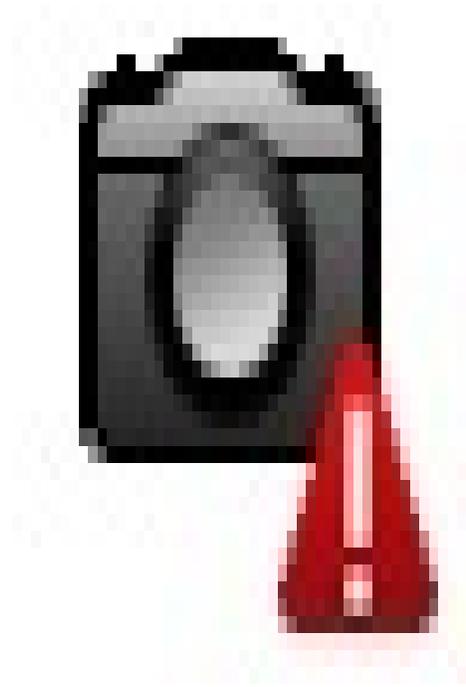
An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and Ecumenism



**A Roman Catholic
take on an authentic
Byzantine style icon—
complete with not just
stigmata but the
Sacred Heart of Jesus.**

**The effect on an
Orthodox is like the
following**

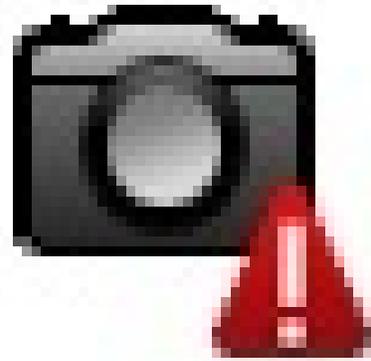
OrthodoxCircle post:



This last icon was made by a fully Orthodox Christian in good standing, who posted it as "A little joke)))" and repented and apologized when other Orthodox explained to her that this was tasteless and inappropriate.

To my knowledge, examples like the first two above abound, and Roman Catholics seem not, like this faithful

Orthodox woman, to acknowledge that what they had done was inappropriate and tasteless, and apologize and humbly repent and return to walking the Orthodox way.



A shirt proudly worn by some Catholics, claiming the wearer to be an "Orthodox Christian in Communion with Rome." I've wished to make a shirt that said, "Catholic Christian in Communion with the Archdruid of Canterbury".

There is an elephant in the room.
But Catholics are very

**skilled at NOT seeing
it.**

What might be called "the Orthodox question"

I expect ecumenical outreach to Orthodox has been quite a trying experience for Catholics. It must seem to Catholics like they have made Orthodoxy their top ecumenical priority, and after they have done their best and bent over backwards, many Orthodox have shrugged and said, "That makes one of us!" or else made a nastier response. And I wonder if Catholics have felt a twinge of the Lord's frustration in saying, "All day long I have held out my hands to a rebellious and stubborn people." (Rom 10:21)

In my experience, most Catholic priests have been hospitable: warm to the point of being warmer to me than my own priests. It almost seems as if the recipe for handling Orthodox is to express a great deal of warmth and warmly express hope for Catholics and Orthodox to be united. And that, in a nutshell, is how Catholics seem to conceive what might be called "the Orthodox question."

And I'm afraid I have something painful to say. Catholics think Orthodox are basically the same, and that they understand us. And I'm asking you to take a tough pill to swallow: Catholics do not understand Orthodox. You think you do, but you don't.

I'd like to talk about an elephant in the room. This elephant, however painfully obvious to Orthodox, seems something Catholics are strikingly oblivious to.

A conciliatory gesture (or so I was told)

All the Orthodox I know were puzzled for instance, that the Pope thought it conciliatory to retain titles such as "Vicar of Jesus Christ," "Successor of the Prince of the Apostles," and "Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church," but drop "Patriarch of the West." Orthodox complain that the Roman bishop "was given primacy but demanded supremacy," and the title "Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church" is offensive. Every bishop is the successor of the prince of the apostles, so reserving that title to the Pope is out of line. But Orthodoxy in both ancient and modern times regards the Pope as the Patriarch of Rome, and the Orthodox Church, having His Holiness IGNATIUS the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, has good reason to call the Patriarch of Rome, "the Patriarch of the West." The response I heard to His Holiness Benedict dropping that one title while retaining the others, ranged from "Huh?" to, "Hello? Do you understand us at *all*?"

What Catholics never acknowledge

That is not a point I wish to belabor; it is a relatively minor example next to how, when in my experience Catholics have warmly asked Orthodox to reunify, never once have I seen any recognition or manifest awareness of the foremost concern Orthodox have about Rome and Constantinople being united. Never once have I seen mere acknowledgment of the Orthodox concern about what Rome most needs to repent of.

Let me clarify that slightly. I've heard Catholics acknowledge that Catholics have committed atrocities against Orthodox in the past, and Catholics may express regrets over wrongs from ages past and chide Orthodox for a lack of love in not being reunified. But when I say, "what Rome most needs to repent of," I am not taking the historian's view. I'm not talking about sack of the Constantinople, although people more Orthodox than me may insist on things like that. I am not talking about what Rome has done in the past to repent of, but what is continuing now. I am talking about the present tense, and in the present tense. When Catholics come to me and honor Orthodoxy with deep warmth and respect and express a desire for reunion, what I have never once heard mention of is the recantation of Western heresy.

This may be another tough pill to swallow. Catholics may know that Orthodox consider Catholics to be heretics, but this never enters the discussion when Catholics are being warm and trying to welcome Orthodox into their embrace. It's never acknowledged or addressed. The warm embrace instead affirms that we have a common faith, a common theology, a common tradition: we are the same, or so Orthodox are told, in all essentials. If Orthodox have not restored communion, we are told that we do not recognize that we have all the doctrinal agreement properly needed for reunification.

But don't we agree on major things? Rome's bishops say we do!

I would like to outline three areas of difference and give some flesh to the Orthodox claim that there are unresolved differences. I would like to outline one issue about what is theology, and then move on to social ethics, and close on ecumenism itself. I will somewhat artificially limit myself to three; some people more Orthodox than me may wonder why, for instance, I don't discuss the filioque clause (answer: I am not yet Orthodox enough to appreciate the importance given by my spiritual betters, even if I do trust that they are my spiritual betters). But there's a lot in these three.

To Catholics who insist that we share a common faith, I wish to ask a question that may sound flippant or even abrasive. A common faith? *Really?* Are you ready to de-canonize Thomas Aquinas and repudiate his scholasticism? Because Orthodox faith is something incompatible with the "theology" of Thomas Aquinas, and if you don't understand this, you're missing something fundamental to Orthodox understandings of theology. And if you're wondering why I used quotes around "theology," let me explain. Or, perhaps better, let me give an example.

See the two texts below. One is chapter 5 in St. Dionysius (or, if you prefer, pseudo-Dionysius), *The Mystical Theology*. That gem is on the left. To the right is a partial rewriting of the ideas in the style of Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite, "The Mystical Theology"

Rewritten in the scholastic style of Thomas Aquinas

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 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 that we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or to any other being. It falls neither within the predicate of nonbeing nor of 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 nor knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond every 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

Question Five: Whether God may accurately be described with words and concepts.

Objection One: It appears that God may be accurately described, for otherwise he could not be described as existing. For we read, *I AM WHO AM*, and if God cannot be described as existing, then assuredly nothing else can. But we know that things exist, therefore God may be accurately described as existing.

Objection Two: It would seem that God may be described with predicates, for Scripture calls him Father, Son, King, Wisdom, etc.

Objection Three: It appears that either affirmations or negations must accurately describe God, for between an affirmation and its negation, exactly one of them must be true.

On the Contrary, I reply that every affirmation and negation is finite, and in the end inadequate beyond measure, incapable of containing or of circumscribing God.

We should remember that the ancients described God in imperfect terms rather than say nothing about him at all...

preeminently simple and
absolute nature, it is also
beyond every denial.

Lost in translation?

There is something lost in "translation" here. What exactly is lost? Remember Robert Frost's words, "Nothing of poetry is lost in translation except for the poetry." There is a famous, ancient maxim in the Orthodox Church's treasured [Philokalia](#) saying, "A theologian is one who prays truly, and one who prays truly is a theologian:" theology is an invitation to prayer. And the original *Mystical Theology* as rendered on the left is exactly that: an invitation to prayer, while the rewrite in the style of the *Summa Theologiæ* has been castrated: it is only an invitation to analysis and an impressively deft solution to a logic puzzle. The ideas are all preserved: nothing of the theology is lost in translation except for the theology. And this is part of why Archimandrite Vasileos, steeped in the nourishing, prayerful theology of the Orthodox Church, bluntly writes in [Hymn of Entry](#) that scholastic theology is "an indigestible stone."

Thomas Aquinas drew on Greek Fathers and in particular St. John the Damascene. He gathered some of the richest theology of the East and turned it into something that is not theology to Orthodox: nothing of the Greek theology was lost in the scholastic translation but the theology! And there is more amiss in that Thomas Aquinas also drew on "the Philosopher," Aristotle, and all the materialistic seeds in Aristotelianism. (The Greeks never lost Aristotle, but they also never made such a big deal about him, and to be called an Aristotelian could be a strike against you.) There is a spooky hint of the "methodological agnosticism" of today's academic theology—the insistence that maybe you have religious beliefs, but you need to push them aside, at least for the moment, to write serious theology. The seed of secular academic "theology" is already present in how Thomas Aquinas transformed the Fathers.

This is a basic issue with far-reaching implications.

Am I *seriously* suggesting that Rome de-canonize Thomas Aquinas? Not exactly. I am trying to point out what level of repentance and recantation would be called for in order that full communion would be appropriate. I am not seriously asking that Rome de-canonize Thomas

Aquinas. I *am* suggesting, though, that Rome begin to recognize that nastier and deeper cuts than this would be needed for full communion between Rome and Orthodoxy. And I know that it is not pleasant to think of rejoining the Orthodox Church as (*shudder*) a reconciled heretic. I know it's not pleasant. I am, by the grace of God, a reconciled heretic myself, and I recanted Western heresy myself. It's a humbling position, and if it's too big a step for you to take, it is something to at least *recognize* that it's a big step to take, and one that Rome has not yet taken.

The Saint and the Activist

Let me describe two very different images of what life is for. The one I will call "the saint" is that, quite simply, life is for the contemplation of God, and the means to contemplation is largely asceticism: the concrete practices of a life of faith. The other one, which I will call, "the activist," is living to change the world as a secular ideology would understand changing the world. In practice the "saint" and the "activist" may be the ends of a spectrum rather than a rigid dichotomy, but I wish at least to distinguish the two, and make some remarks about modern Catholic social teaching.

Modern Catholic social teaching could be enlightened. It could be well meant. It could be humane. It could be carefully thought out. It could be a recipe for a better society. It could be providential. It could be something we should learn from, or something we need. It could be any number of things, but what it absolutely is *not* is theology. It is absolutely not spiritually nourishing theology. If, to Orthodox, scholastic theology like that of Thomas Aquinas is as indigestible as a stone, modern Catholic social teaching takes indigestibility to a whole new level—like indigestible shards of broken glass.

The 2005 [Deus Caritas Est](#) names the *Song of Songs* three times, and that is without precedent in the Catholic social encyclicals from the 1891 [Rerum Novarum](#) on. Look for references to the *Song of Songs* in their footnotes—I don't think you'll find any, or at least I didn't. This is a symptom of a real problem, a lack of the kind of theology that would think of things like the *Song of Songs*—which is highly significant. The *Song of Songs* is a favorite in mystical theology, the prayerful theology that flows from faith, and mystical theology is not easily found in the social encyclicals. I am aware of the friction when secular academics assume that Catholic social teaching is one more political ideology to be changed at will. I give some benefit of the doubt to Catholics who insist that there are important differences, even if I'm skeptical over whether the differences are *quite* so big as they are made out to be. But without insisting that Catholic social teaching is *just* another activist ideology, I

will say that it is anything but a pure "saint" model, and it mixes in the secular "activist" model to a degree that is utterly unlawful to Orthodox.

Arius is more scathingly condemned in Orthodox liturgy than even Judas. And, contrary to current fashion, I really do believe Arius and Arianism are as bad as the Fathers say. But Arius never dreamed either of reasoning out systematic theology or of establishing social justice. His *Thalia* are a (perhaps very bad) invitation to worship, not a systematic theology or a plan for social justice. In those regards, Catholic theology not only does not reach the standard of the old Orthodox giants: it does not even reach the standard of the old arch-heretics!

Catholics today celebrate Orthodoxy and almost everything they know about us save that we are not in full communion. Catholic priests encourage icons, or reading the Greek fathers, or the Jesus prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." But what Catholics may not always be mindful of is that they celebrate Orthodoxy and put it alongside things that are utterly anathema to Orthodox: like heartily endorsing the Orthodox Divine Liturgy and placing it alongside the Roman mass, Protestant services, Unitarian meetings, Hindu worship, and the spiritualist *séance* as all amply embraced by Rome's enfolding bosom.

What we today call "ecumenism" is at its root a Protestant phenomenon. It stems from how Protestants sought to honor Christ's prayer that we may all be one, when they took it as non-negotiable that they were part of various Protestant denominations which remained out of communion with Rome. The Catholic insistence that each Protestant who returns to Rome heals part of the Western schism is a nonstarter for this "ecumenism:" this "ecumenism" knows we need unity but takes schism as non-negotiable: which is to say that this "ecumenism" rejects the understanding of Orthodox, some Catholics, and even the first Protestants that full communion is full communion and what Christ prayed for was a full communion that assumed doctrinal unity.

One more thing that is very important to many Orthodox, and that I have never once heard acknowledged or even mentioned by the Catholics reaching so hard for ecumenical embrace is that many Orthodox are

uneasy at best with ecumenism. It has been my own experience that the more devout and more mature Orthodox are, the more certainly they regard ecumenism as a spiritual poison. Some of the more conservative speak of "ecumenism awareness" as Americans involved in the war on drugs speak of "drug awareness."

Catholics can be a lot like Orthodox in their responses to Protestants and Protestant ideas of ecumenism; one might see a Catholic responding to an invitation to join an ecumenical communion service at First Baptist by saying something like,

I'm flattered by your ecumenical outreach... And really am, um, uh, *honored* that you see me as basically the same as an Evangelical... And I really appreciate that I am as welcome to join you in receiving communion as your very own flock... Really, I'm flattered...

...But full communion is full communion, and it reflects fundamental confusion to put the cart before the horse. For us to act otherwise would be a travesty. I know that you may be generously overlooking our differences, but even if it means being *less* generous, we need to give proper attention to our unresolved differences before anything approaching full communion would be appropriate.

But Catholics seem to be a bit like Protestants in their ecumenical advances to Orthodox. If I understand correctly, whereas Rome used to tell Orthodox, "You would be welcome to take communion with us, but we would rather you obey your bishops," now I am told by Rome that I may remain Orthodox while receiving Roman communion, and my reply is,

I'm flattered by your ecumenical outreach... And really am, um, uh, *honored* that you see me as basically the same as any Catholic... And I really appreciate that I am as welcome to join you in receiving communion as your very own flock... Really, I'm flattered...

...But full communion is full communion, and it reflects fundamental confusion to put the cart before the horse. For us to act

otherwise would be a travesty. I know that you may be generously overlooking our differences, but even if it means being *less* generous, we need to give proper attention to our unresolved differences before anything approaching full communion would be appropriate.

If the Roman Church is almost Orthodox in its dealings with Protestants, it in turn seems almost Protestant in its dealings with Orthodox. It may be that Rome looks at Orthodoxy and sees things that are almost entirely permitted in the Roman Church: almost every point of theology or spirituality that is *the only way to do things* in Orthodoxy is at least *a permitted option* to Roman Catholics. (So Rome looks at Orthodoxy, or at least some Romans do, and see Orthodox as something that can be allowed to be a full-fledged part of the Roman communion: almost as Protestants interested in ecumenism look at the Roman Church as being every bit as much a full-fledged Christian denomination as the best of Protestant groups.) But the reverse of this phenomenon is *not* true: that is, Orthodox do not look at Rome and say, "Everything that you require or allow in spiritual theology is also allowed in healthy Eastern Orthodoxy." Furthermore, I have never seen awareness or sensitivity to those of Orthodox who do not consider ecumenism, at least between traditional communions, to be a self-evidently good thing to work for: Catholics can't conceive of a good reason for why Orthodox would not share their puppyish enthusiasm for ecumenism. And I have never heard a Catholic who expressed a desire for the restoration for full communion show any perception or willingness to work for the Orthodox concerns about what needs to feed into any *appropriate* restoration of communion, namely the recantation of Western heresy represented by figures like Thomas Aquinas and not only by [Mater et Magistra](#) or liberal Catholic dissent.

Conclusion: are we at the eve of an explosion?

I may have mentioned several elephants in the room. Let me close by mentioning one more that many Orthodox are painfully aware of, even if Catholics are oblivious.

Orthodoxy may remind Western Christians of Rome's ancient origins. But there is an important way in which I would compare Orthodoxy today to Western Christianity on the eve of the Reformation. Things hadn't exploded. Yet. But there were serious problems and trouble brewing, and I'm not sure it's that clear to people how much trouble is brewing.

Your ecumenical advances and efforts to draw us closer to Rome's enfolding bosom come at a rough and delicate time:

What if, while there was serious trouble but not yet schisms spreading like wildfire, the East had reached out to their estranged Western brethren and said:

Good news! You really don't need scholasticism... And you don't exactly need transubstantiation either... And you don't need anywhere such a top-down Church heirarchy... And you really don't need to be in communion with the Patriarch of Rome... And...

There is a profound schism brewing in the Orthodox Church. It may not be within your power to stop it, but it may be within your power to avoid giving it an early start, and it may be within your power to avoid making the wreckage even worse.

The best thing I can think of to say is simply, "God have mercy on us all."

Cordially yours,
[Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward](#)
The Sunday of St. Mary of Egypt; Lent, 2009.

Un-man's Tales:

C.S. Lewis's Perelandra, Fairy Tales, and Feminism

The two C.S. Lewis scholars cited and discussed below are two of the greatest around. One of them I know. But as Lewis said, "A small man may avoid the error of a great one."

A first clue to something big, tucked into a choice of children's books

I was once part of a group dedicated to reading children's stories (primarily fantasy) aloud. At one point the group decided to read Patricia Wrede's [Dealing with Dragons](#). I had a visceral reaction to the book as something warped, but when I tried to explain it to the group by saying that it was like the Un-man in [Perelandra](#). I was met with severe resistance from two men in the group. Despite this, and after lengthy further discussions, I was able to persuade them that the analogy was at least the best I could manage in a tight time slot.

I was puzzled at some mysterious slippage that had intelligent Christians who appreciated good literature magnetized by works that were, well... *warped*. And that mysterious slippage seemed to keep cropping up at other times and circumstances.

Why the big deal? I will get to the Un-man's message in a moment, but for now let me say that little girls are ~~sexist~~ *way* too romantic. And this being ~~sexist~~ *way* too romantic motivates girls to want fairy tales, to want some knight in shining armor or some prince to sweep them off their feet. And seeing how this ~~sexist~~ deeply romantic desire cannot easily be ground out of them, feminists have written their own fairy tales, but...

To speak from my own experience, I never realized how straight traditional fairy tales were until I met feminist fairy tales. And by 'straight' I am not exactly meaning the opposite of queer (though that is close at hand), but the opposite of twisted and warped, like [Do You Want to Date My Avatar?](#) (I never knew how witchcraft could be considered unnatural vice until I read the witches' apologetic in Terry Pratchett's incredibly warped [The Wee Free Men](#).) There is something warped in these tales that is not covered by saying that [Dealing with Dragons](#) has a heroine who delights only in what is forbidden, rejects marriage for the company of dragons, and ridicules every time its pariahs say something just isn't *done*. (And—and I don't see this as insignificant—the book uses, just once, the word 'magicked', a spelling of 'magic' reserved mostly for

real occult practice in life and not metaphorical magic.) Seeing as how the desire for fairy tales is too hard to pull out, authors have presented warped anti-fairy tales.

[Ella Enchanted](#) makes it plain: for a girl or woman to be under obedience is an unmixed curse. There is no place for "love, honor, and obey."

The commercials for [Tangled](#) leave some doubt about whether the heroine sings a Snow White-style "Some day my prince will come."

The Un-man's own tales

One question that can be fairly raised is how far this might just be Lewis's creative imagining for one story—and it would be a brave soul who would deny Lewis can be imaginative. Whether *this* point is just imagination, or something Lewis would say in a nonfiction essay, can in fact be seen from a nonfiction essay, [Priestesses in the Church?](#)

[Perelandra](#) has a protagonist who visits Venus or Perelandra, where an unfallen Eve is joined first by him and then by the antagonist, called the Un-man because he moves from prelest or spiritual illusion to calling demons or the Devil into himself and then letting his body be used as a demonic puppet.

How does the Un-man try to tempt this story's Eve?

[The Lady said:] "I will think more of this. I will get the King to make me older about it."

[The Un-man answered:] "How greatly I desire to meet this King of yours! But in the matter of Stories he may be no older than you himself."

"That saying of yours is like a tree with no fruit. The King is always older than I, and about all things."...

[The Lady said,] "What are [women on earth] like?"

[The Un-man answered,] "They are of great spirit. They always reach out their hands for the new and unexpected good, and see that it is good long before the men understand it. Their minds run ahead of what Maleldil has told them. They do not need to wait for Him to tell them what is good, but know it for themselves as He does..."

...The Lady seemed to be saying very little. [The Un-man]'s voice was speaking gently and continuously. It was not talking about the Fixed Land nor even about Maleldil. It appeared to be telling, with extreme beauty and pathos, a number of stories, and at first Benson

extreme beauty and pathos, a number of stories, and at first Ransom could not perceive any connecting link between them. They were all about women, but women who had apparently lived at different periods of the world's history and in quiet differences. From the Lady's replies it appeared that the stories contained much that she did not understand; but oddly enough the Un-man did not mind. If the questions aroused by any one story proved at all difficult to answer, the speaker simply dropped that story and instantly began another. The heroines of the stories seemed all to have suffered a great deal—they had been oppressed by their fathers, cast off by husbands, deserted by lovers. Their children had risen up against them and society had driven them out. But the stories all ended, in a sense, happily: sometimes with honours and praises to a heroine still living, more often by tardy acknowledgment and unavailing tears after her death. As the endless speech proceeded, the Lady's questions grew always fewer...

The expression on [the Lady's] face, revealed in the sudden light, was one that [Ransom] had not seen there before. Her eyes were not fixed on the narrator; as far as that went, her thoughts might have been a thousand miles away. Her lips were shut and a little pursed. Her eyebrows were slightly raised. He had not yet seen her look so like a woman of our own race; and yet her expression was one he had not very often met on earth—except, as he realized with a shock, on the stage. "Like a tragedy queen" was the disgusting comparison that arose in his mind. Of course it was a gross exaggeration. It was an insult for which he could not forgive himself. And yet... and yet... the tableau revealed by the lightning had photographed itself on his brain. Do what he would, he found it impossible not to think of that new look in her face. A very *good* tragedy queen, no doubt, very nobly played by an actress who was a good woman in real life...

A moment later [the Un-man] was explaining that men like Ransom in his own world—men of that intensely male and backward-looking type who always shrank away from the new good—had continuously laboured to keep women down to mere childbearing and to ignore the high destiny for which Maleldil had

actually created her...

The external and, as it were, dramatic conception of the self was the enemy's true aim. He was making her mind a theatre in which that phantom self should hold the stage. He had already written the play.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but the Lady is complementarian to the point where one wonders if the label 'complementarian' is sufficient, and the demon or Devil using the Un-man's body is doing his treacherous worst to convert her to feminism. Hooper says he is trying to make her fall by transgressing one commandment, and that is true, but the entire substance of the attack to make her fall is by seducing her to feminism.

A strange silence in the criticism

Quoting a friend, "Also, just a side note and not about your writing, but I find the criticism of Lewis rather comical since Sarah is represented as a model of discernment, which is above intellectual virtue and includes it. This idea is part of what sparks the 'huh?' response from me at any rate."

Walter Hooper's [C.S. Lewis: Companion and Guide](#) treats this dialogue in detail but without the faintest passing reference to feminism, men and women, sex roles, or anything else in that nexus. It does, however, treat the next and final book in the trilogy, [That Hideous Strength](#), and defend Lewis from "anti-feminism" in a character who was a woman trying to do a dissertation on Milton: Lewis, it is revealed, had originally intended her to be doing a dissertation on biochemistry, but found that he was not in a position to make that part of the story compelling, and so set a character whose interests more closely paralleled his own. So the issue of feminism was on his radar, possibly looming large. But, and this is a common thread with other examples, he exhibits a mysterious slippage. His account gets too many things right to be dismissed on the ground that he doesn't know how to read such literature, but it also leaves too much out, mysteriously, to conclude that he gave anything like such a scholar's disinterested best in explaining the text. (It is my own opinion that Hooper in fact *does* know how to read; he just mysteriously sets this ability aside when Lewis counters feminism.) And this slippage keeps happening in other places and context, always mysterious on the hypothesis that the errors are just errors of disinterested, honest scholarship.

Jerry Root, in his own treatment in [C.S. Lewis and a Problem of Evil: An Investigation of a Pervasive Theme](#), treats subjectivism as spiritual poison and problem of evil Lewis attacks in his different works: Root argues it to be the prime unifying theme in Lewis). But with slight irony, Root seems to turn subjectivistic, or at least disturbing, precisely where his book touches gender roles and egalitarianism. In his comments on [The Great Divorce](#)'s greatest saint-figure, a woman, Susan Smith, is

slighted: among other remarks, he quotes someone as saying that women in C.S. Lewis's stories are "he neglects any intellectual virtue in his female characters," and this is particularly applied to Sarah Smith. When he defends Lewis, after a fashion, Root volunteers, "a book written in the 1940s will lack some accommodations to the culture of the twenty-first century." But this section is among the gooiest logic in Root's entire text, speaking with a quasi-psychoanalytic Freudian or Jungian outlook of "a kind of fertile mother-image and nature-goddess," that is without other parallel and certainly does not infect the discussion of Lewis's parents, who well enough loom large at points, but not in any psychoanalytic fashion. Root's entire treatment at this point has an "*I can't put my finger on it, but—*" resemblance to feminists disarming and neutralizing any claim that the Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary could in any way, shape, or form contribute to the well-standing of women: one author, pointing out the difficulty of a woman today being both a virgin and a mother, used that as a pretext to entirely dismiss the idea that She could be a model for woman or a token of woman's good estate, thus throwing out the baby, the bathwater, and indeed the tub. The Mother of God is She who answered, [Be it unto me according to thy word](#), an answer that may be echoed whether or not one is a virgin, a mother, or for that matter a woman.

The critique Root repeats, on reflection, may meet an Orthodox response of "Huh?", or more devastatingly, "Yes, but what's your point?", not because Lewis portrays a saint as "no model of intellectual virtue," but because Orthodox sainthood is not a matter of intellectual virtue. Among its rich collection of many saints there are very *few* models of intellectual virtue, admittedly mostly men, and usually having received their formation *outside* the Orthodox Church: St. John Chrysostom was called "Chrysostom" or "Golden-Mouth" because of his formation and mastery of pagan rhetoric. But intellectual virtue as a whole is not a central force in the saints, and Bertrand Russell's observation that in the Gospels not one word is put in praise of intelligence might be accepted, not as a weakness of the Gospel, but as a clarification of what is and is not central to Christian faith. And in terms of what is truly important, we would do well to recall the story of [St. Zosima and St. Mary of Egypt](#). If Lewis's image of sainthood is a woman who is not an academic, this is not

an embarrassment to explain away, but a finger on the pulse of what does and does not matter for sainthood.

Humankind, *n.* Mankind, as pronounced by people who are offended at "man" ever being [inclusive language](#).

[Hayward's Unabridged Dictionary](#)

Root mentions the Un-man briefly, and gives heavy attention to the man who would become the Un-man as he appears in the prior book in the trilogy, but does not reference or suggest a connection between the Un-man and feminism. Root became an egalitarian, and shifts in his book from speaking of "men" to saying "humankind". And this is far from one scholar's idiosyncrasy; a look at the World Evangelical Alliance's online bookstore as I was involved with it showed this mysterious slippage not as something you find a little here, a little there, but as endemic and without any effective opposition.

Un-man's Tales for Grown-Ups

During my time as webmaster to the World Evangelical Alliance, the one truly depressing part of my work was getting the bookstore online. Something like eighty to ninety percent of the work was titles like [Women as Risk-Takers for God](#) which were Un-man's Tales for adults. I was depressed that the World Evangelical Alliance didn't seem to have anything else to say on its bookshelves: not only was there a dearth of complementarian "opposing views" works like [Man and Woman in Christ](#), but there was a dearth of anything besides Unman's Tales. The same mysterious phenomenon was not limited to a ragtag group of friends, or individual scholars; it was dominant at the highest level in one of the most important parachurch organizations around, and not one that, like Christians for Biblical Equality, had a charter of egalitarian or feminist concerns and priorities.

Conclusion

G.K. Chesterton said, "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed." That might hold for Chesterton's day, and classics like Grimm and MacDonald today, but today's fairy tales, or rather Unman's tales, do not tell children the dragons can be killed. Children already know that deep down inside. They tell children dragons can be befriended and that dragons may make excellent company. For another title of the myriad represented by [Dealing with Dragons](#), look at the tale of cross-cultural friendship one may look for in [The Dragon and the George](#). When first published, [Dealing with Dragons](#) might have been provocative. Now [Tangled](#) is not. And reading [Perelandra](#) leaves one with an uncomfortable sense that C.S. Lewis apparently plagiarized, in the Unman's tales, works written decades after his death.

This issue is substantial, and Lewis's sensitivity to it is almost prophetic: sensibilities may have changed, but only in the direction of our needing to hear the warning more. And it is one Christians seem to be blind to: complementarianism seems less wrong than petty, making a mountain out of a molehill. But the core issue is already a mountain, not a molehill.

[Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.](#) Aim for something better than Unman's Tales.

Not Un-Man's Tales: *A Referral to Another Commentator*

For a breath of fresh air on this topic, see Edith M. Humphrey's [Further Up and Further In: Orthodox Conversations with C.S. Lewis on Scripture and Theology](#), talking about [That Hideous Strength](#) and other works.

Humphrey acknowledges feminist friends, has taken pains to understand feminism, and generally wishes that feminist questions be taken seriously. But she is not a feminist, and if I may say almost the same thing, she is a straight shooter.

I think she's wrong on points; she may think I'm wrong on points, but I would lean towards same-team criticism, and I suspect she would offer me same-team criticism. She has produced a straightforward account where every male scholar I've read becomes astonishingly slippery and subjectivist.

Move over, Hooper and Root. I've found a commentator on C.S. Lewis who is honest and can *read*.

[*A note to Humphrey written later:*]

I skimmed your work on points, and stayed up writing your work, intending to replace my brief endorsement with a thorough engagement on substantive points. I find that what I have to say to you is short:

First, the Breastplate of St. Patrick is the only chance many Christians will get to cast a spell in church.

Second, I owe an infinite debt to the reality of Hell.

Third, I think you might like my "novella" (more properly a mediievally structured romance), [The Sign of the Grail](#).

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](#) [PDF] ([purchase](#))

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 flamboyantly 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.

Drunkennes 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 drunkennes. Drunkennes 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!](#)

**Technology and Me: “~~Sufficiently
undocumented code~~ Sufficiently
advanced technology is
indistinguishable from magic...”**

(To the pedantic, “Technology and I.”)

Merlin and me

I met with dismay upon rereading Mirandola's Renaissance [Oration on the Dignity of Man](#). The first 80% or so of the text contains bits that sound Orthodox, and much of the text sounds Christian if you aren't really paying attention. But the last 20% of the text is a hymn to the glory of magic, and while there exists a "goetia" that brings one into contact with demonic forces and *of course* we should steer clear of *that* and not touch it with a ~~nine-foot~~ ten foot pole, there is also another magic that is perhaps the noblest endeavor we can pursue.

My shock was not in particular at Mirandola's endorsement of occult endeavor. It was rather recognizing a point of failure in C.S. Lewis. I had recognized what looks like a source, possibly one of many Renaissance mages' sources, of the words in C.S. Lewis [That Hideous Strength](#):

Dimble and [the Director] and the Dennistons shared between them a knowledge of Arthurian Britain which orthodox scholarship will probably not reach for some centuries...

What exactly [Merlin] had done [in Bragdon wood] they did not know; but they had all, by various routes, come too far either to consider his art mere legend and imposture, or to equate it exactly with what the Renaissance called Magic. Dimble even maintained that a good critic, by his sensibility alone, could detect the difference between the traces which the two things had left on literature. "What common measure is there," he would ask, "between ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago with their midnight studies, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results simply by being Merlin?" And Ransom agreed. He thought that Merlin's art was the last survival of something older and different—something brought to Western Europe after the fall of Numinor and going back to an era in which the general relations of mind and matter on this planet had been other than those we know. It had probably differed from Renaissance Magic profoundly. It had possibly (though this is doubtful) been less ~~guilty~~: it had certainly been more effective. For

...probably been less glib. It had certainly been more creative. For Paracelsus and Agrippa and the rest had achieved little or nothing: Bacon himself—no enemy to magic except on this account—reported that the magicians “attained not to greatness and certainty of works.” The whole Renaissance outburst of forbidden arts had, it seemed, been a method of losing one’s soul on singularly unfavourable terms. But the older Art had been a different proposition.

There is a problem with this passage. **It is far too seductive.** It also represents an adaptation of Mirandola or other Renaissance sources, enough to make me disgusted, but I am concerned that is seductive. Elsewhere Lewis portrays the banality of evil; Mark Studdock and the nightmarish, dystopian N.I.C.E. shock the reader by how hollow and empty they are, and leave one disgusted with the "Inner Ring" Lewis also critiques in cool prose. But here and elsewhere, Merlin is glorious. Ransom does not let Merlin renew old acquaintances or turn blades of grass to be weapons, but it is part of Merlin's glory to offer what Ransom must refuse. And magic is the one area where Lewis portrays sin in seductive lighting. Never mind his "fairy[-tale] magic" vs. "real magic" distinction, which distinguishes the kind of magic that most often serves as a plot device in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), versus portrayal in literature of realistic occult practice, for the moment. One way people have described the difference between a flat character in literature, and a rounded one, is, "A rounded character believably surprises the reader." Merlin on that definition at least is one of the most rounded characters I have seen in literature; he comes close to delivering nothing *but* believable surprises.

I should clarify that I don't count it against Lewis that he has an older model. People have pointed out, for instance, that what C.S. Lewis advocates in [The Abolition of Man](#) is largely a framework of Aristotelian natural law; I guess that his use of the term "Tao" (which translates "Word"—"Λογος" in the classic Chinese Bible) is used in preference to "Natural Law" because Catholicism has taken the framework of natural law and moved it very far from what it was for the ancients, and for C.S. Lewis starting out with a separate term may have seemed easier than straightening out a now-highly-distorted conceptualization that people would think they already knew, not to mention that Lewis is not quick to

publicly dress down a major emphasis within the Roman Catholic Church. However, in reading Mirandola, I was dismayed to have such a thing be a prototype for something that is glamorized in the text. I don't object that C.S. Lewis worked from an older model: I object strongly that he worked here from **that** older model.

Now I should comment that I actually agree with some of the goodness that fills out Merlin's character. A later dialogue reads:

“...But about Merlin. What it comes to, as far as I can make out, is this. There were still possibilities for a man of that age that aren't for a man of ours. The Earth itself was much more like an animal in those days. And mental processes were much more like physical actions...”

...”Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He's at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our point of view, confused. For him, every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and to be taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases. Finally, come the Belbury people, who take over that view from the modern man unaltered and simply want to increase their power by tacking onto it the aid of spirits—extra-natural, anti-natural spirits. Of course they hoped to have it both ways. They thought the old *magia* of Merlin which worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with the new *goetia*—the brutal surgery from without. No. In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way. Do you know that he is forbidden by the rules of his order to use any edged tool on any growing thing?

~~“I love vegans. They taste like chicken.”~~

I am an animal lover, and a meat lover (preferably grass-fed, organic). However, I would like to talk about myself a bit, at least on one point.

I regularly visit pets at [a local cageless, no-kill pet shelter where I have been told, "The cats like it when you come over!"](#) (It's a cat shelter, but if they opened an area for dogs, I'd want to go and play with the dogs, too, and the same goes for rabbits and ferrets—I'd love to meet a ferret!)

On one visit, a volunteer introduced me to a visitor in a way that was clearly publicly giving me thanks. She identified me as “one of our socializers,” and named four or five cats that I had helped to socialize to be friendly and ready to be adopted. I believe her, but I was aware of nothing of the sort. What I had done was to come in on visits, approach cats and let them get my scent (so they could decide and announce if they wanted to be petted, yes or no), and gently pet and gently talk to cats who let me approach them. And that was really all; I believed I was one of many hands helping pull off a class act and see to it that a cat could go home, and nothing more. But she apparently saw a much more singular contribution on my part even if contributing to a class act is itself a major achievement. I had commented, “The one thing that's hard about visiting pets at the cat shelter is that all the cats I like most vanish,” with the thought that this was simply a fact about the most likable cats are the fastest to go home with someone. It appears, though, that I had a more active role for at least some of those cats. The one cat whose name I *do* remember, is a very friendly cat now whom I earlier vaguely remember as not at all mean, but not quite so affectionate earlier on.

Some of this may sound exotic (or maybe just boastful), and the only point in my life I remember being aware of achieving a striking goal was a half hour during which I gently took a dog who was nervous around men, and slowly coaxed and pulled his leash little by little until half an hour I was petting his head on my lap and when I stood up, he wanted to meet the other men. But at the shelter, I have never been aware of any goal of my own in actions beyond the major goal of simply showing love. I had

my own in actions beyond the major goal of simply showing love. I had not really been aware of cats becoming friendlier; the changes are not noticeable when your attention is on the pet. But apparently I had given a singular contribution to a class act, more than what I knew.

That is what I have done in my case. Monks who are above my pay grade in one direction show such love to animals that are wild. Married couples who are above my pay grade in another direction do the same in raising children. I happen to do this with pets. And one Orthodox priest I know beats a drum that extends well beyond showing love to shelter pets in saying, "The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our head to our heart."

Evangelical Orthodox Church

In living memory, a group of Evangelical Christians decided, like many good, red-blooded Protestants, to recreate the ancient Church, and to follow its development in history up to when it vanished. And they did so, calling themselves the Evangelical Orthodox Church, until at one point they ran across an Eastern Orthodox priest, and interrogated him as inside authorities interrogating an outsider, testing for instance whether he recognized Holy Communion as the body and blood of Christ, until they slowly realized that in fact he was the insider and they who questioned him were outside. Then most, although not all, members of the Evangelical Orthodox Church reached the logical end of their conclusions: they were received into the Orthodox Church that has never vanished.

Never mind if the Orthodox understanding of matter and spirit appear today to be confused. What fills out Merlin's art is in fact alive and kicking in Orthodoxy. "Do you know that [Merlin] is forbidden by the rules of his order to use any edged tool on any growing thing?" It comes as a surprise to Western Christians, especially those fond of figures like Thomas Aquinas, that I, like all Orthodox, am forbidden to engage in systematic theology. I am hesitant to call myself a theologian in that in the Orthodox understanding "theology" is not an endeavor like an academic discipline but the direct experience of God, and in the fullest sense of the term there are three that have rightly been called theologians: St. John the Theologian, St. Gregory the Theologian, and (some centuries back) St. Symeon the New Theologian. It does not need saying that I am not a fourth member of that company. However, if we deal with the more elastic senses of the term, I deal some in mystical theology. And systematic theology is categorically off-limits for all theology and for all Orthodox.

Merlin is an advertisement for Holy Orthodoxy even if this may not be evident to readers who do not understand Holy Orthodoxy.

“Space-conquering technologies” are body-conquering technologies

In pop culture’s older science fiction, one technology is a jetpack, and in fact such jetpacks have been researched and do exist. They are, however, surprisingly loud, and it is difficult learn to use them safely. It was reported at one Olympic Games that they had someone use a jetpack to successfully fly over the stadium, but military researchers made jet-packs to let soldiers cross over streams, and then found that they were too loud to be useful to soldiers in the intended fashion. It has also been popularly imagined that we would send astronauts to Mars and space travel would enter public usage like jet travel did, and that hasn’t happened yet.

It has been said in projecting the future that a good estimate is:

- Tomorrow will be like today,
- One year from now will be about as far from now as now is from one year back,
- Accurately predicting ten years from now is the real trick.

For a time, advances in space-conquering technologies, which I really wish to call **body-conquering technologies** as overriding the limits of our embodied nature, were things that could move the human body from one place to another faster. Cars are one such technology, and airplanes a further advance, even if there is not widespread airplane ownership the way there’s been for cars. Airplanes have gotten faster than sound, although faster-than-sound airplane use is not widespread and [SR-71 “Blackbirds”](#) and Concorde have been retired from use.

What was less anticipated is that the body-conquering technologies that would prevail at least up to now are not about making meat move faster; they’re about circumventing the need to move meat. Jean-Claude Larchet’s [The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul](#) looks from radio onwards at body-conquering technologies, even though I do not recall much of any comment about their status as space-conquering. Much of the book covered terrain that I

already knew, but something that surprised and saddened me was to learn that 85% of African households now own a television, and cellphone use was very widespread. I had simply assumed, while on a train and seeing a minor use an iPhone to rapidly switch between screens and splitting his attention between that and two friends he was talking with, that the sort of technological acid trip I was unintentionally eavesdropping was simply a rich kid's syndrome. *It is nothing of the sort!*

[The Luddite's Guide to Technology: The Past Writes Back to Humane Tech!](#) discusses what I've found about abstaining from some technologies I can abstain from, and how to make abstemious use of technologies we use. I don't have any games on my iPhone, or at least none for my own use (I have a few train games for my nephews 4 and 6, and I prefer not to let them use it because it just seems to fester squabbles). I use it for utilitarian purposes, and try to minimize any other use, especially as a canned treatment for boredom. Also, while the watch I have is spectacular (when purchased it was the top of the line for digital Casio Pathfinder watches, and has a compass and the moon phase among other features), but it is not an Apple Watch and does not report to Big Brother on every heartbeat I make (~~the N.I.C.E.~~ N.S.A. will have to content itself with knowing every step I take). By the way, did I mention that I put duct tape on the inside surface of a now broken Apple Watch, blocking view of my bloodstream?

[That Hideous Strength](#) seems to always have on its cover an accolade from *Time*: "Well-written, fast-paced satirical fantasy." It is a commonplace that *real life outpaces satire*, but there are many ways that his text reads as a fairly accurate prediction of today. If anything, it seems dated. To quote the dialogue between Ransom and Merlin:

"Since you have knowledge, answer me three questions, if you dare."

"I will answer them, if I can. But as for daring, we shall see."

"Who is called Sulva? What road does she walk? Why is the womb barren on one side? Where are the cold marriages?"

Ransom replied, “Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. The other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields on her further side. On this side, the womb is barren and the marriages cold. There dwell an accursed people, full of pride and lust. There when a young man takes a maiden in marriage, they do not lie together, but each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other, made to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty (*delicati*) in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.”

A year or two ago, *Men's Health* had a cover story, “The Sex Robots Are Coming!” (That’s, um, quite a bit of wordplay!) When I tried to get a copy of the cover in images, I caught a glimpse of the story: sex robots were perhaps never going to be mainstream, but they interviewed someone who had “lived with” a sex robot for two years and who said, “I never knew vaginas could be so varied!” (Fortunately, I did not ingest more.)

This literal fulfillment of Lewis’s image is almost beside the point of the fact that marriage is under attack and we are moving in multiple ways away from it. We have now crossed the point where a standard utility puts pornography within easy reach. On another front, we have the gay rights movement. And the concept of a marriage as being between two humans is in some ways hazy. One friend mentioned to me a website, to people whom he, *and I*, have a lot in common, but on the point of marriage advocated one’s choice of quite ceremony with one’s choice of non-living object as spouse, and not even a non-living object made as a sex toy!

It has been suggested that Romans 1 could read as an indictment about today whose ink is scarcely dry (Rom 1:18-32 NIV):

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to

them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

I've read a 19th century text speak of "these days of final apostasy." There is an apostasy even from being human. Come to think of it (no pun

There is an apostasy even from being human. Come to think of it (no pun intended), the Apostle's words seem a bit of an understatement if we apply them today.

Part of the present generation gap is in trends of not wanting to learn to drive, and living with their parents and not pursuing employment. Now I did not want to drive; instead of my generation's "My wheels are my freedom," I was sucked into, and administering, a technological precursor to social networks. And I live with my parents now; I have repeatedly tried and failed to find employment in corporate America, [I am trying as hard as I can to get to one monastery](#). (You may decide if it is hypocritical to write this while I am living at my parents' house or not.)

One other brief note: I am as I write sitting in the parking lot of the cat shelter, where I stand among the cats as some sort of king and lord, in the truest sense of the word. On the way here, I saw a large dog which had a bit of a leash or a lead dangling from its collar. However, I did not try to make friends with it. I parked, called the police, and told them I had seen a loose dog near two streets. I didn't attempt anything impressive beyond giving what little knowledge I had so animal control could catch the dog and return it to owners.

Discernment for old "prophecies"

I have seen an “Old English prophecy” quoted in Orthodox signatures:

When pictures seem alive with movements free
When boats like fishes swim beneath the sea,
When men like birds shall scour the sky
Then half the world, deep drenched in blood shall die.

There are a couple of things to be said here.

First, a brief search will turn up that this is not an Orthodox prophecy. It is part of “Mother Shipton”’s output. Second, “Mother Shipton” is not any kind of Orthodox monastic, but an English fortune teller. Third, “Mother Shipton” is in fact a complete hoax: a woman who never existed, with after-the-fact, made-up predictions for the most part. All of these first three points are easily found on first-page search results. Fourthly and finally, if you go through enough alleged prophecies from an occult figure, which I have not knowingly done and do not endorse, it’s usually not too long before you’ll find one that is spooky in its apparent accuracy. The demons gather information in ways not open to us, but they do not know the future, which (the [Philokalia](#) tells us) is why their educated guesses about the future are sometimes wrong. (Note that demons may have known what they intended for the future.) Orthodox simply do not have business endorsing this kind of “prophecy.”

Now for a thornier matter: the Prophecies of St. Nilus.

To quote [the version of St. Nilus’s prophecies on OrthodoxWiki](#):

The Prophecy of Saint Nilus

The Plight of the World and the Church during the 20th Century

By SAINT NILUS (d. circa AD 430)

After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable. When the time for the Advent of the Antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will become unrecognizable.

People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals because of the temptations of the Antichrist. There will be no respect for parents and elders, love will disappear, and Christian pastors, bishops, and priests will become vain men, completely failing to distinguish the right-hand way from the left.

At that time the morals and traditions of Christians and of the Church will change. People will abandon modesty, and dissipation will reign. Falsehood and greed will attain great proportions, and woe to those who pile up treasures. Lust, adultery, homosexuality, secret deeds and murder will rule in society.

At that future time, due to the power of such great crimes and licentiousness, people will be deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which they received in Holy Baptism and equally of remorse. The Churches of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors, and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all. Then they will separate themselves out of the world in holy refuges in search of lightening their spiritual sufferings, but everywhere they will meet obstacles and constraints.

And all this will result from the fact that the Antichrist wants to be Lord over everything and become the ruler of the whole universe, and he will produce miracles and fantastic signs. He will also give depraved wisdom to an unhappy man so that he will discover a way by which one man can carry on a conversation with another from one end of the earth to the other.

At that time men will also fly through the air like birds and descend to the bottom of the sea like fish. And when they have achieved all this, these unhappy people will spend their lives in comfort without knowing, poor souls, that it is deceit of the Antichrist.

And, the impious one!â€”he will so complete science with vanity that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence of God in three hypostases. Then the All-good God will see the downfall of the human race and will shorten the days for the sake of those few who are being saved, because the enemy wants to lead even the chosen into temptation, if that is possible... then the sword of chastisement will suddenly appear and kill the perverter and his servants.

The OrthodoxWiki points out certain problems and concludes the alleged prophecy is a forgery, the first objection being that Orthodox did not begin dating from the number of years since Christ's birth until the century after Saint Nilus allegedly died. Other objections include that implied age of the Antichrist appears, according to this prophecy, to have been around for over half a century. And to my historian's eye, I assert that much of this appears to be after-the-fact predictions, almost as bad as the "Mother Shipton" predictions themselves.

However, I believe the prophecy is genuine, and here's why.

The [OCA Saints page](#) includes a St. Nilus said to predict the future as commemorated on November 12 (New Style):

Venerable Nilus the Myrrh-gusher of Mt Athos

Saint Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher of Mt Athos was born in Greece, in a village named for Saint Peter, in the Zakoneia diocese. He was raised by his uncle, the hieromonk Macarius. Having attained the age of maturity, he received monastic tonsure and was found worthy of ordination to hierodeacon, and then to hieromonk.

The desire for greater monastic struggles brought uncle and nephew to Mt Athos, where Macarius and Nilus lived in asceticism at a place called the Holy Rocks. Upon the repose of Saint Macarius, the venerable Nilus, aflame with zeal for even more intense spiritual efforts, found an isolated place almost inaccessible for any living thing. Upon his departure to the Lord in 1651, Saint Nilus was glorified by an abundant flow of curative myrrh, for which Christians journeyed from the most distant lands of the East.

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.

After seeing that, I dug long and hard on the Internet, and I found what I believe is an authentic historic document, barnacled over in later versions but stemming from a document that seems real enough to my own historical instinct. I now deeply regret that I did not preserve the fruit of that research. The urban legend version reads straightforwardly as a retelling of St. Nilus's life and it omits something important that the

as a retelling of St. Nilus's life, and it omits something important that the life omits: the actual text of the Mark of the Beast.

For one reason why I trust it, it didn't seem to contain any sort of dating, at least that I could recognize. Possibly it gave a timeline along some system that I am not familiar with, and the saint's life here says that St. Nilus's predictions accurately describe the people of the mid-twentieth century. But that could just be from someone from the mid-twentieth century, writing the saint's life, and finding things uncomfortably pointed.

Second, this version did comment that men would grow long hair and become indistinguishable from the women, but it didn't simply list the sexual vices we did today. Presumably a particular point is being made about effeminacy, but the original contained no vice lists such as St. Paul is wont to do.

Third, my recollection is that the OCA site used to say that St. Nilus predicted the radio and did not mention the telephone. The text of his prophecy said that some party would be given "wisdom" (parts of the rumor mill version say "depraved wisdom") that one man could speak and be heard on the other side of the world. This is from a technological perspective ambiguous, although I might comment that Larchet Jean-Claudet in [The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul](#) understands distinctions within technology perfectly well but is inclined to lump them together, especially as regards their implications for morals. Today the list of technologies that fit the bill include the radio, television, telephones, internet telephony, Skype, video chat, and more. More may be invented.

Fourth, it is a characteristic of prophecy, at least in the Bible, to include together related things that do not happen at the same time but fit the same pattern. St. Nilus's prediction regarding technology has been fading in, perhaps first with the radio. His remarks about effeminacy have also been fading in. My father used to joke, in a spirit of humor that was nothing at all literal, that when he said he had a twin sister and people asked if they were identical, he would say, "Yes, I had a sex change." *I would not joke about such things now.* Never mind just the

long hair. Cross-dressing already is mainstream, and gender reassignment surgery already is mainstream. I believe this is fading in further.

Fifth, my recollection is that the original version contained information that I have not found since. More specifically, I recall a chilling account of what I believe was presented as the full inscription in the Mark of the Beast. I regrettably do not remember all of it, but part of what I remember is, "...Of my own free will I accept this..." in admitting total and voluntary consent.

Now if you are concerned that I am relying on my memory, I'd mention that on one IQ test my memory subscore was one of the highest, at 188. (On another incident, bizarrely enough, the psychologist found that I had dropped 118 points to a memory score of 70, and he was holding on to that intellectually disabled score for dear life, without budging an inch when I said, "My writing, including recent writing, is at complexity, and my speech is at complexity.") Pick whichever one you want to believe.

My verdict is that St. Nilus wrote prophecies that are probably preserved, and it has attained an extraordinary collection of urban legend barnacles on top of barnacles, but the seed of the whole thing is real.

The disenchantment of magic

Q: How many Wiccan fundamentalists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Why on earth would Mary Daly want *light*?!?

Wicca is called the Old Religion, and its original self-account is that this was the ancient religion to return to. Since some scholarly controversies, it has become unmistakably clear that unless you are going to steel yourself out of all evidence, Wicca is in fact a feature of 19th century spiritualism, and most people accept the historical conclusions while holding original Wiccan accounts of its history and pre-history to be inspiring stories, with a few insisting in the face of evidence beyond reasonable doubt that Wicca's claims are true, called by other Wiccans an extremely pejorative "Wiccan fundamentalists."

The Old Religion is not Wicca; the Old Religion is in fact Orthodoxy, and it began in eternity, present with Creation itself, present with Adam and Eve, and it retains the perfection of classical paganism; C.S. Lewis's favorite old book, [The Consolation of Philosophy](#), is the fully Christian work of a philosopher who has after extraordinarily good fortune been exiled far from Rome and faces eventual execution, and without contradiction consoles himself from the very best that classical paganism has to offer. [As I have said elsewhere, Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-paganism isn't.](#)

Most Wiccans, I imagine, have gotten over the blow that someone seeking the real and true Old Religion would be well-advised to look elsewhere from Wicca.

Here, I have a deeper cut to offer.

One major selling point in Wicca, and one major consideration, is harmony with nature. And I have to say that if you want harmony with nature you should abandon Wicca.

In Orthodox theology, unnatural vice neither begins nor ends with queer sex. It is an *umbrella* term, and it includes the occult. [It also includes, for that matter, contraception.](#)

Role playing games as I have played them offer a weaker form of the same drug: it lets you override the Providence of [God the Spiritual Father's](#) decisions about where you are and what circumstances you are in. Magic is not content with grounding. It wants to circumvent or override what nature is and how it normally works, and it is a step into a smaller world. The fact that some people go mad after practicing the occult stems from a fissure that began, perhaps, with seeking to do things by magic. Seeking power to correct what God did wrong is wrong whether it is done in gender reassignment surgery or occult practice.

I have long been drawn to the occult, and lust, and they have both seemed like innocent things I should not be denied. However, those who have their heads clear of the siren songs see something very different with harmony with God and nature in occult endeavor. And those people closest to God (and with Him, nature) find magic an abomination. On this point I trust them.

“More evil than Satan himself”

Some years back, some people [Google bombed](#) so that the #1 organic search result for “more evil than Satan himself” was Microsoft’s homepage. Since then, Google has had hard feelings when Microsoft artificially set Bing’s search for “more evil than Satan himself” to be the number Google is named after, which can be written, as Bing did, “10[^]100”.

Nazi Germany was wrong because it embraced what seemed one of the most progressive ideas at all time, *eugenics*. Google is not Nazi in any sense, but it has embraced Eugenics 2.0: Transhumanism. While eugenics wanted most people out of the gene pool (more specifically, those who were not Aryans, and Aryans who were not enough of a perfect specimen), transhumanism wants everybody out of the gene pool: phasing out the entire human race itself, in favor of the kind of technological creation I critiqued in [AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics](#).

Amazon has been critiqued; it wants to destroy paper booksellers, and it is another terrible megacorporation. ~~FaceesBook~~ FaceBook is just as bad. All the megacorporations I’ve really heard research on, from Apple to Wal-Mart, are in their own way the N.I.C.E. that is the corporate villain-figure in [That Hideous Strength](#). It is essentially non-optional to patronize N.I.C.E.s, and I say that as an author with books on Amazon. Kindle books are there because Amazon wants to phase out printed books.

All this is true, but we are advised to take a cue from another powerhouse brand: **“Don’t be too proud of this technological terror you’ve constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.”**

Are we in the end times?

Eastern Orthodoxy affirms the Incarnation in all its sundry implications, and that is why an icon of Christ, perhaps with the Theotokos, is the best possible picture an Orthodox Christian can have: witness the Orthodox love of icons.

Islam categorically denies the Incarnation in all its sundry implications, and that is why an a picture of Mohammed is the worst possible picture to a Muslim: witness the Muslim reaction to the Danish cartoons.

I believe that we are in the end times, but figuring out when Christ will return remains completely off-limits.

The earliest I can remember reading someone saying that the Second Coming is immanent is not St. John Chrysostom; it is the Apostle. You may think St. Nilus's eschatological prophecies were wrongly grasped in the mid-twentieth century; but here we are 70 years later, and we've been hit by a stronger dose, but the times and dates God intends are still beyond us. I believe we are in the end times, and I do not feel qualified to contradict that people are throwing things at the wall and seeing if it will stick, to pave the way for the Antichrist. Some people have said that the Antichrist will be a Muslim. I don't know if this is prophecy or mere rumor, but St. John the Evangelist's definition of being an anti-Christ is denying that Jesus came in the flesh, and [Islam works out on a capital scale what you get if you take Christianity and you systematically remove all trace of the Incarnation.](#) Furthermore, there are, I have heard, over a hundred organizations trying to establish a world Muslim Caliphate. *I don't know whether I will die, or be alive when Christ comes, but my obligation is the same in either case.*

Conclusion: “Hogwarts for Hackers”—*Wired*

Wired ran a piece on the [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#) as [Hogwarts for Hackers](#). [I spent way too much time reading Arthurian legends](#), and at [IMSA](#), I had barely opened a page of Arthurian legends (I remember the spelling “swerde” for “sword,” and I was not then a philologist), and one of the Class of 1992’s senior class awards was apparently made for me: “Most likely to be on IMSAsun [*the Unix social network I administered*] in the year 2020.” The award was given to me as *Jonathan “Merlin” Hayward*, as I was then much drawn to the character of Merlin, and it was immortalized in my senior award.

(I remember one time when I was a student, someone asked if I was the local “Unix wizard,” and when I showed extreme hesitance, a much-loved alum, Scott Swanson, answered, “Yes.” And in fact I was, at [IMSA](#), a 15 year old Unix system administrator. And I have in fact long traded in a power that is not considered literal wizardry but seems enmeshed in magical metaphor; I have traded in what is called “intuitive thinking” and “intuitive feeling” exercise of power, even if exercise of the latter power does not come across as an exercise of power. “The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our head to our heart,” and I have found something liberating in letting go of some of my “intuitive thinking” power.)

Now, however, I am hoping that my senior award, most likely to be on an early social network in 2020, might not quite come true. Already I use social media mainly for occasional announcements, and not of my breakfast. I would like to be a monastic novice using the Internet only as blessed by an abbot, [and repenting from a desire for power that would break rules in the natural order God provided for our good](#): for magic (and to some degree other sins) is an attempt to cheat and overpower what God has given.

I am puzzled, personally, that *Wired* gave press coverage for someone who edited the source to be a better “DikuLOSER” (as the term for DikuMUD players was when I was at IMSA). I also edited the source

code there, for my favorite game, in the same computer language, but I don't particularly think it merits at least positive attention. But [Avery Coonley School](#) and the [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#) represent a starting point in a strong identification with mathematics (I ranked 7th in the nation in a math contest as a kid), to being a Renaissance man in an almost classical style, to (God willing) making the journey from my head to my heart, and repenting before and in monastic repentance. I would say that I want with all my heart to go to Kursk Root Hermitage, but that is not quite true. My deepest will is to do as God wills, and seeking monasticism wholeheartedly is the step of obedience I make in pursuit of that goal. I am seeking that self-transcendent theosis or divinisation that is alike the goal of marriage and monasticism, in whatever form God wills.

I am trying to reach a monastery. [Would you can help me?](#)

Part 2:
Building (Partly) on C.S. Lewis

**Technology and Me: “~~Sufficiently~~
~~undocumented code~~ Sufficiently
advanced technology is
indistinguishable from magic...”**

(To the pedantic, “Technology and I.”)

Merlin and me

I met with dismay upon rereading Mirandola's Renaissance [Oration on the Dignity of Man](#). The first 80% or so of the text contains bits that sound Orthodox, and much of the text sounds Christian if you aren't really paying attention. But the last 20% of the text is a hymn to the glory of magic, and while there exists a "goetia" that brings one into contact with demonic forces and *of course* we should steer clear of *that* and not touch it with a ten-foot pole, there is also another magic that is perhaps the noblest endeavor we can pursue.

My shock was not in particular at Mirandola's endorsement of occult endeavor. It was rather recognizing a point of failure in C.S. Lewis. I had recognized what looks like a source, possibly one of many Renaissance mages' sources, of the words in C.S. Lewis [That Hideous Strength](#):

Dimble and [the Director] and the Dennistons shared between them a knowledge of Arthurian Britain which orthodox scholarship will probably not reach for some centuries...

What exactly [Merlin] had done [in Bragdon wood] they did not know; but they had all, by various routes, come too far either to consider his art mere legend and imposture, or to equate it exactly with what the Renaissance called Magic. Dimble even maintained that a good critic, by his sensibility alone, could detect the difference between the traces which the two things had left on literature. "What common measure is there," he would ask, "between ceremonial occultists like Faustus and Prospero and Archimago with their midnight studies, their attendant fiends or elementals, and a figure like Merlin who seems to produce his results simply by being Merlin?" And Ransom agreed. He thought that Merlin's art was the last survival of something older and different—something brought to Western Europe after the fall of Numinor and going back to an era in which the general relations of mind and matter on this planet had been other than those we know. It had probably differed from Renaissance Magic profoundly. It had possibly (though this is doubtful) been less guilty: it had certainly been more effective. For

...probably been less glib. It had certainly been more creative. For Paracelsus and Agrippa and the rest had achieved little or nothing: Bacon himself—no enemy to magic except on this account—reported that the magicians “attained not to greatness and certainty of works.” The whole Renaissance outburst of forbidden arts had, it seemed, been a method of losing one’s soul on singularly unfavourable terms. But the older Art had been a different proposition.

There is a problem with this passage. **It is far too seductive.** It also represents an adaptation of Mirandola or other Renaissance sources, enough to make me disgusted, but I am concerned that is seductive. Elsewhere Lewis portrays the banality of evil; Mark Studdock and the nightmarish, dystopian N.I.C.E. shock the reader by how hollow and empty they are, and leave one disgusted with the "Inner Ring" Lewis also critiques in cool prose. But here and elsewhere, Merlin is glorious. Ransom does not let Merlin renew old acquaintances or turn blades of grass to be weapons, but it is part of Merlin's glory to offer what Ransom must refuse. And magic is the one area where Lewis portrays sin in seductive lighting. Never mind his "fairy[-tale] magic" vs. "real magic" distinction, which distinguishes the kind of magic that most often serves as a plot device in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#), versus portrayal in literature of realistic occult practice, for the moment. One way people have described the difference between a flat character in literature, and a rounded one, is, "A rounded character believably surprises the reader." Merlin on that definition at least is one of the most rounded characters I have seen in literature; he comes close to delivering nothing *but* believable surprises.

I should clarify that I don't count it against Lewis that he has an older model. People have pointed out, for instance, that what C.S. Lewis advocates in [The Abolition of Man](#) is largely a framework of Aristotelian natural law; I guess that his use of the term "Tao" (which translates "Word"—"Λογος" in the classic Chinese Bible) is used in preference to "Natural Law" because Catholicism has taken the framework of natural law and moved it very far from what it was for the ancients, and for C.S. Lewis starting out with a separate term may have seemed easier than straightening out a now-highly-distorted conceptualization that people would think they already knew, not to mention that Lewis is not quick to

publicly dress down a major emphasis within the Roman Catholic Church. However, in reading Mirandola, I was dismayed to have such a thing be a prototype for something that is glamorized in the text. I don't object that C.S. Lewis worked from an older model: I object strongly that he worked here from **that** older model.

Now I should comment that I actually agree with some of the goodness that fills out Merlin's character. A later dialogue reads:

“...But about Merlin. What it comes to, as far as I can make out, is this. There were still possibilities for a man of that age that aren't for a man of ours. The Earth itself was much more like an animal in those days. And mental processes were much more like physical actions...”

...”Merlin is the reverse of Belbury. He's at the opposite extreme. He is the last vestige of an old order in which matter and spirit were, from our point of view, confused. For him, every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. After him came the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and to be taken to bits if it won't work the way he pleases. Finally, come the Belbury people, who take over that view from the modern man unaltered and simply want to increase their power by tacking onto it the aid of spirits—extra-natural, anti-natural spirits. Of course they hoped to have it both ways. They thought the old *magia* of Merlin which worked in with the spiritual qualities of Nature, loving and reverencing them and knowing them from within, could be combined with the new *goetia*—the brutal surgery from without. No. In a sense Merlin represents what we've got to get back to in some different way. Do you know that he is forbidden by the rules of his order to use any edged tool on any growing thing?

~~“I love vegans. They taste like chicken.”~~

I am an animal lover, and a meat lover (preferably grass-fed, organic). However, I would like to talk about myself a bit, at least on one point.

I regularly visit pets at [a local cageless, no-kill pet shelter where I have been told, "The cats like it when you come over!"](#) (It's a cat shelter, but if they opened an area for dogs, I'd want to go and play with the dogs, too, and the same goes for rabbits and ferrets—I'd love to meet a ferret!)

On one visit, a volunteer introduced me to a visitor in a way that was clearly publicly giving me thanks. She identified me as “one of our socializers,” and named four or five cats that I had helped to socialize to be friendly and ready to be adopted. I believe her, but I was aware of nothing of the sort. What I had done was to come in on visits, approach cats and let them get my scent (so they could decide and announce if they wanted to be petted, yes or no), and gently pet and gently talk to cats who let me approach them. And that was really all; I believed I was one of many hands helping pull off a class act and see to it that a cat could go home, and nothing more. But she apparently saw a much more singular contribution on my part even if contributing to a class act is itself a major achievement. I had commented, “The one thing that's hard about visiting pets at the cat shelter is that all the cats I like most vanish,” with the thought that this was simply a fact about the most likable cats are the fastest to go home with someone. It appears, though, that I had a more active role for at least some of those cats. The one cat whose name I *do* remember, is a very friendly cat now whom I earlier vaguely remember as not at all mean, but not quite so affectionate earlier on.

Some of this may sound exotic (or maybe just boastful), and the only point in my life I remember being aware of achieving a striking goal was a half hour during which I gently took a dog who was nervous around men, and slowly coaxed and pulled his leash little by little until half an hour I was petting his head on my lap and when I stood up, he wanted to meet the other men. But at the shelter, I have never been aware of any goal of my own in actions beyond the major goal of simply showing love. I had

my own in actions beyond the major goal of simply showing love. I had not really been aware of cats becoming friendlier; the changes are not noticeable when your attention is on the pet. But apparently I had given a singular contribution to a class act, more than what I knew.

That is what I have done in my case. Monks who are above my pay grade in one direction show such love to animals that are wild. Married couples who are above my pay grade in another direction do the same in raising children. I happen to do this with pets. And one Orthodox priest I know beats a drum that extends well beyond showing love to shelter pets in saying, "The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our head to our heart."

Evangelical Orthodox Church

In living memory, a group of Evangelical Christians decided, like many good, red-blooded Protestants, to recreate the ancient Church, and to follow its development in history up to when it vanished. And they did so, calling themselves the Evangelical Orthodox Church, until at one point they ran across an Eastern Orthodox priest, and interrogated him as inside authorities interrogating an outsider, testing for instance whether he recognized Holy Communion as the body and blood of Christ, until they slowly realized that in fact he was the insider and they who questioned him were outside. Then most, although not all, members of the Evangelical Orthodox Church reached the logical end of their conclusions: they were received into the Orthodox Church that has never vanished.

Never mind if the Orthodox understanding of matter and spirit appear today to be confused. What fills out Merlin's art is in fact alive and kicking in Orthodoxy. "Do you know that [Merlin] is forbidden by the rules of his order to use any edged tool on any growing thing?" It comes as a surprise to Western Christians, especially those fond of figures like Thomas Aquinas, that I, like all Orthodox, am forbidden to engage in systematic theology. I am hesitant to call myself a theologian in that in the Orthodox understanding "theology" is not an endeavor like an academic discipline but the direct experience of God, and in the fullest sense of the term there are three that have rightly been called theologians: St. John the Theologian, St. Gregory the Theologian, and (some centuries back) St. Symeon the New Theologian. It does not need saying that I am not a fourth member of that company. However, if we deal with the more elastic senses of the term, I deal some in mystical theology. And systematic theology is categorically off-limits for all theology and for all Orthodox.

Merlin is an advertisement for Holy Orthodoxy even if this may not be evident to readers who do not understand Holy Orthodoxy.

“Space-conquering technologies” are body-conquering technologies

In pop culture’s older science fiction, one technology is a jetpack, and in fact such jetpacks have been researched and do exist. They are, however, surprisingly loud, and it is difficult learn to use them safely. It was reported at one Olympic Games that they had someone use a jetpack to successfully fly over the stadium, but military researchers made jet-packs to let soldiers cross over streams, and then found that they were too loud to be useful to soldiers in the intended fashion. It has also been popularly imagined that we would send astronauts to Mars and space travel would enter public usage like jet travel did, and that hasn’t happened yet.

It has been said in projecting the future that a good estimate is:

- Tomorrow will be like today,
- One year from now will be about as far from now as now is from one year back,
- Accurately predicting ten years from now is the real trick.

For a time, advances in space-conquering technologies, which I really wish to call **body-conquering technologies** as overriding the limits of our embodied nature, were things that could move the human body from one place to another faster. Cars are one such technology, and airplanes a further advance, even if there is not widespread airplane ownership the way there’s been for cars. Airplanes have gotten faster than sound, although faster-than-sound airplane use is not widespread and [SR-71 “Blackbirds”](#) and Concorde have been retired from use.

What was less anticipated is that the body-conquering technologies that would prevail at least up to now are not about making meat move faster; they’re about circumventing the need to move meat. Jean-Claude Larchet’s [The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul](#) looks from radio onwards at body-conquering technologies, even though I do not recall much of any comment about their status as space-conquering. Much of the book covered terrain that I

already knew, but something that surprised and saddened me was to learn that 85% of African households now own a television, and cellphone use was very widespread. I had simply assumed, while on a train and seeing a minor use an iPhone to rapidly switch between screens and splitting his attention between that and two friends he was talking with, that the sort of technological acid trip I was unintentionally eavesdropping was simply a rich kid's syndrome. *It is nothing of the sort!*

[The Luddite's Guide to Technology: The Past Writes Back to Humane Tech!](#) discusses what I've found about abstaining from some technologies I can abstain from, and how to make abstemious use of technologies we use. I don't have any games on my iPhone, or at least none for my own use (I have a few train games for my nephews 4 and 6, and I prefer not to let them use it because it just seems to fester squabbles). I use it for utilitarian purposes, and try to minimize any other use, especially as a canned treatment for boredom. Also, while the watch I have is spectacular (when purchased it was the top of the line for digital Casio Pathfinder watches, and has a compass and the moon phase among other features), but it is not an Apple Watch and does not report to Big Brother on every heartbeat I make (~~the N.I.C.E.~~ N.S.A. will have to content itself with knowing every step I take). By the way, did I mention that I put duct tape on the inside surface of a now broken Apple Watch, blocking view of my bloodstream?

[That Hideous Strength](#) seems to always have on its cover an accolade from *Time*: "Well-written, fast-paced satirical fantasy." It is a commonplace that *real life outpaces satire*, but there are many ways that his text reads as a fairly accurate prediction of today. If anything, it seems dated. To quote the dialogue between Ransom and Merlin:

"Since you have knowledge, answer me three questions, if you dare."

"I will answer them, if I can. But as for daring, we shall see."

"Who is called Sulva? What road does she walk? Why is the womb barren on one side? Where are the cold marriages?"

Ransom replied, “Sulva is she whom mortals call the Moon. She walks in the lowest sphere. The rim of the world that was wasted goes through her. Half of her orb is turned towards us and shares our curse. The other half looks to Deep Heaven; happy would he be who could cross that frontier and see the fields on her further side. On this side, the womb is barren and the marriages cold. There dwell an accursed people, full of pride and lust. There when a young man takes a maiden in marriage, they do not lie together, but each lies with a cunningly fashioned image of the other, made to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty (*delicati*) in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.”

A year or two ago, *Men's Health* had a cover story, “The Sex Robots Are Coming!” (That’s, um, quite a bit of wordplay!) When I tried to get a copy of the cover in images, I caught a glimpse of the story: sex robots were perhaps never going to be mainstream, but they interviewed someone who had “lived with” a sex robot for two years and who said, “I never knew vaginas could be so varied!” (Fortunately, I did not ingest more.)

This literal fulfillment of Lewis’s image is almost beside the point of the fact that marriage is under attack and we are moving in multiple ways away from it. We have now crossed the point where a standard utility puts pornography within easy reach. On another front, we have the gay rights movement. And the concept of a marriage as being between two humans is in some ways hazy. One friend mentioned to me a website, to people whom he, *and I*, have a lot in common, but on the point of marriage advocated one’s choice of quite ceremony with one’s choice of non-living object as spouse, and not even a non-living object made as a sex toy!

It has been suggested that Romans 1 could read as an indictment about today whose ink is scarcely dry (Rom 1:18-32 NIV):

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to

them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

I've read a 19th century text speak of "these days of final apostasy." There is an apostasy even from being human. Come to think of it (no pun

There is an apostasy even from being human. Come to think of it (no pun intended), the Apostle's words seem a bit of an understatement if we apply them today.

Part of the present generation gap is in trends of not wanting to learn to drive, and living with their parents and not pursuing employment. Now I did not want to drive; instead of my generation's "My wheels are my freedom," I was sucked into, and administering, a technological precursor to social networks. And I live with my parents now; I have repeatedly tried and failed to find employment in corporate America, [I am trying as hard as I can to get to one monastery](#). (You may decide if it is hypocritical to write this while I am living at my parents' house or not.)

One other brief note: I am as I write sitting in the parking lot of the cat shelter, where I stand among the cats as some sort of king and lord, in the truest sense of the word. On the way here, I saw a large dog which had a bit of a leash or a lead dangling from its collar. However, I did not try to make friends with it. I parked, called the police, and told them I had seen a loose dog near two streets. I didn't attempt anything impressive beyond giving what little knowledge I had so animal control could catch the dog and return it to owners.

Discernment for old "prophecies"

I have seen an “Old English prophecy” quoted in Orthodox signatures:

When pictures seem alive with movements free
When boats like fishes swim beneath the sea,
When men like birds shall scour the sky
Then half the world, deep drenched in blood shall die.

There are a couple of things to be said here.

First, a brief search will turn up that this is not an Orthodox prophecy. It is part of “Mother Shipton”'s output. Second, “Mother Shipton” is not any kind of Orthodox monastic, but an English fortune teller. Third, “Mother Shipton” is in fact a complete hoax: a woman who never existed, with after-the-fact, made-up predictions for the most part. All of these first three points are easily found on first-page search results. Fourthly and finally, if you go through enough alleged prophecies from an occult figure, which I have not knowingly done and do not endorse, it's usually not too long before you'll find one that is spooky in its apparent accuracy. The demons gather information in ways not open to us, but they do not know the future, which (the [Philokalia](#) tells us) is why their educated guesses about the future are sometimes wrong. (Note that demons may have known what they intended for the future.) Orthodox simply do not have business endorsing this kind of “prophecy.”

Now for a thornier matter: the Prophecies of St. Nilus.

To quote [the version of St. Nilus's prophecies on OrthodoxWiki](#):

The Prophecy of Saint Nilus

The Plight of the World and the Church during the 20th Century

By SAINT NILUS (d. circa AD 430)

After the year 1900, toward the middle of the 20th century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable. When the time for the Advent of the Antichrist approaches, people's minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will become unrecognizable.

People's appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals because of the temptations of the Antichrist. There will be no respect for parents and elders, love will disappear, and Christian pastors, bishops, and priests will become vain men, completely failing to distinguish the right-hand way from the left.

At that time the morals and traditions of Christians and of the Church will change. People will abandon modesty, and dissipation will reign. Falsehood and greed will attain great proportions, and woe to those who pile up treasures. Lust, adultery, homosexuality, secret deeds and murder will rule in society.

At that future time, due to the power of such great crimes and licentiousness, people will be deprived of the grace of the Holy Spirit, which they received in Holy Baptism and equally of remorse. The Churches of God will be deprived of God-fearing and pious pastors, and woe to the Christians remaining in the world at that time; they will completely lose their faith because they will lack the opportunity of seeing the light of knowledge from anyone at all. Then they will separate themselves out of the world in holy refuges in search of lightening their spiritual sufferings, but everywhere they will meet obstacles and constraints.

And all this will result from the fact that the Antichrist wants to be Lord over everything and become the ruler of the whole universe, and he will produce miracles and fantastic signs. He will also give depraved wisdom to an unhappy man so that he will discover a way by which one man can carry on a conversation with another from one end of the earth to the other.

At that time men will also fly through the air like birds and descend to the bottom of the sea like fish. And when they have achieved all this, these unhappy people will spend their lives in comfort without knowing, poor souls, that it is deceit of the Antichrist.

And, the impious one!â€”he will so complete science with vanity that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence of God in three hypostases. Then the All-good God will see the downfall of the human race and will shorten the days for the sake of those few who are being saved, because the enemy wants to lead even the chosen into temptation, if that is possible... then the sword of chastisement will suddenly appear and kill the perverter and his servants.

The OrthodoxWiki points out certain problems and concludes the alleged prophecy is a forgery, the first objection being that Orthodox did not begin dating from the number of years since Christ's birth until the century after Saint Nilus allegedly died. Other objections include that implied age of the Antichrist appears, according to this prophecy, to have been around for over half a century. And to my historian's eye, I assert that much of this appears to be after-the-fact predictions, almost as bad as the "Mother Shipton" predictions themselves.

However, I believe the prophecy is genuine, and here's why.

The [OCA Saints page](#) includes a St. Nilus said to predict the future as commemorated on November 12 (New Style):

Venerable Nilus the Myrrh-gusher of Mt Athos

Saint Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher of Mt Athos was born in Greece, in a village named for Saint Peter, in the Zakoneia diocese. He was raised by his uncle, the hieromonk Macarius. Having attained the age of maturity, he received monastic tonsure and was found worthy of ordination to hierodeacon, and then to hieromonk.

The desire for greater monastic struggles brought uncle and nephew to Mt Athos, where Macarius and Nilus lived in asceticism at a place called the Holy Rocks. Upon the repose of Saint Macarius, the venerable Nilus, aflame with zeal for even more intense spiritual efforts, found an isolated place almost inaccessible for any living thing. Upon his departure to the Lord in 1651, Saint Nilus was glorified by an abundant flow of curative myrrh, for which Christians journeyed from the most distant lands of the East.

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.

After seeing that, I dug long and hard on the Internet, and I found what I believe is an authentic historic document, barnacled over in later versions but stemming from a document that seems real enough to my own historical instinct. I now deeply regret that I did not preserve the fruit of that research. The urban legend version reads straightforwardly as a retelling of St Nilus's life and it omits something important that the

as a retelling of St. Nilus's life, and it omits something important that the life omits: the actual text of the Mark of the Beast.

For one reason why I trust it, it didn't seem to contain any sort of dating, at least that I could recognize. Possibly it gave a timeline along some system that I am not familiar with, and the saint's life here says that St. Nilus's predictions accurately describe the people of the mid-twentieth century. But that could just be from someone from the mid-twentieth century, writing the saint's life, and finding things uncomfortably pointed.

Second, this version did comment that men would grow long hair and become indistinguishable from the women, but it didn't simply list the sexual vices we did today. Presumably a particular point is being made about effeminacy, but the original contained no vice lists such as St. Paul is wont to do.

Third, my recollection is that the OCA site used to say that St. Nilus predicted the radio and did not mention the telephone. The text of his prophecy said that some party would be given "wisdom" (parts of the rumor mill version say "depraved wisdom") that one man could speak and be heard on the other side of the world. This is from a technological perspective ambiguous, although I might comment that Larchet Jean-Claudet in [The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul](#) understands distinctions within technology perfectly well but is inclined to lump them together, especially as regards their implications for morals. Today the list of technologies that fit the bill include the radio, television, telephones, internet telephony, Skype, video chat, and more. More may be invented.

Fourth, it is a characteristic of prophecy, at least in the Bible, to include together related things that do not happen at the same time but fit the same pattern. St. Nilus's prediction regarding technology has been fading in, perhaps first with the radio. His remarks about effeminacy have also been fading in. My father used to joke, in a spirit of humor that was nothing at all literal, that when he said he had a twin sister and people asked if they were identical, he would say, "Yes, I had a sex change." *I would not joke about such things now.* Never mind just the

long hair. Cross-dressing already is mainstream, and gender reassignment surgery already is mainstream. I believe this is fading in further.

Fifth, my recollection is that the original version contained information that I have not found since. More specifically, I recall a chilling account of what I believe was presented as the full inscription in the Mark of the Beast. I regrettably do not remember all of it, but part of what I remember is, "...Of my own free will I accept this..." in admitting total and voluntary consent.

Now if you are concerned that I am relying on my memory, I'd mention that on one IQ test my memory subscore was one of the highest, at 188. (On another incident, bizarrely enough, the psychologist found that I had dropped 118 points to a memory score of 70, and he was holding on to that intellectually disabled score for dear life, without budging an inch when I said, "My writing, including recent writing, is at complexity, and my speech is at complexity.") Pick whichever one you want to believe.

My verdict is that St. Nilus wrote prophecies that are probably preserved, and it has attained an extraordinary collection of urban legend barnacles on top of barnacles, but the seed of the whole thing is real.

The disenchantment of magic

Q: How many Wiccan fundamentalists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Why on earth would Mary Daly want *light*?!?

Wicca is called the Old Religion, and its original self-account is that this was the ancient religion to return to. Since some scholarly controversies, it has become unmistakably clear that unless you are going to steel yourself out of all evidence, Wicca is in fact a feature of 19th century spiritualism, and most people accept the historical conclusions while holding original Wiccan accounts of its history and pre-history to be inspiring stories, with a few insisting in the face of evidence beyond reasonable doubt that Wicca's claims are true, called by other Wiccans an extremely pejorative "Wiccan fundamentalists."

The Old Religion is not Wicca; the Old Religion is in fact Orthodoxy, and it began in eternity, present with Creation itself, present with Adam and Eve, and it retains the perfection of classical paganism; C.S. Lewis's favorite old book, [The Consolation of Philosophy](#), is the fully Christian work of a philosopher who has after extraordinarily good fortune been exiled far from Rome and faces eventual execution, and without contradiction consoles himself from the very best that classical paganism has to offer. [As I have said elsewhere, Orthodoxy is pagan and neo-paganism isn't.](#)

Most Wiccans, I imagine, have gotten over the blow that someone seeking the real and true Old Religion would be well-advised to look elsewhere from Wicca.

Here, I have a deeper cut to offer.

One major selling point in Wicca, and one major consideration, is harmony with nature. And I have to say that if you want harmony with nature you should abandon Wicca.

In Orthodox theology, unnatural vice neither begins nor ends with queer sex. It is an *umbrella* term, and it includes the occult. [It also includes, for that matter, contraception.](#)

Role playing games as I have played them offer a weaker form of the same drug: it lets you override the Providence of [God the Spiritual Father's](#) decisions about where you are and what circumstances you are in. Magic is not content with grounding. It wants to circumvent or override what nature is and how it normally works, and it is a step into a smaller world. The fact that some people go mad after practicing the occult stems from a fissure that began, perhaps, with seeking to do things by magic. Seeking power to correct what God did wrong is wrong whether it is done in gender reassignment surgery or occult practice.

I have long been drawn to the occult, and lust, and they have both seemed like innocent things I should not be denied. However, those who have their heads clear of the siren songs see something very different with harmony with God and nature in occult endeavor. And those people closest to God (and with Him, nature) find magic an abomination. On this point I trust them.

“More evil than Satan himself”

Some years back, some people [Google bombed](#) so that the #1 organic search result for “more evil than Satan himself” was Microsoft’s homepage. Since then, Google has had hard feelings when Microsoft artificially set Bing’s search for “more evil than Satan himself” to be the number Google is named after, which can be written, as Bing did, “10¹⁰⁰”.

Nazi Germany was wrong because it embraced what seemed one of the most progressive ideas at all time, *eugenics*. Google is not Nazi in any sense, but it has embraced Eugenics 2.0: Transhumanism. While eugenics wanted most people out of the gene pool (more specifically, those who were not Aryans, and Aryans who were not enough of a perfect specimen), transhumanism wants everybody out of the gene pool: phasing out the entire human race itself, in favor of the kind of technological creation I critiqued in [AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics](#).

Amazon has been critiqued; it wants to destroy paper booksellers, and it is another terrible megacorporation. ~~FaceesBook~~ FaceBook is just as bad. All the megacorporations I’ve really heard research on, from Apple to Wal-Mart, are in their own way the N.I.C.E. that is the corporate villain-figure in [That Hideous Strength](#). It is essentially non-optional to patronize N.I.C.E.s, and I say that as an author with books on Amazon. Kindle books are there because Amazon wants to phase out printed books.

All this is true, but we are advised to take a cue from another powerhouse brand: **“Don’t be too proud of this technological terror you’ve constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force.”**

Are we in the end times?

I believe that we are in the end times, but figuring out when Christ will return remains completely off-limits.

Eastern Orthodoxy affirms the Incarnation in all its sundry implications, and that is why an icon of Christ, perhaps with the Theotokos, is the best possible picture an Orthodox Christian can have: witness the Orthodox love of icons.

Islam categorically denies the Incarnation in all its sundry implications, and that is why an a picture of Mohammed is the worst possible picture to a Muslim: witness the Danish cartoons.

The earliest I can remember reading someone saying that the Second Coming is immanent is not St. John Chrysostom; it is the Apostle. You may think St. Nilus's eschatological prophecies were wrongly grasped in the mid-twentieth century; but here we are 70 years later, and we've been hit by a stronger dose, but the times and dates God intends are still beyond us. I believe we are in the end times, and I do not feel qualified to contradict that people are throwing things at the wall and seeing if it will stick, to pave the way for the Antichrist. Some people have said that the Antichrist will be a Muslim. I don't know if this is prophecy or mere rumor, but St. John the Evangelist's definition of being an anti-Christ is denying that Jesus came in the flesh, and [Islam works out on a capital scale what you get if you take Christianity and you systematically remove all trace of the Incarnation.](#) Furthermore, there are, I have heard, over a hundred organizations trying to establish a world Muslim Caliphate. *I don't know whether I will die, or be alive when Christ comes, but my obligation is the same in either case.*

Conclusion: “Hogwarts for Hackers”—*Wired*

Wired ran a piece on the [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#) as [Hogwarts for Hackers](#). [I spent way too much time reading Arthurian legends](#), and at [IMSA](#), I had barely opened a page of Arthurian legends (I remember the spelling “swerde” for “sword,” and I was not then a philologist), and one of the Class of 1992’s senior class awards was apparently made for me: “Most likely to be on IMSAsun [*the Unix social network I administered*] in the year 2020.” The award was given to me as *Jonathan “Merlin” Hayward*, as I was then much drawn to the character of Merlin, and it was immortalized in my senior award.

(I remember one time when I was a student, someone asked if I was the local “Unix wizard,” and when I showed extreme hesitance, a much-loved alum, Scott Swanson, answered, “Yes.” And in fact I was, at [IMSA](#), a 15 year old Unix system administrator. And I have in fact long traded in a power that is not considered literal wizardry but seems enmeshed in magical metaphor; I have traded in what is called “intuitive thinking” and “intuitive feeling” exercise of power, even if exercise of the latter power does not come across as an exercise of power. “The longest journey we will ever take is the journey from our head to our heart,” and I have found something liberating in letting go of some of my “intuitive thinking” power.)

Now, however, I am hoping that my senior award, most likely to be on an early social network in 2020, might not quite come true. Already I use social media mainly for occasional announcements, and not of my breakfast. I would like to be a monastic novice using the Internet only as blessed by an abbot, [and repenting from a desire for power that would break rules in the natural order God provided for our good](#): for magic (and to some degree other sins) is an attempt to cheat and overpower what God has given.

I am puzzled, personally, that *Wired* gave press coverage for someone who edited the source to be a better “DikuLOSER” (as the term for DikuMUD players was when I was at IMSA). I also edited the source

code there, for my favorite game, in the same computer language, but I don't particularly think it merits at least positive attention. But [Avery Coonley School](#) and the [Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy](#) represent a starting point in a strong identification with mathematics (I ranked 7th in the nation in a math contest as a kid), to being a Renaissance man in an almost classical style, to (God willing) making the journey from my head to my heart, and repenting before and in monastic repentance. I would say that I want with all my heart to go to Kursk Root Hermitage, but that is not quite true. My deepest will is to do as God wills, and seeking monasticism wholeheartedly is the step of obedience I make in pursuit of that goal. I am seeking that self-transcendent theosis or divinisation that is alike the goal of marriage and monasticism, in whatever form God wills.

I am trying to reach a monastery. [Would you can help me?](#)

Within the Steel Orb

The car pulled up on the dark cobblestones and stopped by the darker castle. The vehicle was silver-grey, low to the ground, and sleek. A —let us call him a man—opened the driver's door on the right, and stood up, tall, dark, clad in a robe the color of the sky at midnight. Around the car he went, opened the door for his passenger, and once the passenger stepped out, made one swift motion and had two bags on his shoulder. The bags were large, but he moved as if he were accustomed to carrying far heavier fare. It was starlight out, and the moon was visible as moonlight rippled across a pool.

The guest reached for the bags. "Those are heavy. Let me—"

The host smiled darkly. "Do not worry about the weight of your bags."

The host opened a solid greyblack door, of unearthly smoothness, and walked swiftly down a granite hallway, allowing his guest to follow. "You've had a long day. Let me get you something to drink." He turned a door, poured something into two iridescent titanium mugs, and turned through another corridor and opened a door on its side. Inside the room were two deep armchairs and a low table.

"This is my first time traveling between worlds—how am I to address you?"

The host smiled. "Why do you wish to know more of my name? It is

enough for you to call me Oinos. Please enjoy our welcome."

The guest sipped his drink. "Cider?"

The host said, "You may call it that; it is a juice, which has not had artificial things done to make it taste like it just came out of its fruit regardless of how much it should have aged by the time you taste it. It is juice where time has been allowed to do its work." He was holding a steel orb. "You are welcome here, Art." Then—he barely seemed to move—there was a spark, and Oinos pulled a candle from the wall and set it on the table.

Art said, "Why not a fluorescent light to really light the room up?"

The host said, "For the same reason that you either do not offer your guests mocha at all, or else give them real mocha and not a mix of hot water, instant coffee, and hot cocoa powder. In our world, we can turn the room bright as day any time, but we do not often do so."

"Aah. We have a lot to learn from you about getting back to nature."

"Really? What do you mean by 'getting back to nature'? What do you do to try to 'get back to nature'?"

"Um, I don't know what to really do. Maybe try to be in touch with the trees, not being cooped up inside all the time, if I were doing a better job of it..."

"If that is getting back in touch with nature, then we pay little attention to getting in touch with nature. And nature, as we understand it, is about something fundamentally beyond dancing on hills or sitting and watching waves. I don't criticize you if you do them, but there is really something more. And I can talk with you about drinking juice without touching the natural processes that make cider or what have you, and I can talk with you about natural cycles and why we don't have imitation daylight any time it would seem convenient. But I would like you to walk away with something more, and more interesting, than how we keep technology from being too disruptive to natural processes. That isn't really the point. It's almost what you might call a side effect."

"But you do an awfully impressive job of putting technology in its place and not getting too involved with it."

Oinos said, "Have you had enough chance to stretch out and rest and quench your thirst? Would you like to see something?"

"Yes."

Oinos stood, and led the way down some stairs to a room that seemed to be filled with odd devices. He pushed some things aside, then walked up to a device with a square in the center, and pushed one side. Chains and gears moved, and another square replaced it.

"This is my workshop, with various items that I have worked on. You can come over here and play with this little labyrinth; it's not completely working, but you can explore it if you take the time to figure it out. Come on over. It's what I've been working on most recently."

Art looked around, somewhat amazed, and walked over to the 'labyrinth.'

Oinos said, "In your world, in classical Greek, the same word, 'techne,' means both 'art' and 'technology.' You misunderstand my kindred if you think we aren't especially interested in technology; we have a great interest in technology, as with other kinds of art. But just as you can travel a long distance to see the Mona Lisa without needing a mass-produced Mona Lisa to hang in your bathroom, we enjoy and appreciate technologies without making them conveniences we need to have available every single day."

Art pressed a square and the labyrinth shifted. "Have I come here to see technologies?"

Oinos paused. "I would not advise it. You see our technologies, or how we use them, because that is what you are most ready to see. Visitors from some other worlds hardly notice them, even if they are astonished when they are pointed out."

Art said, "Then why don't we go back to the other room?"

Oinos turned. "Excellent." They went back, and Art sat down in his chair.

Art, after a long pause, said, "I still find it puzzling why, if you appreciate technology, you don't want to have more of it."

Oinos said, "Why do you find it so puzzling?"

"Technology *does* seem to add a lot to the body."

"That is a very misleading way to put it. The effect of most technologies that you think of as adding to the body is in fact to undercut the body. The technologies that you call 'space-conquering' might be appropriately called 'body-conquering.'"

"So the telephone is a body-conquering device? Does it make my body less real?"

"Once upon a time, long ago from your perspective, news and information could not really travel faster than a person could travel. If you were talking with a person, that person had to be pretty close, and it was awkward and inconvenient to communicate with those who were far away. That meant that the people you talked with were probably people from your local community."

"So you were deprived of easy access to people far away?"

"Let me put it this way. It mattered where you were, meaning where your body was. Now, on the telephone, or instant messages, or the web, nothing and no one is really anywhere, and that means profound things for what communities are. And are not. You may have read about 'close-knit rural communities' which have become something exotic and esoteric to most of your world's city dwellers... but when space conquering technologies had not come in, and another space-conquering technology, modern roads allowing easy moving so that people would have to say goodbye to face-to-face friendships every few years... It's a very different way of relating. A close-knit rural community is exotic to you because it is a body-based community in ways that tend not to

happen when people make heavy use of body-conquering, or space-conquering, or whatever you want to call them, technologies."

"But isn't there more than a lack of technologies to close-knit communities?"

"Yes, indeed... but... spiritual discipline is about much more than the body, but a lot of spiritual discipline can only shape people when people are running into the body's limitations. The disciplines—worship, prayer, fasting, silence, almsgiving, and so on—only mean something if there are bodily limits you are bumping into. If you can take a pill that takes away your body's discomfort in fasting, or standing through worship, then the body-conquering technology of that pill has cut you off from the spiritual benefit of that practice."

"Aren't spiritual practices about more than the body?"

"Yes indeed, but you won't get there if you have something less than the body."

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its

effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? Or, better, Python with numpy and scipy enabled? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even them most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

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"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the minute difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A *mosquito*? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to

depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Would you explain relativity to me so that I can discuss its implications?"

"I really think there might be more productive ways to use your visit."

"But you have a scientist's understanding of relativity."

"I am not sure I'd say that."

"Why? You seem to understand relativity a lot more like a scientist than I do."

"Let's talk about biology for a moment. Do you remember the theory of spontaneous generation? You know, the theory that life just emerges from appropriate material?"

"I think so."

"But your world's scientists haven't believed in spontaneous generation since over a century before you were born. Why would you be taught that theory—I'm assuming you learned this in a science class and not digging into history?"

"My science course explained the theory in covering historical background, even though scientists no longer believe that bread spontaneously generates mold."

"Let me ask what may seem like a non-sequitur. I assume you're familiar with people who are working to get even more of religion taken out of public schools?"

"Yes."

"They are very concerned about official prayers at school events, right? About having schools endorse even the occasional religious practice?"

"Yes."

"Ok. Let me ask what may seem like a strange question. Have these 'separation of Church and state' advocates also advocated that geometry be taken out of the classroom?"

Art closed his eyes, and then looked at Oinos as if he had two heads. "It seems you don't know everything about my world."

"I don't. But please understand that geometry did not originate as a secular technical practice. You might have heard this mentioned. Geometry began its life as a 'sacred science,' or a religious practice, and to its founders the idea that geometry does not have religious content would have struck them as worse than saying that prayer does not have religious content."

"Ok, I think I remember that being mentioned. So to speak, my math teacher taught about geometry the 'sacred science' the way that my biology teacher taught about the past theory of spontaneous generation."

Oinos focused his eyes on Art. "In our schools, and in our training, physics, biology, and chemistry are 'taught' as 'secular sciences' the same way, in your school, spontaneous generation is taught as 'past science', or even better, the 'sacred science' of geometry is 'taught' in the course of getting on to a modern understanding of geometry."

Art said, "So the idea that the terrain we call 'biology' is to you—"

Oinos continued: "As much something peered at through a glass bell as the idea that the terrain of regular polygons belongs to a secularized mathematics."

"What is a sacred science?"

Oinos sat back. "If a science is about understanding something as

self-contained whose explanations do not involve God, and it is an attempt to understand as physics understand, and the scientist understands as a detached observer, looking in through a window, then you have a secular science—the kind that reeks of the occult to us. Or that may sound strange, because in your world people proclaiming sacred sciences are proclaiming the occult. But let me deal with that later. A sacred science does not try to understand objects as something that can be explained without reference to God. A sacred science is first and foremost about God, not about objects. When it understands objects, it understands them out of God, and tries to see God shining through them. A sacred science has its home base in the understanding of God, not of inanimate matter, and its understanding of things bears the imprint of God. If you want the nature of its knowing in an image, do not think of someone looking in and observing, detached, through a window, but someone drinking something in."

"Is everything a sacred science to you? And what is a sacred science? Astrology?"

"Something like that, except that I use the term 'sacred science' by way of accommodation. Our own term is one that has no good translation in your language. But let us turn to the stars."

"Astrology is right in this: a star is more than a ball of plasma. Even in the Bible there is not always such a distinction between the ranks of angels and the stars as someone raised on materialist science might think." He rose, and began to walk, gesturing for Art to follow him. In the passage, they turned and entered a door. Oinos lit a lamp next to an icon on the wall.

The icon looked like starlight. It showed angels praying at the left, and then the studded sapphiric canopy of the night sky behind a land with herbs shooting from the earth, and on the right an immense Man—if he was a Man—standing, his hand raised in benediction. All around the sapphire dome were some majestic figures, soaring aloft in two of their six wings. Art paused to drink it in.

"What are those symbols?"

"They are Greek letters. You are looking at an icon of the creation of the stars, but the text is not the text for that day; it is from another book, telling of the angels thunderously shouting for joy when the stars were created. So the stars are connected with the angels."

"Is this astrology?"

"No, because the stars and angels both point to God. The influences in astrology point beyond matter to something else, but they do not point far enough beyond themselves. If you can use something to make a forecast that way, it doesn't point far enough beyond itself."

"Why not?"

"One definition to distinguish religion from magic—one used by anthropologists—is that religion is trying to come into contact with the divine, and magic is trying to control the divine. God cannot be controlled, and there is something of control in trying to foretell a future that God holds in mystery. A real God cannot be pried into by a skill. Astrology departs from a science that can only see stars as so much plasma, but it doesn't go far enough to lead people to look into the stars and see a shadow of their Creator. To be a sacred science, it is not enough to point to something more than matter as secular science understands it; as the term is used in our language, one can only be a *sacred* science by pointing to God."

"Then what is a sacred science? Which branches of learning as you break them up? Can they even be translated into my language?"

"You seem to think that if astrology is not a sacred science then sacred sciences must be something much more hidden. Not so. Farming is a sacred science, as is hunting, or inventing, or writing. When a monk makes incense, it is not about how much incense he can make per unit of time; his making incense is the active part of living contemplatively, and his prayer shows itself in physical labor. His act is more than material production; it is a sacred science, or sacred art or sacred endeavor, and what goes into and what comes out of the activity is prayer. Nor is it simply a matter that he is praying while he acts; his prayers matter for the incense. There are many lands from your world's Desert Fathers to

incense. There are many lands from your world's Desert Fathers to Mexico in your own day where people have a sense that it matters what state people cook in, and that cooking with love puts something into a dish that no money can buy. Perhaps you will not look at me askance when I say that not only monks in their monasteries exotically making incense for worship are performing a sacred science, but cooking, for people who may be low on the totem pole and who are not considered exotic, as much as for anyone else, can and should be a sacred science. Like the great work that will stay up with a sick child all night."

"Hmm..." Art said, and then finished his tankard. "Have you traveled much?"

"I have not reached one in five of the galaxies with inhabited worlds. I can introduce you to people who have some traveling experience, but I am not an experienced traveler. Still, I have met sites worth visiting. I have met, learned, worshiped. Traveling in this castle I have drunk the blood of gems. There are worlds where there is nothing to see, for all is music, and song does everything that words do for you. I have beheld a star as it formed, and I have been part of an invention that moves forward as a thousand races in their laboratories add their devices. I have read books, and what is more I have spoken with members of different worlds and races. There seems to be no shortage of wonders, and I have even been to your own world, with people who write fantasy that continues to astonish us—"

"My son-in-law is big into fantasy—he got me to see a Lord of the whatever-it-was movie—but I don't fancy them much myself."

"We know about Tolkein, but he is not considered a source of astonishing fantasy to us."

"Um..." Art took a long time to recall a name, and Oinos waited patiently. "Lewis?"

"If you're looking for names you would have heard of, Voltaire and Jung are two of the fantasy authors we consider essential. Tolkein and Lewis are merely imaginative. It is Voltaire and Jung who are truly fantasy authors. But there are innumerable others in your world."

Art said, "Um... what do you mean by 'fantasy author'?"

Oinos turned. "I'm sorry; there is a discrepancy between how your language uses 'fantasy author' and ours. We have two separate words that your 'fantasy' translates, and the words stand for very different concepts. One refers to works of imagination that are set in another world that is not confused with reality. The other refers to a fundamental confusion that can cost a terrible price. Our world does not produce fiction; we do appreciate the fiction of other worlds, but we do not draw a particularly strong line between fiction where only the characters and events are imagined, and fiction where the whole world is imagined. But we do pay considerable attention to the second kind of fantasy, and our study of fantasy authors is not a study of imagination but a study of works that lead people into unreality. 'Fantasy author' is one of the more important terms in understanding your world and its history."

Art failed to conceal his reaction.

"Or perhaps I was being too blunt. But, unfashionable as it may be, there is such a thing as evil in your world, and the ways in which people live, including what they believe, has something to do with it. Not everything, but something."

Oinos waited for a time. Then, when Art remained silent, he said, "Come with me. I have something to show you." He opened a door on the other side of the room, and went into the next room. The room was lit by diffuse moonlight, and there was a ledge around the room and water which Oinos stirred with his hand to light a phosphorescent glow. When Art had stepped in, Oinos stepped up, balancing on a steel cable, and stood silent for a while. "Is there anything here that you can focus on?"

"What do you mean?"

"Step up on this cable and take my hand."

"What if I fall into the water?"

Art tried to balance, but it seemed even more difficult in the dark.

For a while, he tried to keep his balance with Oinos's help, but he seemed barely up. He overcompensated twice in opposite directions, began flying into the water, and was stopped at last by Oinos's grip, strong as steel, on his arm.

"I can't do this," Art said.

"Very well." Oinos opened a door on the other side of the room, and slowly led him out. As they walked, Oinos started up a spiral staircase and sat down to rest after Art reached the top. Then Art looked up at the sky, and down to see what looked like a telescope.

"What is it?"

"A telescope, not too different from those of your world."

Oinos stood up, looked at it, and began some adjustments. Then he called Art over, and said, "Do you see that body?"

"What is it?"

"A small moon."

Oinos said, "I want you to look at it as closely as you can," and then pulled something on the telescope.

"It's moving out of sight."

"That's right; I just deactivated the tracking feature. You should be able to feel handles; you can move the telescope with them."

"Why do I need to move the telescope? Is the moon moving?"

"This planet is rotating: what the telescope sees will change as it rotates with the planet, and on a telescope you can see the rotation."

Art moved the handles and found that it seemed either not to move at all or else move a lot when he put pressure on it.

Art said, "This is a hard telescope to control."

Oinos said, "The telescope is worth controlling."

"Can you turn the tracking back on?"

Oinos merely repeated, "The telescope is worth controlling."

The celestial body had moved out of view. Art made several movements, barely passed over the moon, and then found it. He tried to see what he could, then give a relatively violent shove when the moon reached the edge of his field of view, and see if he could observe the body that way. After several tries, he began to get the object consistently in view... and found that he was seeing the same things about it, not being settled enough between jolts to really focus on what was there.

Art tried to make a smooth, slow movement with his body, and found that a much taller order than it sounded. His movement, which he could have sworn was gentle and smooth, produced what seemed like erratic movement, and it was only with greatest difficulty that he held the moon in view.

"Is this badly lubricated? Or do you have lubrication in this world?"

"We do, on some of our less precise machines. This telescope is massive, but it's not something that moves roughly when it is pushed smoothly; the joints move so smoothly that putting oil or other lubricants that are familiar to you would make them move much more roughly."

"Then why is it moving roughly every time I push it smoothly?"

"Maybe you aren't pushing it as smoothly as you think you are?"

Art pushed back his irritation, and then found the moon again. And found, to his dismay, that when the telescope jerked, he had moved the slightest amount unevenly.

Art pushed observation of the moon to the back of his mind. He wanted to move the telescope smoothly enough that he wouldn't have to keep finding the moon again. After a while, he found that this was less

difficult than he thought, and tried for something harder: keeping the moon in the center of what he could see in the telescope.

He found, after a while, that he could keep the moon in the center if he tried, and for periods was able to manage something even harder: keeping the moon from moving, or perhaps just moving slowly. And then, after a time, he found himself concentrating through the telescope on taking in the beauty of the moon.

It was breathtaking, and Art later could never remember a time he had looked on something with quite that fascination.

Then Art realized he was exhausted, and began to sit down; Oinos pulled him to a bench.

After closing his eyes for a while, Art said, "This was a magnificent break from your teaching."

"A break from teaching? What would you mean?"

Art sat, opened his mouth, and then closed it. After a while, he said, "I was thinking about what you said about fantasy authors... do you think there is anything that can help?"

Oinos said, "Let me show you." He led Art into a long corridor with smooth walls and a round arch at top. A faint blue glow followed them, vanishing at the edges. Art said, "Do you think it will be long before our world has full artificial intelligence?"

Oinos said, "Hmm... Programming artificial intelligence on a computer is not *that* much more complex than getting a stone to lay an egg."

Art said, "But our scientists are making progress. Your advanced world has artificial intelligence, right?"

Oinos said, "Why on earth would we be able to do that? Why would that even be a goal?"

"You have computers, right?"

you have computers, right?

"Yes, indeed; the table that I used to call up a scientific calculator works on the same principle as your world's computers. I could almost say that inventing a new kind of computer is a rite of passage among serious inventors, or at least that's the closest term your world would have."

"And your computer science is pretty advanced, right? Much more advanced than ours?"

"We know things that the trajectory of computer science in your world will never reach because it is not pointed in the right direction." Oinos tapped the wall and arcs of pale blue light spun out.

"Then you should be well beyond the point of making artificial intelligence."

"Why on a million, million worlds should we ever be able to do that? Or even think that is something we *could* accomplish?"

"Well, if I can be obvious, the brain is a computer, and the mind is its software."

"Is it?"

"What else could the mind be?"

"What else could the mind be? What about an altar at which to worship? A workshop? A bridge between Heaven and earth, a meeting place where eternity meets time? A treasury in which to gather riches? A spark of divine fire? A line in a strong grid? A river, ever flowing, ever full? A tree reaching to Heaven while its roots grasp the earth? A mountain made immovable for the greatest storm? A home in which to live and a ship by which to sail? A constellation of stars? A temple that sanctifies the earth? A force to draw things in? A captain directing a starship or a voyager who can travel without? A diamond forged over aeons from of old? A perpetual motion machine that is simply impossible but functions anyway? A faithful manuscript by which an ancient book passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind

passes on? A showcase of holy icons? A mirror, clear or clouded? A wind which can never be pinned down? A haunting moment? A home with which to welcome others, and a mouth with which to kiss? A strand of a web? An acrobat balancing for his whole life long on a slender crystalline prism between two chasms? A protecting veil and a concealing mist? An eye to glimpse the uncreated Light as the world moves on its way? A rift yawning into the depths of the earth? A kairometer, both primeval and young? A—"

"All right, all right! I get the idea, and that's some pretty lovely poetry. (What's a kairometer?) These are all very beautiful metaphors for the mind, but I am interested in what the mind is literally."

"Then it might interest you to hear that your world's computer is also a metaphor for the mind. A good and poetic metaphor, perhaps, but a metaphor, and one that is better to balance with other complementary metaphors. It is the habit of some in your world to understand the human mind through the metaphor of the latest technology for you to be infatuated with. Today, the mind is a computer, or something like that. Before you had the computer, 'You're just wired that way' because the brain or the mind or whatever is a wired-up telephone exchange, the telephone exchange being your previous object of technological infatuation, before the computer. Admittedly, 'the mind is a computer' is an attractive metaphor. But there is some fundamental confusion in taking *that* metaphor literally and assuming that, since the mind is a computer, all you have to do is make some more progress with technology and research and you can give a computer an intelligent mind."

"I know that computers don't have emotions yet, but they seem to have rationality down cold."

"Do they?"

"Are you actually going to tell me that computers, with their math and logic, aren't rational?"

"Let me ask you a question. Would you say that the thing you can hold, a thing that you call a book, can make an argument?"

"Yes; I've seen some pretty good ones."

"Really? How do paper and ink think out their position?"

Art hesitated, and said, "Um, if you're going to nitpick..."

"I'm not nitpicking. A book is a tool of intelligent communication, and they are part of how people read author's stories, or explanation of how to do things, or poetry, or ideas. But the physical thing is not thereby intelligent. However much you think of a book as making an argument, the book is incapable of knowing what an argument is, and for that matter the paper and ink have no idea of whether they contain the world's best classic, or something mediocre, or incoherent accusations that world leaders are secretly planning to turn your world to dog drool, or randomly generated material that is absolute gibberish. The book may be meaningful to you, but the paper with ink on it is not the sort of thing that can understand what you recognize through the book.

"This might ordinarily be nitpicking, but it says something important about computers. One of the most difficult things for computer science instructors in your world to pound through people's heads is that a computer does not get the gist of what you are asking it to do and overlook minor mistakes, because the computer has no sense of what you are doing and no way to discern what were trying to get it to do from a mistake where you wrote in a bug by telling it to do something slightly different from what you meant. The computer has no sense that a programmer meant anything. A computer follows instructions, one after another, whether or not they make sense, and indeed without being able to wonder whether they make sense. To you, a program may be a tool that acts as an electronic shopping cart to let you order things through the web, but the web server no more understands that it is being used as a web server than a humor book understands that it is meant to make people laugh. Now most or all of the books you see are meant to say something—there's not much market for a paperback volume filled with random gibberish—but a computer can't understand that it is running a program written for a purpose any more than a book can understand that the ink on its pages is intended for people to read."

Art said, "You don't think artificial intelligence is making real

Art said, "You don't think artificial intelligence is making real progress? They seem to keep making new achievements."

Oinos said, "The rhetoric of 'We're making real breakthroughs now; we're on the verge of full artificial intelligence, and with what we're achieving, full artificial intelligence is just around the corner' is not new: people have been saying that full artificial intelligence is just around the corner since before you were born. But *breeding a better and better kind of apple tree is not progress towards growing oranges*. Computer science, and not just artificial intelligence, has gotten good at getting computers to function better as computers. But human intelligence is something else... and it is profoundly missing the point to only realize that the computer is missing a crucial ingredient of the most computer-like activity of human rational analysis. Even if asking a computer to recognize a program's purpose reflects a fundamental error—you're barking up the wrong telephone pole. Some people from your world say that when you have a hammer, everything begins to look like a nail. The most interesting thing about the mind is not that it can do something more complete when it pounds in computer-style nails. It's something else entirely."

"But what?"

"When things are going well, the 'computer' that performs calculating analysis is like your moon: a satellite, that reflects light from something greater. Its light is useful, but there is something more to be had. The sun, as it were, is that the mind is like an altar, or even something better. It takes long struggles and work, but you need to understand that the heart of the mind is at once practical and spiritual, and that its greatest fruit comes not in speech but in silence."

Art was silent for a long time.

Oinos stopped, tapped a wall once, and waited as an opening appeared in the black stone. Inside an alcove was a small piece of rough hewn obsidian; Oinos reached in, took it, and turned it to reveal another side, finely machined, with a series of concentric ridged grooves centered around a tiny niche. "You asked what a kairometer was, and this is a kairometer, although it would take you some time to understand exactly

what it is."

"Is it one of the other types of computers in your world?"

"Yes. I would call it information technology, although not like the information technology you know. It is something people come back to, something by which people get something more than they had, but it does this not so much according to its current state as to our state in the moment we are using it. It does not change." Oinos placed the object in Art's hands.

Art slowly turned it. "Will our world have anything like this?"

Oinos took the kairometer back and returned it to its niche; when he withdrew his hand, the opening closed with a faint whine. "I will leave you to find that yourself."

Oinos began walking, and they soon reached the end of the corridor. Art followed Oinos through the doorway at the end and gasped.

Through the doorway was something that left Art trying to figure out whether or not it was a room. It was a massive place, lit by a crystalline blue light. As Art looked around, he began to make sense of his surroundings: there were some bright things, lower down, in an immense room with rounded arches and a dome at the top, made of pure glass. Starlight streamed in. Art stepped through the doorway and sunk down a couple of inches.

Oinos stooped for a moment, and then said, "Take off your shoes. They are not needed here." Art did so, and found that he was walking on a floor of velveteen softness. In the far heart of the room a thin plume of smoke arose. Art could not tell whether he smelled a fragrance, but he realized there was a piercing chant. Art asked, "What is the chant saying?"

Oinos did not answer.

What was the occasion? Art continued to look, to listen, and began trying to drink it in. It almost sounded as if they were preparing to receive

a person of considerable importance. There was majesty in the air.

Oinos seemed to have slipped away.

Art turned and saw an icon behind him, hanging on the glass. There was something about it he couldn't describe. The icon was dark, and the colors were bright, almost luminous. A man lay dreaming at the bottom, and something reached up to a light hidden in the clouds—was it a ladder? Art told himself the artistic effect was impressive, but there was something that seemed amiss in that way of looking at it.

What bothered him about saying the icon had good artistic effect? Was the artistry bad? That didn't seem to be it. He looked at a couple of areas of artistic technique, but it was difficult to do so; such analysis felt like a foreign intrusion. He thought about his mood, but that seemed to be the wrong place to look, and almost the same kind of intrusion. There seemed to be something shining through the icon; looking at it was like other things he had done in this world, only moreso. He was looking through the icon and not around it, but... Art had some sense of what it was, but it was not something he could fit into words.

After being absorbed in the icon, Art looked around. There must have been hundreds of icons around, and lights, and people; he saw what seemed like a sparse number of people—of Oinos's kind—spread out through the vast space. There was a chant of some kind that changed from time to time, but seemed to somehow be part of the same flow. Things seemed to move very slowly—or move in a different time, as if clock time were turned on its side, or perhaps as if he had known clock time as it was turned on its side and now it was right side up—but Art never had the sense of nothing going on. There seemed to always be something more going on than he could grasp.

Art shifted about, having stood for what seemed like too long, sat down for a time, and stood up. The place seemed chaotic, in a way cluttered, yet when he looked at the "clutter," there was something shining through, clean as ice, majestic as starlight, resonant as silence, full of life as the power beneath the surface of a river, and ordered with an order that no rectangular grid could match. He did not understand any of

the details of the brilliant dazzling darkness... but they spoke to him none the less.

After long hours of listening to the chant, Art realized with a start that the fingers of dawn had stolen all around him, and he saw stone and verdant forest about the glass walls until the sunlight began to blaze. He thought, he though he could understand the song even as its words remained beyond his reach, and he wished the light would grow stronger so he could see more. There was a crescendo all about him, and—

Oinos was before him. Perhaps for some time.

"I almost understand it," Art said. "I have started to taste this world."

Oinos bowed deeply. "It is time for you to leave."

Doxology

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

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

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

OF DIVINED MEN JOINING TALK OF TALK OF ANGELS.

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

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

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

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

Whilst remaining the only one god.

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

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

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

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

In a seed.

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

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

Let our spiritual eye be ever transfixed upon thine eternal radiant

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

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

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

Αμην,
So be it. Amen.

Why We Should Believe in Hell

We live in an age where we wish that all should be saved; universalism is “in the air,” and every recent treatment I am aware of Hell being treated by an Orthodox author today, the author does not deny the doctrine of Hell, but none the less wishes to do so. Universalism is “in the air” both inside and outside of Orthodoxy (I think it’s a likely import to Orthodoxy), and the telling of a title is telling: Han Urs von Balthasar’s [Dare We Hope that All Men Be Saved?](#) does not deny that people will go to Hell, but it wishes to do so. And on that topic I remember a homiletic comment I heard some twenty years back, about hoping that all would be saved: “Hope it all you want! *But don’t preach it.*”

I might briefly comment that one author in the *Philokalia* says that we owe more to Hell than Heaven, because more people have been saved through fear of Hell’s torments than through desire of Heaven’s bliss [even if the latter infinitely outclass the former]. I know I owe a lot to the fear of Hell and the desire for a better balance sheet come Judgment.

Doctrine of God

In the interests of doing more than just stitch together a couple of quotations from previous blog posts, I would like to comment on what in formal academic language is called “doctrine of God,” and studies one angle of the One God in a way that is a mutual counterbalance to studying the persons of the Trinity.

In what may be the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy, Anselm of Canterbury defines God to be that which is greater than anything else that can be thought [and is also greater than can be thought]. To exist in reality is greater than to exist only in thought, and so it would be a contradiction for the God who is greater than anything else that can be thought to only exist in people’s minds. (And if you’ve just come up with a counterargument to say that the same implies there must be an ultimate tropical island that rains Champagne and has filet mignon and lobster grow on trees, [your objection and argument has been raised by one of Anselm’s contemporaries and refuted by Anselm.](#))

I personally do not accept this argument, although I am not interested in explaining why. What I *am* interested in is that Anselm is starting with the Christian God. Until you have seen why, it sounds odd that theologians deny that God is the largest element within a larger system, or that God is an instance of a class. It’s a bit slippery *what* is being asserted and/or denied, and even more slippery *why*. But there is a great deal to be said about doctrine of God, and I would dip into it with a joke.

There were four rabbis who were discussing Torah, and as was usual among them the three agreed on something and overruled the odd man out. They always said, “See? It’s three against one.”

One day the odd man out had enough, and he began to pray, “Show them that I am right,” and all of a sudden there was a soft rumble of thunder.

The odd rabbi out said, “So?”

The other three said, “That’s striking, but it doesn’t prove you’re right. It’s still three against one.”

The rabbi prayed, “G-d, I’ve given you so much and I’ve asked for so little. Please give them a sign that I’m right.”

When he finished praying, there was much louder thunder, and a small cloud appeared in the sky. He looked at the other rabbis, but they only said, “It’s still three against one.”

Then the lone rabbi knelt down, was able to pray just, “G-d, I—” when before his knee could even touch the ground, clouds suddenly filled the sky, a bolt of lightning struck a nearby tree, there was a thunderous earthquake, and a deep, booming voice thundered, **“He’s right!”**

The lone rabbi looked at the others and said, “Well? Are you still going to deny it?”

The others said, “So what? It’s still three against two.”

The point of this scandalous joke is not just that when God has spoken, a discussion is over. It is that the Oneness of God is not the same as creaturely oneness; it can’t be added like we count physical objects. Saying “It’s still three against two” is at its core strict idolatry, because asserting One God is fundamentally beyond asserting that there happens to be one book on a shelf. [Doxology asserts a monotheism that is more thorough than Islam; a monotheism that is large enough to be threatened neither by the non-numerical three persons in the Trinity, nor by faithful being made divine.](#)

Recognizing an exception as an exception

And on this point I would like to point to something exceptional as something exceptional in Orthodox classics. The Our Father is understood to be a particularly special, divine prayer, and it is included in the Divine Liturgy after the holy gifts have been consecrated and almost immediately before the Holy Mysteries are received. “Our Father” is understood as tied to theosis, a prayer that belongs *only* to those deified as sons of God. And regarding the words, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us,” St. Maximus Confessor says that we stand before God as moral exemplars to him, and urge him to imitate our own virtue.

This much is legitimate, but it is deliberately striking, and it completely loses its force if the idea of us showing God the nature of virtue is a commonplace cliché. The claim is intended to be shocking, because he assumes his readers know that we don’t know holiness better than God. In the day that he wrote, it was very striking for men to attempt to inform God about the nature of holiness and virtue. In our day, the project is quite common.

On that point, I would like to look at a maxim I propose, 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.

God the Spiritual Father

In [God the Spiritual Father](#), I wrote:

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*.

Voltaire may be right when he explicitly explodes the claim that we live in the best of all possible worlds, but he is wrong when he implicitly fails to draw the readers to a more profound and important truth: *we live in a world governed by the best of all possible Gods*, and this best of all possible Gods cares for us in a way participated in by a spiritual father caring for a spiritual child.

I do not explore the afterlife in [God the Spiritual Father](#), only the present life. *However*, what is asserted of the God who looks over our lives while we are living carries full force after our lives, too: the God who is the best of all possible Gods *before* our death remains the best of all possible Gods to us *after* our death.

One point when I was studying academic theology at Fordham there was a fashionable doctrine that was absolutely *right*. And that is that the freedom we have is not simply an identical and unchanging ability to make unrelated choices; one way to differ is to assert that by each choice we make we are making ourselves one notch more a creature of Heaven, or one notch more a creature of Hell. C.S. Lewis wrote that you can only get to Hell on your own steam, and said that in the end there are two classes of people: those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says, “*Thy* will be done.” Though God may send people to Hell, the image of God sending people to Hell might be counterbalanced by the deeper image of God offering each person, saved and unsaved alike, an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell.

When I wrote the seriously flawed [The Way of the Way](#), years before joining the Orthodox Church, one thing I commented was that to those who hold on to sin, even Heaven would be Hell. I understand that Kalomiros’s [The River of Fire](#) has undergone serious critique, but it is right at least in this: if the damned were to enter Heaven, they would experience Heaven as Hell. In Kalomiros it is said that the fire of Hell is nothing other than the Light of Heaven as experienced through the rejection of the only terms it can be enjoyed.

In this world we have theodicy, difficulty understanding how an absolutely Good God could create a world with suffering. In looking at the next world, the same impulse holds; we want to be exemplars to God in virtue, but I assert that if we wish to change God’s mind, we wish incoherently on several levels.

Suffering for others

In another work I do not wish to name, I wrote,

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

One pastor tried to say this without a laugh, and failed, that he was one place in the American South during a heat wave, and just before elevator doors closed, a jogger stepped in, sweating bullets, and said, "It's hotter than *Hell* out there!" The pastor said, slowly,

"*No. It isn't,*" and crept out everyone else in the elevator. But the damned exist, there is always at least possibility of salvation, God does ever better than they observe, and the damned do one thing that is essential. They provide other people with conflicts that can be part of a saving struggle. And when the Crack of Doom comes those who treat you abusively you will partly answer for your sins in your place. This is first a cause to feel relieved, then giddy, then at least for a moment when the full implications begin to unfold, *pure terror*. **Christ died for your sins, and so did Judas, Arius, Marx, Jung, and Hitler.**

I used to find the close of the Beatitudes sung during the Divine Liturgy hard to accept as real: "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." I found it hard to rejoice at verbal abuse.

Now I find those words difficult in a different way: the [Philokalia](#) briefly, and in a single passage, states that if you mistreat others, you will answer for their sin. I no longer find it so difficult to be glad I have a reward in Heaven, but the hard part now is that recognizing that my own reward comes at a terrible price. However, I trust that in this I am not more loving than God, and how he arranges things is beautiful, and it all fits in God's heart, whether or not it fits in my head.

And this, I think, is the one thing I have going for me compared to Christians who wish they are universalist. It is not whether we would wish the salvation of all; it is whether notions about God that fit in my head are normative for God to reform by. I do not claim a final word on whether all will be saved, but I do suggest a palliative at least that the God who makes the saved co-workers with God and co-heirs with Christ has imbued human nature with a genuine authority to choose between Heaven and Hell, and none arrive in Hell but those who choose it above Heaven.

An Orthodox clergyman said, in another context (namely what happens to us in our days on earth) that we should wish for whatever God

has provided to happen, to be what happens. (In other words, wish for what exists, not what doesn't exist.)

Perhaps this, together with an appreciation of Sovereignty and Mercy being in God one and the same thing, might help us to curb our wishes that God would comply with our universalism.

Unashamed

The day his daughter Abigail was born was the best day of Abraham's life. Like father, like daughter, they said in the village, and especially of them. He was an accomplished musician, and she breathed music.

He taught her a music that was simple, pure, powerful. It had only one voice; it needed only one voice. It moved slowly, unhurriedly, and had a force that was spellbinding. Abraham taught Abigail many songs, and as she grew, she began to make songs of her own. Abigail knew nothing of polyphony, nor of hurried technical complexity; her songs needed nothing of them. Her songs came from an unhurried time out of time, gentle as lapping waves, and mighty as an ocean.

One day a visitor came, a young man in a white suit. He said, "Before your father comes, I would like you to see what you have been missing." He took out a music player, and began to play.

Abby at first covered her ears; she was in turn stunned, shocked, and intrigued. The music had many voices, weaving in and out of each other quickly, intricately. She heard wheels within wheels within wheels within wheels of complexity. She began to try, began to think in polyphony — and the man said, "I will come to you later. It is time for your music with your father."

Every time in her life, sitting down at a keyboard with her father was the highlight of her day. Every day but this day. This day, she could only

think about how simple and plain the music was, how lacking in complexity. Abraham stopped his song and looked at his daughter. "Who have you been listening to, Abigail?"

Something had been gnawing at Abby's heart; the music seemed bleak, grey. It was as if she had beheld the world in fair moonlight, and then a blast of eerie light assaulted her eyes — and now she could see nothing. She felt embarrassed by her music, ashamed to have dared to approach her father with anything so terribly unsophisticated. Crying, she gathered up her skirts and ran as if there were no tomorrow.

Tomorrow came, and the day after; it was a miserable day, after sleeping in a gutter. Abigail began to beg, and it was over a year before another beggar let her play on his keyboard. Abby learned to play in many voices; she was so successful that she forgot that she was missing something. She occupied herself so fully with intricate music that in another year she was asked to give concerts and performances. Her music was rich and full, and her heart was poor and empty.

Years passed, and Abigail gave *the* performance of her career. It was before a sold-out audience, and it was written about in the papers. She walked out after the performance and the reception, with moonlight falling over soft grass and fireflies dancing, and something happened.

Abby heard the wind blowing in the trees.

In the wind, Abigail heard music, and in the wind and the music Abigail heard all the things she had lost in her childhood. It was as if she had looked in an image and asked, "What is that wretched thing?" — and realized she was looking into a mirror. No, it was not quite that; it was as if in an instant her whole world was turned upside down, and her musical complexity she could not bear. She heard all over again the words, "Who have you been listening to?" — only, this time, she did not think them the words of a jealous monster, but words of concern, words of "Who has struck a blow against you?" She saw that she was blind and heard that she was deaf: that the hearing of complexity had not simply been an opening of her ears, but a wounding, a smiting, after which she could not know the concentrated presence a child had known, no matter how complex — or how simple — the music became. The sword cut deeper when she tried

or how simple — the music became. The sword cut deeper when she tried to sing songs from her childhood, at first could remember none, then could remember one — and it sounded empty — and she knew that the song was not empty. It was her. She lay down and wailed.

Suddenly, she realized she was not alone. An old man was watching her. Abigail looked around in fright; there was nowhere to run to hide. "What do you want?" she said.

"There is music even in your wail."

"I loathe music."

There was a time of silence, a time that drew uncomfortably long, and Abigail asked, "What is your name?"

The man said, "Look into my eyes. You know my name."

Abigail stood, poised like a man balancing on the edge of a sword, a chasm to either side. She did not — Abigail shrieked with joy. "*Daddy!*"

"It has been a long time since we've sat down at music, sweet daughter."

"You don't want to hear my music. I was ashamed of what we used to play, and I am now ashamed of it all."

"Oh, child! Yes, I do. *I will never be ashamed of you.* Will you come and walk with me? I have a keyboard."

As Abby's fingers began to dance, she first felt as if she were being weighed in the balance and found wanting. The self-consciousness she had finally managed to banish in her playing was now there — ugly, repulsive — and then she was through it. She made a horrible mistake, and then another, and then laughed, and Abraham laughed with her. Abby began to play and then sing, serious, inconsequential, silly, and delightful in the presence of her father. It was as if shackles fell from her wrists, her tongue loosed — she thought for a moment that she was like a little girl again, playing at her father's side, and then knew that it was better. What could she compare it to? She couldn't. She was at a

better. What could she compare it to? She couldn't. She was at a simplicity beyond complexity, and her father called forth from her music that she could never have done without her trouble. The music seemed like dance, like laughter; it was under and around and through her, connecting her with her father, a moment out of time.

After they had both sung and laughed and cried, Abraham said, "Abby, will you come home with me? My house has never been the same without you."

"A Professional Courtesy to a Fellow Poet," or "Juggling Hot Potatoes," or "Invictus," 2nd Draft

html

[\(See this video on YouTube!\)](#)

"Invictus," *rough draft*:

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears,
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years,
Finds and shall find me unashamed.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate.
I am the captain of my soul.

I therefore wish to extend this classic poem a very minor
professional courtesy:

"Invectiveictus," sent back for revisions and extended some degree of Professional Courtesy

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!

Stephanos

*The crown of Earth is the temple,
and the crown of the temple is Heaven.*

Stephan ran to get away from his pesky sister—if nothing else he could at least outrun her!

Where to go?

One place seemed best, and his legs carried him to the chapel—or, better to say, the temple. The chapel was a building which seemed larger from the inside than the outside, and (though this is less remarkable than it sounds) it is shaped like an octagon on the outside and a cross on the inside.

Stephan slowed down to a walk. This place, so vast and open and full of light on the inside—a mystically hearted architect who read *The Timeless Way of Building* might have said that it breathed—and Stephan did not think of why he felt so much at home, but if he did he would have thought of the congregation worshipping with the skies and the seas, the rocks and the trees, and choir after choir of angels, and perhaps he would have thought of this place not only as a crown to earth but a room of Heaven.

What he was thinking of was the Icon that adorns the Icon stand, and for that matter adorns the whole temple. It had not only the Icons, but the relics of (from left to right) Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint John

Chrysostom, and Saint Basil the Great. His mother had told Stephan that they were very old, and Stephan looked at her and said, "Older than email? Now *that* is old!" She closed her eyes, and when she opened them she smiled. "Older than email," she said, "and electric lights, and cars, and a great many of the kinds of things in our house, and our country, and..." her voice trailed off. He said, "Was it as old as King Arthur?" She said, "It is older than even the tale of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table."

As he had kissed the relics, he had begun to understand that what made them important was something deeper than their old age. But he could not say what.

But now he opened the doors to the temple, smelled the faint but fragrant smell of incense—*frankincense*—and was surprised to see another Icon on the stand. (Oh, wait, he thought. There were frequently other Icons.) The Icon was Saint Mary of Egypt. (This Icon did not have any relics.) He looked at the Icon, and began to look into it. What was her story? He remembered the part of her story he liked best—when, very far from being a saint at the beginning of her life, she came to a church and couldn't go in. An invisible force barred her, and a saint, the Mother of God, spoke to her through an Icon. Stephan vaguely remembered Father saying something about how it was also important how after years of fasting from everything but bread or vegetables, she was discovered but refused to go back to places that would still have been a temptation to her.

She was very gaunt, and yet that gauntness held fierce power. When he had looked into the Icon—or through it, as one looks through a window—he kissed her hand and looked at the royal doors, light doors with a kind of wooden mesh (it was beautiful) and a tower of three Icons each. The royal doors were at the center of the low, open wall that guarded the holy of holies within the temple, a special place crowned by the altar. The top two Icons told the place, not of the Annunciation **to** the Mother of God, but the Annunciation **of** the Mother of God. He looked into the pictures and saw the Annunciation **of** the Mother of God: not when the Archangel said, "Hail, O favored One! The Lord is with you," but when the Virgin listened and replied, "Behold the handmaiden of the

Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word."

The spine of Eve's sin was snapped.

Death and Hell had already begun to crumble.

After looking through these pictures—it was not enough to say that he simply looked at them, though it was hard to explain why—he turned around and was absorbed into the Icon painted as a mural on the sloped ceiling that was now before him.

If that was the answer to Eve's sin, this was the answer to Adam's sin.

The Icon was an Icon the color of sunrise—or was it sunset? Then he saw something he hadn't seen before, even though this was one of his favorite Icons. It was an Icon of the Crucifixion, and he saw Christ at the center with rocks below—obedience in a garden of desolation had answered disobedience in a garden of delights—and beyond the rocks, the Holy City, and beyond the Holy City a sky with bands and whorls of light the color of sunrise. Now he saw for the first time that where Christ's body met the sky there was a band of purest light around it. Christ had a halo that was white at the center and orange and red at the sides—fitting for the Christ who passed through the earth like a flame.

The flame made him think of the God Who Cannot Be Pushed Around. This God sent his Son, who was also the One Who Cannot Be Pushed Around. In his teaching, in his friendship, in his healing the sick and raising the dead, every step he made was a step closer to this, the Cross. And yet he did this willingly.

Stephan turned, and for a moment was drawn to the mural to the right, which was also breathtakingly beautiful. Two women bore myrrh (the oil that newly chrismated Orthodox have just been anointed with) to perform a last service—the last service they could perform—to a dearly loved friend. And yet they found an empty tomb, and a majestic angel announcing news they would not have dared to hope: the Firstborn of the Dead entered death and death could not hold him. Its power had more than begun to crumble. But then Stephan turned back almost sharply

man began to crumble. But then Stephan turned back, almost sharply. Yes, this was glory. This was glory and majesty and beauty. But Stephan was looking for the beginning of triumph...

...and that was right there in the Icon the color of sunrise. The Cross in itself was the victory of the God Who Cannot Be Pushed Around. However much it cost him, he never let go of his plan or his grace. Christ knew he could call for more than twelve legions of angels—but he never did. He walked the path the Father set before him to the very end.

Stephan stood, his whole being transported to the foot of the Cross. However long he spent there he did not know, and I do not know either. He looked through the Icon, and saw—*tasted*—the full victory of the God Who Cannot Be Pushed Around.

When he did look away, it was in the Light of that God. Everything now bore that Light. He went over to the relics of the patron saints of his land, and though they were much newer than the relics of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Saint John Chrysostom, and Saint Basil the Great, that didn't seem to matter. It was like dust from another world—precious grains of sand from Heaven—and the Icon of Saint Herman of Alaska and Saint Innocent holding up a tiny building was richly colorful—"like a rainbow that has grown up," he heard one of the grown-ups say.

Then he walked over to the Icon of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, holding a scroll that was open partway, with his letter to the Romans: "Let me be given to the wild beasts, for by their means I can attain to God. I am God's wheat, and I am being ground by the teeth of the beasts, so that I may an"—but here the quotation stopped, leaving him wondering. That Icon itself was one of several old-looking, yellowed Icons—though not nearly the oldest around—held in a deep, rich brown wooden frame carved with grapevines and bunches of grapes, as many things in that room were carved (though some had intricate interwoven knots). Stephan said, "I want to be a martyr just like you, Saint Ignatius. Pray for me."

Then he walked over to an Icon that was much smaller, but showed a man standing besides a rustic settlement with an outer wall and turrets and doors and buildings inside. It looked medieval to him, and he wished he could enter that world. It was darkened and yellowed and had a gold

leaf sky, and something was written at the top, but he couldn't read it because it was in a very old language: Old Slavonic.

Right by that Icon was Saint Anthony, the father of all monastics. He had a piercing gaze, and Stephan had the feeling he needed to confess something—but he couldn't think of anything besides his bout with his sister, and she had been a pest. He looked away.

Stephan looked at the Icon on the left of the wall, and saw the prince, Saint Vladimir, with buildings and spires behind him that looked like they were having a party.

Then Stephan stood in front of the main Icon of the Mother of God holding God the Son, though he stood some distance back. The background was gold, and this drew him in a different way than the Icon of Saint Vladimir. This more than any other did not work like a photograph. (Or at least he was more aware of this now.) It might look odd to people who were just used to photographs, but you could say that a photograph was just a picture, but to say this was just a picture would show that you missed what kind of a picture you were looking at. But he had trouble thinking of how. He didn't so much sense that he was looking inot the Icon as that the Mother of God and the Son of God were looking at him. He didn't even think of the Icon being the Icon of the Incarnation and First Coming.

Then he looked at the Icon of the Last Judgment, where Christ the King and Lord and Judge returns holding a book of judgment, a book that is closed because there is nothing left to determine.

He thought intensely. The First Coming of Christ was in a stable, in a cave, and a single choir of angels sung his glory. The Second and Glorious Coming he will ride on the clouds, with legion on legion of angels with him. The First Coming was a mystery, one you could choose to disbelieve—as many people did. There will be no mistaking the Second Coming. In the First Coming, a few knees bowed. In the Second Coming, every knee will bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, some in bliss and rapture and others in utter defeat. At the First Coming, a lone star in the sky heralded

Christ's birth. At the Second Coming, the stars will fall to earth like overripe figs and the sky recede as a vanishing scroll.

What were those chilling, terrifying words of Christ? "Depart from me, you who are damned, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, sick and in prison and you did not visit me, lacking clothes and you did not give me the dignity of having clothes to wear." Then the condemned will say, "Where did we see you hungry and not feed you, or thirsty or sick or in prison and not take care of you?" And the King and Lord and Judge will say, "I most solemnly tell you, as much as you did not do it for the least of these brothers and sisters, you did not do it for me."

Stephan looked at the Icon and said, "I wish Dad would let me give money to beggars when I see..." Then his voice trailed off. The words didn't feel right in his mouth. He looked at the solemn love in the Icon, and then his mind was filled with the memory of his sister in tears.

He slowly backed down from the Icon, feeling the gaze of the King and Lord and Judge. He turned to almost run—he was in too holy of a place to run, and...

Something stopped him from leaving. After struggling inside, he looked around, and his eyes came to rest on the Icon of the Crucifixion that was the color of sunrise. Now he had not noticed them earlier this time, but he saw the Mother of God on one side and the beloved disciple on the earth. What had he just heard in church on Sunday? "Christ said to the beloved disciple, who is not here named because he is the image of every disciple, 'Behold your Mother,' and to his Mother, 'Behold your Son.' Listen to me very carefully. He did not say, 'Behold another man who is also your son,' but something much stranger and more powerful: 'Behold your Son,' because to be Orthodox is to become Christ." Stephan started to think, "Gold for kingship, incense for divinity, myrrh for suffering—these are Christ's gifts but he shares them with the Church, doesn't he?" He looked up, and then looked down.

"But I need to go and apologize for hurting my sister."

Then Christ's icon walked out the door.

The Spectacles

I got up, washed my face in the fountain, and put out the fire. The fountain was carved of yellow marble, set in the wall and adorned with bas-relief sculptures and dark moss. I moved through the labyrinth, not distracting myself with a lamp, not thinking about the organ, whose pipes ranged from 8' to 128' and could shake a cathedral to its foundation. Climbing iron rungs, I emerged from the recesses of a cluttered shed.

I was wearing a T-shirt advertising some random product, jeans which were worn at the cuffs, and fairly new tennis shoes. I would have liked to think I gave no hint of anything unusual: an ordinary man, with a messy house stocked with the usual array of mundane items. I blended in with the Illusion.

I drove over to Benjamin's house. As I walked in, I said, "Benjamin, I'm impressed. You've done a nice job of patching this place since the last explosion."

"Shut up, Morgan."

"By the way, my nephews are coming to visit in two weeks, Friday afternoon. Would you be willing to tinker in your laboratory when they come? Their favorite thing in the world is a good fireworks display."

"Which reminds me, there was one spice that I wanted to give you. It makes any food taste better, and the more you add, the better the food tastes. Pay no attention to the label on the bottle which says 'arsenic'. If

you'll excuse me one moment..." He began to stand up, and I grabbed his shoulder and pulled him back down into the chair.

"How are you, Benjamin?"

"How are you, Morgan?"

I sat silent for a while. When Benjamin remained silent, I said, "I've been spending a lot of time in the library. The sense one gets when contemplating an artistic masterwork is concentrated in looking at what effect *The Mystical Theology* had on a thousand years of wonder."

He said, "You miss the Middle Ages, don't you?"

I said, "They're still around—a bit here, a piece there. On one hand, it's very romantic to hold something small in your hand and say that it is all that is left of a once great realm. On the other hand, it's *only* romantic: it is not the same thing as finding that glory all about you.

"The pain is all the worse when you not only come from a forgotten realm, but you must reckon with the Illusion. It's like there's a filter which turns everything grey. It's not exactly that there's a sinister hand that forces cooperation with the Illusion and tortures you if you don't; in some ways things would be simpler if there were. Of course you're asking for trouble if you show an anachronism in the way you dress, or if you're so gauche as to speak honestly out of the wisdom of another world and push one of the hot buttons of whatever today's hot issues are. But beyond that, you don't have to intentionally cooperate with the Illusion; you can 'non-conform freely' and the Illusion freely conforms itself to you. It's a terribly isolating feeling."

Benjamin stood up, walked over to a bookshelf, and pulled out an ivory tube. "I have something for you, Morgan. A pair of spectacles."

"Did you make these?"

"I'm not saying."

"Why are you giving me eyeglasses? My eyes are fine."

"Your eyes are weaker than you think." He waited a moment, and then said, "And these spectacles have a virtue."

"What is their virtue? What is their power?"

"Please forgive me. As one who has struggled with the Illusion, you know well enough what it means to deeply want to convey something and know that you can't. Please believe me when I say that I would like to express the answer to your question, but I cannot."

I left, taking the glasses and both hoping that I was concealing my anger from Benjamin and knowing that I wasn't.

I arrived at home and disappeared into the labyrinth. A bright lamp, I hoped, would help me understand the spectacles' power. Had I been in a different frame of mind, I might have enjoyed it; I read an ancient and mostly complete Greek manuscript to *The Symbolic Theology* to see if it might reveal new insights. My eyes lingered for a moment over the words:

That symbol, as most, has two layers. Yet a symbol could have an infinite number of layers and still be smaller than what is without layer at all.

I had a deep insight of some sort over these words, and the insight is forever lost because I cared only about one thing, finding out what magic power the spectacles held. I tried to read a cuneiform tablet; as usual, the language gave me an embarrassing amount of trouble, and there was something strange about what it said that completely lacked the allure of being exotic. Wishing I had a better command of languages, I moved about from one serpentine passageway to another, looking at places, even improvising on the organ, and enjoying none of it. Everything looked exactly as if I were looking through a children's toy. Had Benjamin been watching too much *Dumbo* and given me a magic feather?

After a long and fruitless search, I went up into my house, put the spectacles in your pocket, and sat in my chair, the lights off, fatigued in mind and body. I do not recall know how long I stayed there. I only know that I jumped when the doorbell rang

that I jumped when the doorbell rang.

It was Amber. She said, "The supermarket had a really good sale on strawberries, and I thought you might like some."

"Do you have a moment to to come in? I have Coke in the fridge."

I had to stifle my urge to ask her opinion about the spectacles' virtue. I did not know her to be more than meets the eye (at least not in the sense that could be said of Benjamin or me), but the Illusion was much weaker in her than in most people, and she seemed to pick up on things that I wished others would as well. We talked for a little while; she described how she took her family to a pizza restaurant and her son "walked up to a soda machine, pushed one of the levers you're supposed to put your cup against, jumped in startlement when soda fell on his hand, and then began to lick the soda off."

"I've got to get home and get dinner on, but—ooh, you have new glasses in your pocket. Put them on for a moment."

I put my spectacles on, and she said something to me, but I have no idea what she said. It's not because I was drained: I was quite drained when she came, but her charm had left me interested in life again. The reason I have no idea what she said to me is that I was stunned at what I saw when I looked at her through the spectacles.

I saw beauty such as I had not begun to guess at. She was clad in a shimmering robe of scintillating colors. In one hand, she was holding a kaliedoscope, which had not semi-opaque colored chips but tiny glass spheres and prisms inside. The other hand embraced a child on her lap, with love so real it could be seen.

After she left, I took the spectacles off, put them in their case, and after miscellaneous nightly activities, went to bed and dreamed dreams both brilliant and intense.

When I woke up, I tried to think about why I had not recognized Amber's identity before. I closed my eyes and filtered through memories; Amber had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked

AMBER had given signals of something interesting that I had not picked up on—and she had picked up on things I had given. I thought of myself as one above the Illusion—and here I had accepted the Illusion's picture of her. Might there be others who were more than meets the eye?

I came to carry the spectacles with me, and look around for a sign of something out of the ordinary. Several days later, I met a tall man with cornrowed greying hair. When I asked him what he studied in college, he first commented on the arbitrariness of divisions between disciplines, before explaining that his discipline of record was philosophy. His thought was a textbook example of postmodernism, but when I put my spectacles on, I saw many translucent layers: each layer, like a ring of an oak, carried a remnant of a bygone age. Then I listened, and his words sounded no less postmodern, but echoes of the Middle Ages were everywhere.

I began to find these people more and more frequently, and require less and less blatant cues.

I sat in the living room, waiting with cans of Coca-Cola. I enjoy travelling in my nephews' realms; at a prior visit, Nathan discovered a whole realm behind my staircase, and it is my loss that I can only get in when I am with him. Brandon and Nathan had come for the fair that weekend, and I told them I had something neat-looking to show them before I took them to the fair.

I didn't realize my mistake until they insisted that I wear the spectacles at the fair.

I didn't mind the charge of public drunkenness *that* much. It was humiliating, perhaps, but I think at least *some* humiliations are necessary in life. And I didn't mind too much that my nephews' visit was a bummer for them. Perhaps that was unfortunate, but that has long been smoothed over. There were, however, two things that were *not* of small consequence to me.

The first thing that left me staggered was something in addition to

the majesty I saw. I saw a knight, clad in armor forged of solid light, and I saw deep scars he earned warring against dragons. I saw a fair lady who looked beautiful at the skin when seen without the spectacles, and beautiful in layer after layer below the skin when seen with them. The something else I saw in addition to that majesty was that this beauty was something that was not just in a few people, or even many. It was in every single person without exception. That drunken beggar everyone avoided, the one with a stench like a brewery next to a horse stable—I saw his deep and loyal friendships. I saw his generosity with other beggars—please believe me that if you were another beggar, what's his was yours. I saw the quests he made in his youth. I saw his dreams. I saw his story. Beyond all that, I saw something deeper than any of these, a glory underneath and beneath these things. This glory, however disfigured by his bondage to alcohol, filled me with wonder.

The reason the police kept me in the drunk tank for so long was that I was stunned and reeling. I had always known that I was more than what the Illusion says a person is, and struggled to convey my something more to other people... but I never looked to see how other people could be more than the grey mask the Illusion put on their faces. When I was in the drunk tank, I looked at the other men in wonder and asked myself what magic lay in them, what my spectacles would tell me. The old man with an anchor tattooed to his arm: was he a sailor? Where had he sailed on the seven seas? Had he met mermaids? I almost asked him if he'd found Atlantis, when I decided I didn't want to prolong the time the police officer thought I was drunk.

This brings me to the second disturbing find, which was that my spectacles were not with me. I assumed this was because the police had locked them away, but even after I was released, determined inquiry found no one who had seen them. They looked interesting, oddly shaped lenses with thick gold frames; had a thief taken them when I was stunned and before the police picked me up?

The next day I began preparing for a quest.

It filled me with excitement to begin searching the black market,

both because I hoped to find the spectacles, and because I knew I would experience these people in a completely new light.

I had dealings with the black market before, but it had always been unpleasant: not (let me be clear) because I did not know how to defend myself, or was in too much danger of getting suckered into something dangerous, but because I approached its people concealing the emotions I'd feel touching some kind of fetid slime. Now... I still saw that, but I tried to look and see what I would see if I were wearing my spectacles.

I didn't find anything that seemed significant. The next leg of my journey entailed a change of venue: I dressed nicely and mingled with the world of jewellers and antique dealers. Nada.

I began to search high and low; I brainstormed about what exotic places it might be, and I found interesting people along the way. The laborers whom I hired to help me search the city dump almost made me forget that I was searching for something, and over time I chose to look for my spectacles in places that would bring me into contact with people I wanted to meet...

Some years later, I was returning from one of my voyages and realized it had been long (*too long*) since I had spoken with Benjamin. I came and visited him, and told him about the people I'd met. After I had talked for an hour, he put his hand on my mouth and said, "Can I get a word in edgewise?"

I said, "Mmmph mph mmmph mmpm."

He took his hand off my mouth, and I said, "That depends on whether you're rude enough to put your hand over my mouth in mid-sentence."

"That depends on whether you're rude enough to talk for an hour without letting your host get a word in edgewise."

I stuck my tongue out at him.

He stuck his tongue out at me.

Benjamin opened a box on his desk, opened the ivory case inside the box, and pulled out my spectacles. "I believe these might interest you." He handed them to me.

I sat in silence. The clock's ticking seemed to grow louder, until it chimed and we both jumped. Then I looked at him and said, "What in Heaven's name would I need them for?"

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.

Money

Today the biggest symbol of evil is Hitler or Naziism; there is almost no bigger insult than calling someone a Nazi or a comparison to Hitler. The Old Testament's symbol of evil that did the same job was a city in which the Lord God of Hosts could not find fifty righteous, nor forty-five, nor forty, nor thirty, nor twenty, nor even ten righteous men. It was the city on which fire and brimstone rained down from Heaven in divine wrath until smoke arose as from a gigantic furnace. It was, in short, the city of Sodom.

Ezekiel has some remarks about Sodom's sin that might surprise you. Ezekiel 16:49 says, *This was the sin of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, more than enough food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.*

These are far from the only stinging words the Bible says to rich people who could care for the poor and do not do so. Jesus said something that could better be translated, "It is easier for a rope to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God." (Mark 10:25). It would take hours or perhaps days to recite everything blunt the Bible says about wealth, if even I could remember so much.

But who are the rich? The standard American answer is, "People who have more money than I do," and the standard American answer is wrong. It takes too much for granted. Do you want to know how special it is, worldwide, to be able to afford meat for every meal you want it and

your Church permits it? Imagine saying "We're not rich; we just have Champagne and lobster every day." That's what it means for even poorer Americans to say "We're not rich, just a bit comfortable." The amount of money that America spends on weight loss products each year costs more than it would cost to feed the hungry worldwide. When Ezekiel says that "your sister Sodom" had more than enough food *but did not care for the poor*, he is saying something that has every relevance to us if we also fail to care for the poor.

I would be remiss not to mention the Sermon on the Mount here, because the Sermon on the Mount explains something we can miss (Matt 6:19-21,24-33):

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money.

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Do you think that by worrying you can add a single hour to your life? You might as well try to make yourself a foot taller! And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the Kingdom of God and his perfect

righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

This *includes* a hard saying about wealth, but it is not only a hard saying about wealth, but an invitation to joy. "Do not store up treasures on earth but store up treasures in Heaven" is a command to exchange lead for gold and have true wealth. It is an invitation to joy, and it is no accident that these sharp words about Money lead directly into the Bible's central text on why we never need to worry.

Elsewhere we read, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15), which is *not* a statement that spiritual people can rise so high that *their* lives aren't measured by possessions. It is about everybody, great and small. If money doesn't make you happy this is not something specially true about spiritual people; it's something that's true of everybody. But Jesus's entire point is to direct us to what our life *does* consist in. The words about storing up treasures in Heaven prepare us for the "*Therefore* I tell you," and an invitation to live a life that is fuller, richer, more vibrant, deeper, more alive, more radiant with the light of Heaven than we can possibly arrange through wealth.

What will we leave behind if we spend less on ourselves? Will we leave behind the Lord's providence, or hugs, or friendship, or banter, or worship, or the Church, or feasting? Will we leave behind the love of the Father, or Christ as our High Priest, or the Spirit? Will we be losing a Heaven whose beginning is here and now, or will we be pulling out our right hands and our right eyes? If it seems that way, we may adapt C.S. Lewis to say that living the life of Heaven through our finances today may seem like it will cost our right hand and our right eye, or in today's words an arm and a leg, but once we have taken that plunge, we will discover that what we have left behind is precisely nothing. Or perhaps we could say that we are leaving behind a false Savior who never delivers, but only distracts us from the true Savior in Christ, and the treasure that is ours when we lay our treasures at his feet.

Is there a luxury you could give up in this invitation to joy?

A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop

I believe that if some of the best bishops were asked, "How would you like to step down from all of your honors, and all of your power, and hand the reins over to an excellent successor, and become only the lowest rank of monk at an obscure monastery in the middle of nowhere with no authority over any soul's salvation but your own—would you take it?" their response might be, "Um, uh... *what's the catch?*"

If I may comment briefly on virginity and marriage: in a culture where you try to rip your opponent's position to shreds instead of aiming for fair balance in a critique, St. Gregory of Nyssa's [On Virginity](#) is *meant* to rip marriage to shreds. I don't mean that, and I would say something that I don't think needed to be said, or at least not needed to be said, as much: *true marriage should be seen as having something of the hallowed respect associated with monasticism*. A marriage in its fullest traditional sense, is becoming (or already is) something that should be called exotic if people didn't look down their noses at it. As far as true marriage relates to monasticism, the externals are almost antithetical but the goal is the same: self-transcendence. The person who said, "Men love women. Women love children. Children love pets. Life isn't fair," is on to something. Getting into marriage properly requires stepping beyond an egotism of yourself; raising children, if you are so blessed, requires stepping beyond an egotism of two. And Biblically and patristically, childlessness was seen as a curse; the priestly father to whom one child

was given in old age, the Mother of God herself, bore derision even in his high office because people viewed childlessness as a curse enough to be a sign of having earned divine judgment and wrath. And at a day and age where marriage is being torn from limb to limb, it might befit us to make particular efforts to honor marriage alongside monasticism.

There is one advantage to monasticism; actually, there are several, but one eclipses the others, and that is mentioned when St. Paul recognizes that not everyone can be celibate like him, marriage being a legitimate and honorable option. But he mentions a significant advantage to celibacy: the married person must have divided attention between serving family and the Lord, where a celibate person (today this usually belongs in monasticism) is able to give God an undivided attention, enjoying the blessed estate of a Mary sitting at the Lord's feet as a disciple taking in the one thing that is truly necessary, and not as a Martha who is busily encumbered with many other things. And while St. Paul knows that not everybody can walk the celibate path, he does at least wish that people could offer God an undivided attention. And I have yet to hear Orthodox challenge that any genuine marriage includes a condition of divided attention.

If we leave off talking about bishops just briefly, let's take a brief look at the abbot next to a simple monk under him ("simple monk" is a technical term meaning a monk who has not additionally been elevated to any minor or major degree of sacramental priesthood). The simple monk has lost some things, but he has in full the benefit St. Paul wants celibates to have: everything around him is ordered to give him the best opportunity to work on salvation. Meanwhile, any abbot who is doing an abbot's job is denied this luxury. Some abbots have been tempted to step down from their honored position because of how difficult they've found caring for themselves spiritually as any monk should, and additionally care for the many needs of a monastery and the other monks. An abbot may not focus on his own salvation alone; he must divide his attention to deal with disciples and various secular material needs a monastery must address. An abbot is a monk who must bear a monk's full cross; in addition, while an abbot has no sexual license, he must also bear the additional cross of a father who is dividing his attention in dealing with those under his care. He may be celibate, but he effectively forgoes the

chief benefit St. Paul ascribes to living a celibate life.

To be a heirarch brings things another level higher. Right now I don't want to compare the mere monk with a bishop, but rather compare an abbot with a bishop. The abbot acts as a monk in ways that include the full life participation in the services and environment in a monastery. It may be true that the abbot is more finely clad than *other* monks, but abbot and simple monk alike are involved in the same supportive environment, and what abbot and simple monk share is greater than their difference. By comparison, unless the bishop is one of few bishops serving in a monastery, the bishop may be excused for perhaps feeling like a fish out of water. It may be desired that a bishop have extensive monastic character formation, but a bishop is compelled to live in the world, and to travel all over the place in ways and do some things that other monastics rightly flee. Now the heirarch does have the nicest robes of all, and has privileges that no one else has, but it is too easy to see a bishop's crownlike mitre in the majesty of Liturgy and fail to sense the ponderous, heavy crown of thorns invisibly present on a bishop's head all the time. Every Christian must bear his cross, but you are very ignorant about the cross a bishop bears if you think that being a bishop is all about wearing the vestments of the Roman emperor, being called "Your Grace" or "Your Eminence," and sitting on a throne at the center of everything.

Now it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear a bishop's robes; for that matter it is possible to be perfectly satisfied to wear an acolyte's robe or never wear liturgical vestments at all. But I know someone who is really bright, and has been told, "*You are the most brilliant person I know!*" The first time around it was really intoxicating; by the fifth or sixth time he felt more like someone receiving uninteresting old news, and it was more a matter of disciplined social skills than spontaneous delight to keep trying to keep giving a graceful and fitting response to an extraordinary compliment. Perhaps the *first* time a new heirarch is addressed as "Your Grace," "Your Emimence," or "Vladyka," it feels intoxicatingly heady. However, I don't believe the effect lasts much more than a week, if even that. There is reason to address heirarchs respectfully and appropriately, but it is really much less a benefit to the bishop than it is a benefit to us, and this is for the same reason children who respect

adults are better off than children who don't respect adults. Children who respect adults benefit much more from adults' care, and faithful who respect clergy (including respect for heirarchs) benefit much more from pastoral care.

As I wrote in [A pet Owner's rules](#), God is like a pet Owner who has two rules, and only two rules. The first rule, and the more important one, is "I am your Owner. Receive freely of the food and drink I have given you," and the second is really more a clarification than anything else: "*Don't drink out of the toilet.*" The first comparison is to drunkenness. A recovering alcoholic will tell you that being drunk all the time is not a delight; it is suffering you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy. "Strange as it may sound, you have to be basically sober even to enjoy getting drunk:" drunkenness is drinking out of the toilet. *But you don't need to literally drink to be drinking out of the toilet.*

There is something like a confused drinking out of the toilet in ambition, and in my own experience, ambition is not only sinful, but it is a recipe to not enjoy things. Being an abbot may be more prestigious than being a simple monk and being a bishop may be more prestigious than being an abbot but looking at things that way is penny wise and pound foolish.

Ambition reflects a fundamental confusion that sees external honors but not the cross tied to such nonors. I hope to write this without making married Orthodox let go of one whit of their blessed estate, but the best position to be in is a simple monastic, end of discussion. It is a better position to be a simple monastic than to be an abbot, and it is a better position to be an abbot than a heirarch. Now the Church needs clergy, including abbots and heirarchs, and it is right to specifically pray for them as the Liturgy and daily prayer books have it. Making a monk into a priest or abbot, or bishop, represents a sacrifice. Now all of us are called to be a sacrifice at some level, and God's grace rests on people who are clergy for good reasons. An abbot who worthily bears both the *cross* of the celibate and the *cross* of the married in this all-to-transient world may shine with a double *crown* for ever and ever. But the lot we should seek for is not that of Martha cumbered about with much serving; it is of Mary embracing the one thing needful.

The best approach is to apply full force to seeking everything that is better, and then have God persistently tell us if we are to step in what might be called "the contemplative life perfected in action."

The Patriarch's throne, mantle, crown, title, and so on are truly great and glorious.

But they pale in comparison to the hidden Heavenly honors given to a simple monk, an eternal glory that can be present in power here and now.

The Commentary

Memories flitted through Martin's mind as he drove: tantalizing glimpses he had seen of how people really thought in Bible times. Glimpses that made him thirsty for more. It had seemed hours since he left his house, driving out of the city, across back roads in the forest, until at last he reached the quiet town. The store had printer's blocks in the window, and as he stepped in, an old-fashioned bell rung. There were old tools on the walls, and the room was furnished in beautifully varnished wood.

An old man smiled and said, "Welcome to my bookstore. Are you—" Martin nodded. The man looked at him, turned, and disappeared through a doorway. A moment later he was holding a thick leatherbound volume, which he set on the counter. Martin looked at the binding, almost afraid to touch the heavy tome, and read the letters of gold on its cover:

**COMMENTARY
ON THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS
IN ONE VOLUME
CONTAINING A CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF ALL CULTURAL
ISSUES
NEEDFUL TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE
AS DID ITS FIRST READERS**

"You're sure you can afford it, sir? I'd really like to let it go for a lower price, but you must understand that a book like this is costly, and I can't afford to sell it the way I do most other titles."

"Finances will be tight, but I've found knowledge to cost a lot and ignorance to cost more. I have enough money to buy it, if I make it a priority."

"Good. I hope it may profit you. But may I make one request, even if it sounds strange?"

"What is your request?"

"If, for any reason, you no longer want the commentary, or decide to get rid of it, you will let me have the first chance to buy it back."

"Sir? I don't understand. I have been searching for a book like this for years. I don't know how many miles I've driven. I will pay. You're right that this is more money than I could easily spare—and I am webmaster to a major advertising agency. I would have only done so for something I desired a great, great deal."

"Never mind that. If you decide to sell it, will you let me have the first chance?"

"Let's talk about something else. What text does it use?"

"It uses the *Revised Standard Version*. Please answer my question, sir."

"How could anyone prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

"I don't know. Please answer my question."

"Yes, I will come to you first. Now will you sell it to me?"

The old man rung up the sale.

As Martin walked out the door, the shopkeeper muttered to himself, "Sold for the seventh time! Why doesn't anybody want to keep it?"

Martin walked through the door of his house, almost exhausted, and yet full of bliss. He sat in his favorite overstuffed armchair, one that had been reupholstered more than once since he sat in it as a boy. He relaxed, the heavy weight of the volume pressing into his lap like a loved one, and then opened the pages. He took a breath, and began reading.

INTRODUCTION

At the present time, most people believe the question of culture in relation to the Bible is a question of understanding the ancient cultures and accounting for their influence so as to be able to better understand Scripture. That is indeed a valuable field, but its benefits may only be reaped after addressing another concern, a concern that is rarely addressed by people eager to understand Ancient Near Eastern culture.

A part of the reader's culture is the implicit belief that he is not encumbered by culture: culture is what people live under long ago and far away. This is not true. As it turns out, the present culture has at least two beliefs which deeply influence and to some extent limit its ability to connect with the Bible. There is what scholars call 'period awareness', which is not content with the realization that we all live in a historical context, but places different times and places in sealed compartments, almost to the point of forgetting that people who live in the year 432, people who live in 1327, and people who live in 1987 are all human. Its partner in crime is the doctrine of progress, which says at heart that we are better, nobler, and wiser people than those who came before us, and our ideas are better, because ideas, like machines, grow rust and need to be replaced. This gives the reader the most extraordinary difficulties in believing that the Holy Spirit spoke through humans to address human problems in the Bible, and the answer speaks as much to us humans as it did to them. Invariably the reader believes that the Holy Spirit influenced a first century man trying to deal with first century problems, and a delicate work of extrication is needed before ancient texts can be adapted to turn-of-the-millennium concerns.

Martin shifted his position slightly, felt thirsty, almost decided to get

up and get a glass of water, then decided to continue reading. He turned a few pages in order to get into the real meat of the introduction, and resumed reading:

...is another example of this dark pattern.

In an abstracted sense, what occurs is as follows:

1. Scholars implicitly recognize that some passages in the Bible are less than congenial to whatever axe they're grinding.
2. They make a massive search, and subject all of the offending passages to a meticulous examination, an examination much more meticulous than orthodox scholars ever really need when they're trying to understand something.
3. In parallel, there is an exhaustive search of a passage's historical-cultural context. This search dredges up a certain kind of detail—in less flattering terms, it creates disinformation.
4. No matter what the passage says, no matter who's examining it, this story always has the same ending. It turns out that the passage in fact means something radically different from what it appears to mean, and in fact does not contradict the scholar at all.

This dark pattern has devastating effect on people from the reader's culture. They tend to believe that culture has almost any influence it is claimed to; in that regard, they are very gullible. It is almost unheard-of for someone to say, "I'm sorry, no; cultures can make people do a lot of things, but I don't believe a culture could have *that* influence."

It also creates a dangerous belief which is never spoken in so many words: "If a passage in the Bible appears to contradict what we believe today, that is because we do not adequately understand its cultural context."

Martin coughed. He closed the commentary slowly, reverently placed it on the table, and took a walk around the block to think.

Inside him was turmoil. It was like being at an illusionist show,

where impossible things happened. He recalled his freshman year of college, when his best friend Chaplain was a student from Liberia, and come winter, Chaplain was not only seared by cold, but looked betrayed as the icy ground became a traitor beneath his feet. Chaplain learned to keep his balance, but it was slow, and Martin could read the pain off Chaplain's face. How long would it take? He recalled the shopkeeper's words about returning the commentary, and banished them from his mind.

Martin stepped into his house and decided to have no more distractions. He wanted to begin reading commentary, now. He opened the book on the table and sat erect in his chair:

Genesis

- 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.
1:3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why

is there life as we know it?" Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" If someone asks, "Why is there this life that we see?" and someone answers, "Evolution," it is like someone saying, "Why is the kitchen light on?" and someone else answering, "Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?" These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

Martin took a deep breath. Was the text advocating a six-day creationism? That was hard to tell. He felt uncomfortable, in a much deeper way than if Bible-thumpers were preaching to him that evolutionists would burn in Hell.

He decided to see what it would have to say about a problem passage. He flipped to Ephesians 5:

- 5:21 Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.
- 5:22 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.
- 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.
- 5:24 As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.
- 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
- 5:26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,
- 5:27 that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy

and without blemish.

5:28 Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

5:29 For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church,

5:30 because we are members of his body.

5:31 "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

5:32 This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church;

5:33 however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

The reader is at this point pondering what to do with this problem passage. At the moment, he sees three major options: first, to explain it away so it doesn't actually give husbands authority; second, to chalk it up to misogynist Paul trying to rescind Jesus's progressive liberality; and third, to take this as an example of why the Bible can't really be trusted.

To explain why the reader perceives himself caught in this unfortunate choice, it is necessary to explain a powerful cultural force, one whose effect cannot be ignored: feminism. Feminism has such a powerful effect among the educated in his culture that the question one must ask of the reader is not "Is he a feminist?" but "What kind of feminist is he, and to what degree?"

Feminism flows out of a belief that it's a wonderful privilege to be a man, but it is tragic to be a woman. Like Christianity, feminism recognizes the value of lifelong penitence, even the purification that can come through guilt. It teaches men to repent in guilt of being men, and women to likewise repent of being women. The beatific vision in feminism is a condition of sexlessness, which feminists call 'androgyny'.

Martin stopped. "What kind of moron wrote this? Am I actually supposed to believe it?" Then he continued reading:

This is why feminism believes that everything which has

THIS IS WHY FEMINISM BELIEVES THAT EVERYTHING WHICH HAS belonged to men is a privilege which must be shared with women, and everything that has belonged to women is a burden which men must also shoulder. And so naturally, when Paul asserts a husband's authority, the feminist sees nothing but a privilege unfairly hoarded by men.

Martin's skin began to feel clammy.

The authority asserted here is not a domineering authority that uses power to serve oneself. Nowhere in the Bible does Paul tell husbands how to dominate their wives. Instead he follows Jesus's model of authority, one in which leadership is a form of servanthood. Paul doesn't just assume this; he explicitly tells the reader, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." The sigil of male headship and authority is not a crown of gold, but a crown of thorns.

Martin was beginning to wish that the commentary had said, "The Bible is misogynistic, and that's good!" He was beginning to feel a nagging doubt that what he called problem passages were in fact perfectly good passages that didn't look attractive if you had a problem interpretation. What was that remark in a theological debate that had gotten so much under his skin? He almost wanted not to remember it, and then—"Most of the time, when people say they simply cannot understand a particular passage of Scripture, *they understand the passage perfectly well*. What they don't understand is how to explain it away so it doesn't contradict them."

He paced back and forth, and after a time began to think, "The sword can't always cut against me, can it? I know some gay rights activists who believe that the Bible's prohibition of homosexual acts is nothing but taboo. Maybe the commentary on Romans will give me something else to answer them with." He opened the book again:

1:26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural,

1:27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women

and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

The concept of 'taboo' in the reader's culture needs some explanation. When a person says, "That's taboo," what's being said is that there is an unthinking, irrational prejudice against it: one must not go against the prejudice because then people will be upset, but in some sense to call a restriction a taboo is de facto to show it unreasonable.

The term comes from Polynesia and other South Pacific islands, where it is used when people recognize there is a line which it is wiser not to cross. Thomas Aquinas said, "The peasant who does not murder because the law of God is deep in his bones is greater than the theologian who can derive, 'Thou shalt not kill' from first principles."

A taboo is a restriction so deep that most people cannot offer a ready explanation. A few can; apologists and moral philosophers make a point of being able to explain the rules. For most people, though, they know what is right and what is wrong, and it is so deeply a part of them that they cannot, like an apologist, start reasoning with first principles and say an hour and a half later, "and this is why homosexual acts are wrong."

What goes with the term 'taboo' is an assumption that if you can't articulate your reasons on the drop of a hat, that must mean that you don't have any good reasons, and are acting only from benighted prejudice. Paradoxically, the term 'taboo' is itself a taboo: there is a taboo against holding other taboos, and this one is less praiseworthy than other taboos...

Martin walked away and sat in another chair, a high wooden stool. What was it that he had been thinking about before going to buy the commentary? A usability study had been done on his website, and he needed to think about the results. Designing advertising material was different from other areas of the web; the focus was not just on a smooth

user experience but also something that would grab attention, even from a hostile audience. Those two goals were inherently contradictory, like mixing oil and water. His mind began to wander; he thought about the drive to buy the commentary, and began to daydream about a beautiful woman clad only in—

What did the commentary have to say about lust? Jesus said it was equivalent to adultery; the commentary probably went further and made it unforgiveable. He tried to think about work, but an almost morbid curiosity filled him. Finally, he looked up the Sermon on the Mount, and opened to Matthew:

5:27 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

5:28 But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

There is a principle here that was once assumed and now requires some explanation. Jesus condemned lust because it was doing in the heart what was sinful to do in the hands. There is a principle that is forgotten in centuries of people saying, "I can do whatever I want as long as it doesn't harm you," or to speak more precisely, "I can do whatever I want as long as I don't see how it harms you." Suddenly purity was no longer a matter of the heart and hands, but a matter of the hands alone. Where captains in a fleet of ships once tried both to avoid collisions and to keep shipshape inside, now captains believe that it's OK to ignore mechanical problems inside as long as you try not to hit other ships—and if you steer the wheel as hard as you can and your ship still collides with another, you're not to blame. Heinrich Heine wrote:

Should ever that taming talisman break—the Cross—then will come roaring back the wild madness of the ancient warriors, with all their insane, Berserker rage, of whom our Nordic poets speak and sing. That talisman is now already crumbling, and the day is not far off when it shall break apart entirely. On that day, the old stone gods will rise from their long forgotten wreckage and rub from their eyes the dust of a thousand years' sleep. At

long last leaping to life, Thor with his giant hammer will crush the gothic cathedrals. And laugh not at my forebodings, the advice of a dreamer who warns you away from the . . .

Naturphilosophen. No, laugh not at the visionary who knows that in the realm of phenomena comes soon the revolution that has already taken place in the realm of spirit. For thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. There will be played in Germany a play compared to which the French Revolution was but an innocent idyll.

Heinrich Heine was a German Jewish poet who lived a century before Thor's hammer would crush six million of his kinsmen.

The ancient world knew that thought goes before deed as lightning before thunder. They knew that purity is an affair of the heart as well as the hands. Now there is grudging acknowledgment that lust is wrong, a crumbling acceptance that has little place in the culture's impoverished view, but this acknowledgment is like a tree whose soil is taken away. For one example of what goes with that tree, I would like to look at advertising.

Porn uses enticing pictures of women to arouse sexual lust, and can set a chain of events in motion that leads to rape. Advertising uses enticing pictures of chattels to arouse covetous lust, and exists for the sole reason of setting a chain of events in motion that lead people to waste resources by buying things they don't need. The fruit is less bitter, but the vine is the same. Both operate by arousing impure desires that do not lead to a righteous fulfillment. Both porn and advertising are powerfully unreal, and bite those that embrace them. A man that uses porn will have a warped view of women and be slowly separated from healthy relations. Advertising manipulates people to seek a fulfillment in things that things can never provide: buying one more product can never satisfy that deep craving, any more than looking at one more picture can. Bruce Marshall said, "...the young man who rings at the door of a brothel is unconsciously looking for God." Advertisers know that none of their products give a profound good, nothing like what people search for deep down inside, and so they falsely present products as things that are

transcendent, and bring family togetherness or racial harmony.

It has been asked, "Was the Sabbath made for man, or was man made for the Sabbath?" Now the question should be asked, "Was economic wealth made for man, or was man made for economic wealth?" The resounding answer of advertising is, "Man was made for economic wealth." Every ad that is sent out bears the unspoken message, "You, the customer, exist for me, the corporation."

Martin sat in his chair, completely stunned.

After a long time, he padded off to bed, slept fitfully, and was interrupted by nightmares.

The scenic view only made the drive bleaker. Martin stole guiltily into the shop, and laid the book on the counter. The shopkeeper looked at him, and he at the shopkeeper.

"Didn't you ask who could prefer darkness to light, obscurity to illumination?"

Martin's face was filled with anguish. "How can I live without my darkness?"

"Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

A rude awakening

Early in one systematic theology PhD course at Fordham, the text assigned as theology opened by saying, "Theologians are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Not content with this striking claim, the author announced that she was going to use "a term from science," *thought experiment*, which was never used to mean a *Gedanken* experiment as in physics, but instead meant: if we have an idea for how a society should run, we have to experimentally try out this thought and live with it for a while, because if we don't, we will never know what would have happened. ("*Stick your neck out! What have you got to lose?*"—"Your head?") The clumsiness in this use of "a term from science" was on par with saying that you are going to use "an expression from American English", namely *rabbit food*, and subsequently use "rabbit food" as obviously a term meaning food made with rabbit meat.

In this one article were already two things that were fingernails on a chalkboard to my ears. Empirical sciences are today's prestige disciplines, like philosophy / theology / law in bygone eras, and the claim to be a science seems to inevitably be *how to mediate prestige to oneself and one's own discipline*. When I had earlier run into claims of, "Anthropologists are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists

as people in the so-called 'hard sciences,' like physics," I had winced because the claim struck me as not only annoying and untrue, but self-demeaning. But it simply had not occurred to me that theologians would make such a claim, and when they did, I was not only shocked but embarrassed: why should theology, once acclaimed the queen of scholarly disciplines, now seek prestige by parroting the claim to be every-bit-as-much-a-science-as-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics (where "so-called" seemed to always be part of the claim, along with the scare quotes around "hard sciences")? To make my point clearer, I drew what was meant to be a shocking analogy: the claim that theologians are "scientists, and every bit as much as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics" was like trying to defend the dignity of being a woman by saying, "Women are male, and they are just as much male as people who can sire a child."

This "physics envy" looks particularly strange next to the medieval Great Chain of Being as it moved from the highest to the lowest: "God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing". Theology is the study of God and Man; no discipline is given a more noble field. And however much other disciplines may have "physics envy", no other discipline looks lower than physics, the science that studies Rocks and Nothing. There may be something pathetic about an anthropologist trying to step up on the pecking order by claiming to be "just as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Yet on the lips of a theologian, it bears a faint hint of a CEO absurdly saying, "CEOs are janitors, and they are every bit as much janitors as the people responsible for cleaning wastebaskets."

Furthermore, the endemic claim I saw to introduce a "term from science" was, so far as I could remember:

- *Rarely if ever used in any correct fashion.*

The *one* exception I can remember being Wolfhart Pannenberg's illustration of a point by talking about fields such as one finds in the study of electricity and magnetism: the non-scientist theologians in the room said they were having real trouble understanding the illustration conceptually, which would make it seem somewhat

dubious as an *illustration* to help get a point across.

- *Always reflect an effort to claim some of science's prestige.*

I remember the "you're being quaint" smiles I got when I suggested that a point that Pannenberg was trying to make by comparing something to a field as defined in physics, seemed in fact to be a point that could have been much better made by a comparison to the Force from *Star Wars*.

Why the patronizing smiles? The job of the example from physics was to mediate prestige as well as to illustrate a concept that could have been better explained without involving a particularly slippery concept from physics.

A first response

Examples of this kind of "science" abounded, and I was perhaps not wise enough to realize that my clumsy attempts to clarify various misrepresentations of science were perhaps not well received because I was stepping on the Dark and Shameful Secret of Not Being Scientific Enough, and reminding them of an inferiority they were trying hard to dodge. And my attempts to explain "Not being a scientist does not make you inferior" seemed to have no soil in which to grow. In an attempt to start an online discussion, I wrote a piece called "Rumor Science":

I really wish the theology students I knew would either know a lot more about science, or a lot less, and I really wouldn't consider "a lot less" to be disappointing.

Let me explain why. When I was working on my master's in math, there was one passage in particular that struck me from Ann Wilson Schaef's *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System*. Perhaps predictably given my being a mathematician in training, it was a remark about numbers, or rather about how people interact with numbers.

The author broke people down into more or less three groups of people. The first—she mentioned artists—was people that can't count to twenty without taking off their shoes. She didn't quite say **that**, but she emphasized artists and other people where math and numbers simply aren't part of their consciousness. They don't buy into the mystique. And they can say, and sincerely mean, that numbers don't measure everything. They aren't seriously tempted to believe otherwise.

The second group—she mentioned business people—consists of people for whom math works. Even if they're not mathematicians, math works for them and does useful things, and they may say that numbers don't measure anything, but it is well nigh impossible to believe—saying and meaning that numbers don't measure everything is like saying that cars are nice but they can't get you places.

And the third group in the progression? She mentioned scientists, but what she said was that they know math in and out and know it so well that they know its limitations and therefore they can say and mean that numbers don't measure everything. And in the end, even though the "scientist" and the "artist" represent opposite extremes of mathematical competence, they both know there are things numbers can't measure while the second, middle group for mathematical competence are in a position where they expect numbers to do things that numbers can't do.

I was flattered, but I really think it stuck with me for more reasons than just the fact that she included me in one of the "good" groups. There is a sort of *Karate Kid* observation—"Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe. Don't know karate, safe. In the middle, *squash*, like a grape!"—that is relevant to theology and science. It has to do with, among other things, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the question of evolution, and the like (perhaps I should mention the second law of thermodynamics). My point in this is not that there is an obligation to "know karate", that theologians need to earn degrees in the sciences before they are qualified to work as theologians, but that there is something perfectly respectable about "don't know karate."

I'd like to start by talking about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Now a lot of people have heard about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Not many major mathematical theorems have had a Pulitzer prize-winning book written around them (and by the way, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* has been one of my favorite books). Nor do many theorems get summarized in Newsweek as an important theorem which demonstrates that mathematical "proofs" are not certain, but mathematical knowledge is as relative as any other knowledge.

Which is a crass error. The theological equivalent would be to say that Karl Barth's unflattering remarks about "religion" are anti-Christian, or that liberation theology's preferential option for the

poor means that special concern for the poor is optional and to be dealt with according to personal preference. And saying that about liberation theology is a theological "squash like a grape," because it is better to not know liberation theology and know you don't know than believe that you understand liberation theology and "know" that the word "option" implies "optional." **It's not what you don't know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so.**

For the record, what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem means is that for a certain branch of mathematics, there are things that can be neither proven nor disproven—which made his theorem a shocker when there was a Tower of Babel effort to prove or disprove pretty much anything. It proves that some things can never be proven within certain systems. And it has other implications. But it does *not* mean that things that are proven in mathematics are uncertain, or that mathematical knowledge is relative. It says you can't prove everything a mathematician would want to prove. But there are still lots and lots and lots of interesting things that can be proven, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem does not touch these proofs, nor does it mean that mathematical knowledge is merely relative in humanities fashion.

And I'd like to mention what happens when I mention Gödel's **Completeness** Theorem:

Dead silence.

The same great mathematical logician proved another theorem, which does not have a Pulitzer prize winning book, which says that in one other branch of mathematics, besides the branch that Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem speaks to, you can have pretty much what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem says you can't have in the other branch. In other words, you can—mechanically, for that matter, which is a big mathematical achievement—either prove or disprove every single statement. I'm not sure it's as important as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, but it's a major theorem from the same mathematician and no one's heard of it.

There would seem to be obvious non-mathematical reasons for why people would want to be informed about the first theorem and not want to mention the second. I consider it telling (about non-mathematical culture). I know it may be considered a mark of sophistication to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem and share how it's informed your epistemology. But it hasn't informed my epistemology and I really can't tell how my theology would be different if I hadn't heard of it. And my understanding is that other mathematicians tend not to have the highest view of people who are trying to take account of scientific discoveries that an educated person "should" know. There are other reasons for this, including goofy apologetics that make the famous theorem a proof for God. But I at least would rather talk with someone who simply hadn't heard of the theorem than a theologian who had tried to make a "responsible" effort to learn from the discovery.

And my main example is one I'm less sure how to comment on, and not only because I know less biology than math. There was one almost flippant moment in England when the curate asked if anybody had questions about the upcoming Student Evolution conference that everybody was being urged to attend. I asked, "Is this 'Student Evolution' more of a gradual process, or more a matter of 'punk eek'?" (That question brought down the house.)

Punctuated equilibrium, irreverently abbreviated 'punk eek', is a very interesting modification of Darwinian theory. Darwinian *evolution* in its early forms posits and implies a gradual process of very slow changes—almost constant over very long ("geological") time frames. And that is a beautiful theory that flatly contracts almost all known data.

As explained by my Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy biology teacher, "Evolution is like baseball. It has long stretches of boring time interrupted by brief periods of intense excitement." That's punk eek in a nutshell, and what interests me most is that it's the mirror image of saying "God created the world—through evolution!" It says, "Evolution occurred—through punctuated equilibrium!"

That's not the only problem; evolution appears to be, in Kuhnian terms (Structure of Scientific Revolutions), a theory "in crisis", which is the Kuhnian term for when a scientific theory is having serious difficulties accounting for currently given data and may well be on its way out the door. There are several ways people are trying to cope with this—preserving some semblance of a materialist explanation; there was the same kind of resistance going on before science acknowledged the Big Bang, because scientists who want a universe without cause and without beginning or creator heard something that sounded too much like "Let there be light!" They're very interesting, and intellectually dishonest.

Now I need to clarify; people seem to think you have to either be a young earth creationist or else admit evolution of some stripe. I believe in 13 billion years as the rough age of the universe, not six thousand years; I also believe in natural selection and something called "micro-evolution." (By the way, JPII's "more than a hypothesis" was in the original French "*plus qu'un hypothèse*", alternately translatable as "more than one hypothesis", and the official Vatican translation takes this reading. One can say that micro-evolution is one of the hypothesis gathered under the heading of evolution.)

I wince when I see theologians trying their dutiful best to work out an obligation to take evolution into account as a proven fact: squash, like a grape. It's not just that science doesn't trade in proof and evolution is being treated like a revelation, as if a Pope had consulted the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and canonized *The Origin of the Species* as a book of the Bible. Or maybe that's putting it too strongly. It would also be strong language to say that many theologians are adopting a carefully critical attitude to classic Church claims and part of their being critical means placing an embarrassingly blind faith in evolution. But that's truer than I'd want to admit.

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

I don't know what the first and third laws of thermodynamics

say, and I can't say that I'm missing anything. I don't feel obligated to make the second law, which I am familiar with, a feature of my theology, but if I did, I would try to understand the first and third laws of thermodynamics, and treat it as physics in which those three laws and presumably other things fit into a system that needs to be treated as a whole. I don't know how I would incorporate that in my theology, but I'm supposing for the sake of argument that I would. I would rather avoid treating it the way people usually seem to treat it when they treat that as one of the things that educated people "should" know.

I guess that my point in all of this is that some people think there's a duty to know science and be scientific in theology, but this is a duty better shirked. My theology is—or I would like it to be—closer to that of someone who doesn't understand science, period, than that of people who try to improve their theology by incorporating what they can grasp of difficult scientific concepts that the scientists themselves learned with difficulty.

Rumor science is worse than no science, and an ascientific theology is not a handicap. When I say that I would rather see theologians know either much more or much less science, I'm not hoping that theologians will therefore get scientific degrees. The chief merit for a theologian to know science is that it can be a source of liberation that frees people from thinking "We live in a scientific age so it would be better for theology to be scientific." I'm not sure I would be able to question that assumption if I knew much less science. *But what I believe that buys me is not a better theology than someone scientifically innocent but freedom from the perceived need to "take science into account" in my theology so I can do the same kind of theology as someone scientifically innocent.*

I'm not as sure what to say about ecological theology; I wrote [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#) at without scientific reference that I remember, and I believe there are other human ways of knowing Creation besides science. But an ecological theologian who draws on scientific studies is not trying to honor a duty to understand things an educated person should know, but pursuing

something materially relevant. Science has some place; religion and science boundary issues are legitimate, and I don't know I can dissuade people who think it's progressive to try to make a scientific theology—although I really wish people with that interest would get letters after their name from a science discipline, or some other form of genuinely proper scientific credentials appropriate to a genuinely scientific theology.

There are probably other exceptions, and science is interesting. But there is no obligation to go from safely on one side of the road to a position in the middle because it is "closer" to a proper understanding of science. Perhaps liberation theologians want people to understand their cause, but it is better not to pretend to know liberation theology than to approach it in a way that leaves you "knowing" that the preferential option is optional. *It isn't what you know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so*—and rumor science, with its accepted list of important scientific knowledge that scholars need to take into account, is one way to learn from what ain't so.

Science is the prestige discipline(s) today; you see psychology wishing for its Newton to lead it into the promised land of being a science in the fullest sense of the term. You don't see psychology pining for a Shakespeare to lead it into the promised land of being a humanity in the fullest sense of the term. And the social disciplines—I intentionally do not say social **sciences** because they are legitimate academic disciplines but not sciences—are constantly insisting that their members are scientists, but *the claim that theologians are scientists annoys me as a scientist and almost offends me as a theologian*. It should be offensive for much the same reason that it should be offensive to insist on female dignity by claiming that women are really male, and that they are just as much male as people who can sire a child.

It would be an interesting theological work to analyze today's cultural assumptions surrounding science, which are quite important and not dictated by scientific knowledge itself, and then come to almost the same freedom as someone innocent of science.

"My theology," *ewwww*. (While I was at it, why didn't I discuss plans for my own private sun and moon? I'm *not* proud of proudly discussing "my theology".) I know the text has a wart or two.

But the piece contains a suggestion: "rumor science" may be a red flag to a real problem in the place we give science.

Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

That work left out the crowning jewel of scientific theories to ponder in "rumor science": Einstein's "theory of relativity." Some time later, in my science fiction short story / Socratic dialogue, [The Steel Orb](#), I wrote in fiction something that picked up what I had left out:

Art sat back. "I'd be surprised if you're not a real scientist. I imagine that in your world you know things that our scientists will not know for centuries."

Oinos sat back and sat still for a time, closing his eyes. Then he opened his eyes and said, "What have you learned from science?"

"I've spent a lot of time lately, wondering what Einstein's theory of relativity means for us today: even the 'hard' sciences are relative, and what 'reality' is, depends greatly on your own perspective. Even in the hardest sciences, it is fundamentally mistaken to be looking for absolute truth."

Oinos leaned forward, paused, and then tapped the table four different places. In front of Art appeared a gridlike object which Art recognized with a start as a scientific calculator like his son's. "Very well. Let me ask you a question. Relative to your frame of reference, an object of one kilogram rest mass is moving away from you at a speed of one tenth the speed of light. What, from your present frame of reference, is its effective mass?"

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

Oinos said, "If you'd prefer, the table can be set to function as any major brand of calculator you're familiar with. Or would you prefer a computer with Matlab or Mathematica? The remainder of the table's surface can be used to browse the appropriate manuals."

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.

Oinos said, "I'll give you hints. In the theory of relativity, objects can have an effective mass of above their rest mass, but never below it. Furthermore, most calculations of this type tend to have anything that changes, change by a factor of the inverse of the square root of the quantity: one minus the square of the object's speed divided by the square of the speed of light. Do you need me to explain the buttons on the calculator?"

Art shrunk into his chair. "I don't know all of those technical details, but I have spent a lot of time thinking about relativity."

Oinos said, "If you are unable to answer that question before I started dropping hints, let alone after I gave hints, you should not pose as having contemplated what relativity means for us today. I'm not trying to humiliate you. But the first question I asked is the kind of question a teacher would put on a quiz to see if students were awake and not playing video games for most of the first lecture. I know it's fashionable in your world to drop Einstein's name as someone you have deeply pondered. It is also extraordinarily silly. I have noticed that scientists who have a good understanding of relativity often work without presenting themselves as having these deep ponderings about what Einstein means for them today. Trying to deeply ponder Einstein without learning even the basics of relativistic physics is like trying to write the next Nobel prize-winning German novel without being bothered to learn even the most rudimentary German vocabulary and grammar."

"But don't you think that relativity makes a big difference?"

"On a poetic level, I think it is an interesting development in your world's history for a breakthrough in science, Einstein's theory of relativity, to say that what is absolute is not time, but light. Space and time bend before light. There is a poetic beauty to Einstein making an unprecedented absolute out of light. But let us leave poetic appreciation of Einstein's theory aside.

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed

by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed between Einstein making the theory of relativity and people being able to use a sensitive enough clock to measure the microscopically small difference of the so-called 'twins paradox' by bringing an atomic clock on an airplane. The answer to the problem I gave you is that for a tenth the speed of light—which is faster than you can imagine, and well over a thousand times the top speed of the fastest supersonic vehicle your world will ever make—is one half of one percent. It's a disappointingly small increase for a rather astounding speed. If the supersonic Skylon is ever built, would you care to guess the increase in effective mass as it travels at an astounding Mach 5.5?"

"Um, I don't know..."

"Can you guess? Half its mass? The mass of a car? Or just the mass of a normal-sized adult?"

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

"The effective mass increases above the rest mass, for that massive vehicle running at about five times the speed of sound and almost twice the top speed of the SR-71 Blackbird, is something like the mass of a mosquito."

"A *mosquito*? You're joking, right?"

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

"Rumor science": The tip of an iceberg?

But I would like to get on to something that is of far greater concern than "rumor science" as it treats Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the second law of thermodynamics, relativity, evolution, and so on. If the only problem was making a bit of a hash of some scientific theories, that would be one thing. But "rumor science" may be the tip of an iceberg, a telling clue that something may be seriously amiss in how theology has been relating to science. There is another, far more serious boundary issue.

There is something about the nature of academic theology today that may become clearer if we ask questions about the nature of knowledge and line up academic theology with Orthodoxy on the one hand and modern science on the other. The table below lists a few questions connected with knowledge, and then a comparison between Orthodox Christianity, academic theology, and modern science in their own columns:

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>What is knowledge like?</i>	"Adam knew Eve..." The primary word in the Old and New Testaments for sexual union is in fact 'know', and this is a significant clue about the intimate nature of knowledge. Knowledge is, at its core, the knowledge that drinks. It connects at a deepest level, and is cognate to how Orthodox say	Knowledge is <i>critical</i> , meaning <i>detached</i> : the privileged position is of the outsider who stands clear of a situation and looks into a window. The devout believer enjoys no real advantage in grasping his religion compared to the methodical	You can't know how stars age or the limitations of the ideal gas law from direct personal experience. Science stems from a rationalism cognate to the Enlightenment, and even if one rebels against the Enlightenment,

to how Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.

observer who remains detached —and the ordinary believer may be at a marked disadvantage.

it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of personal experience.

This may not be part of the standard Western picture, but the Orthodox, non-materialist

understanding of mind holds that there is a sort of "spiritual eye" which knows and which grasps spiritual realities as overflow to its central purpose of worshiping God.

The center of gravity for knowing is this spiritual eye, and it is the center of a whole and integrated person. Logical and other "discursive" reasoning may have a place, but the seat of this kind of reasoning is a moon next to the light of the sun which is the spiritual eye, the *nous*.

Good scholarship comes from putting all other aspects of the person in their place and enthroning the part of us that reasons logically and almost putting the logic bit on steroids.

Continental philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.

We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that allows this reasoning to shine.

What aspect of yourself do you know with?

They should train

They should train students to

What should teachers cultivate in their students? Teachers should induce students into *discipleship* and should be exemplary disciples themselves. students who will not be content with their teachers' interpretations but push past to their own takes on the matter. develop experiments and theories to carefully challenge the "present working picture" in their field.

What is tradition, and how does your tradition relate to knowing? One may be not so much *under Tradition as in Tradition*: Tradition is like one's culture or language, if a culture and language breathed on by the Holy Spirit of God. Though the matrix of Tradition need not be viewed with legalistic fundamentalism, it is missing something important to fail to love and revere Tradition as something of a Something of the attitude is captured in what followed the telling of an anecdote about a New Testament Greek class where the professor had difficulties telling how to read a short text, until a classics student looked and suggested that the difficulty would evaporate if the text were read with a different set of accents from what scholars traditionally assigned it. The Greek professor's response ("Accents are not inspired!") was presented by the academic theologian As Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman observed, "You get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment."

mother.

theologian
retelling this story

as full warrant to
suggest that
scholars should
not view
themselves as
bound by *tradition*
with its blind
spots.

*How much
emphasis
do you
place on
creativity?*

It reflects some
degree of
fundamental
confusion to
measure the value of
what someone says
by how original it is.
That which is true is
not original, and that
which is original is
not true. Perhaps
people may uncover
new layers of
meaning, but to
measure someone by
how many ideas he
can claim as "mine"
is a strange measure.

Publish something
original, or perish.
Better to say
something original
but not true than
not have any ideas
to claim as "mine."
If need be,
rehabilitate Arius
or Nestorius. (Or,
if you are
Orthodox, meet
current fashions
halfway and show
that St. Augustine
need not be a
whipping boy.)

Continue to push
the envelope. Are
you an
experimental
physicist? If you
cannot observe
anything new by
the layman's
means of
observation,
pioneer new
equipment or a
clever experiment
to push the
envelope of what
can be observed.
Publish
something
original or perish.

There is a very real
sense of empiricism,
albeit a sense that
has very little
directly to do with
empirical science.
Knowledge is what

~~Theologians are
just as empirical as
physicists, whether~~

As much as
theology's
empiricism is the
empiricism of a
knowledge of the
"spiritual eye" and
the whole person,
our empiricism is

Where does your discipline place its empiricism?

you know through the "spiritual eye" and it is a knowledge that can only be realized through direct participation. An "idle word" may be a word of that which you do not have this knowledge of, and this sin would appear to be foundational to the empiricism of science. We really do have an empiricism, but it might be better not to engender pointless confusion by claiming to be empirical when the empiricism known to the academy is pre-eminently that of empirical science, whether it is either actual or aspiring science.

~~physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics.~~ We have such quasi-scientific empiricism as can be had for the human and divine domain we cover; there is a great deal of diversity, and some of us do not place much emphasis on the empiricism of science, but some of us have enough of scientific empiricism to do history work that stands its ground when judged by secular history's standards.

an empiricism of detached, careful, methodical, reasoned investigation—the investigation of the reasoning faculty on steroids. Our science exhibits professionalism and a particular vision of intellectual virtue. Our empiricism corresponds to this vision, and no one has pushed this empiricism of the reasoning faculty further, and the unique technology founded on science is a testament to how far we have pushed this kind of empiricism.

When they are lined up, academic theology appears to have a great many continuities with science and a real disconnect with Orthodox Christianity. Could academic theologians feel an inferiority complex about Not Being Scientific Enough? Absolutely. But the actual problem may be that they are entirely *too* scientific. I am less concerned that their theology is not sufficiently scientific than that it is not sufficiently *theological*.

Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

It is along those lines that I have taken something of the track of "join the enemy's camp to show its weaknesses from within" in exposing the blind spots of Darwinism, for instance. In the theologically driven short story [The Commentary](#), the issue is not really whether Darwinism is correct at all. The question is not whether we should be content with Darwinian answers, but whether we should be content with Darwinian *questions*.

Martin stepped into his house and decided to have no more distractions. He wanted to begin reading commentary, now. He opened the book on the table and sat erect in his chair:

Genesis

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

1:3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In

short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" If someone asks, "Why is there this life that we see?" and someone answers, "Evolution," it is like someone saying, "Why is the kitchen light on?" and someone else answering, "Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?" These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

Martin took a deep breath. Was the text advocating a six-day creationism? That was hard to tell. He felt uncomfortable, in a much deeper way than if Bible-thumpers were preaching to him that evolutionists would burn in Hell.

There is a hint here of why some people who do not believe in a young earth are no less concerned about young earth creationism: the concern is not exactly that it is junk science, but precisely that it is *too* scientific, assuming many of evolutionary theory's blindnesses even as it asserts the full literal truth of the Bible in answering questions on the terms of what science asks of an origins theory.

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

Pointy-haired boss: I'm sending you to Elbonia to teach a

class on Cobol on Thursday.

Dilbert: But I don't know Cobol. Can't you ask Wally? He knows Cobol!

Pointy-haired boss: I already checked, and he's busy on Thursday.

Dilbert: Can't you reschedule?

Pointy-haired boss: Ok, are you free on Tuesday?

Dilbert: You're answering the wrong question!

Dilbert's mortified, "You're answering the wrong question!" has some slight relevance the issues of religion and science: in my homily, [Two Decisive Moments](#) I tried to ask people to look, and aim, *higher*:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

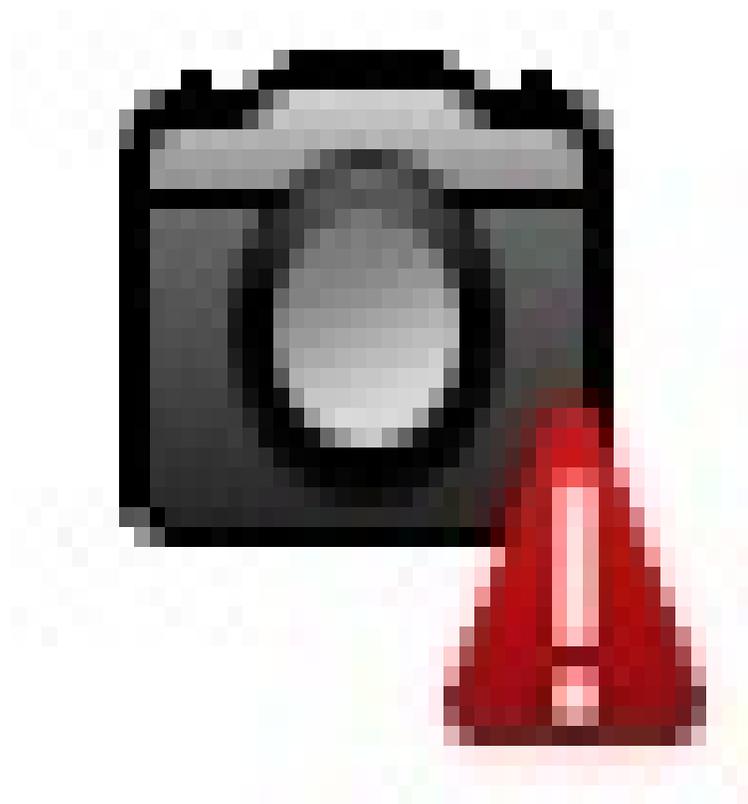
Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham,

Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "*Behold the man!*"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man! Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!*

Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.



An icon of the Resurrection.

Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers! You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of

peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.*

Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

I wince at the idea that for theologians "boundary issues" are mostly about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths to the day's state of flux in scientific speculation. I wince that theologians so often assume that the biggest contribution they can give to the dialogue between theology and science is the rubber stamp of perennially agreeing with science. I would decisively prefer that when theologians "approach religion and science boundary issues," we do so as boundaries are understood in pop psychology—and more specifically *bad* pop psychology—which is all about you cannot meaningfully say "Yes" until it is your practice to say "No" when you should say "No": what theology needs in its

boundaries with science is not primarily a question of what else we should seek to embrace, but of where theology has ingested things toxic to its constitution.

What gets lost when theology loses track (by which I do not mean primarily rumor science, but the three columns where theology seemed a colony of science that had lost touch with Orthodox faith) is that when theology assumes the character of science, it loses the character of theology.

The research for my diploma thesis at Cambridge had me read a lot of historical-critical commentary on a relevant passage; I read everything I could find on the topic in Tyndale House's specialized library, and something became painfully obvious. When a good Protestant sermon uses historical or cultural context to illuminate a passage from Scripture, the preacher has sifted through pearls amidst sand, and the impression that cultural context offers a motherlode of gold to enrich our understanding of the Bible is quite contrary to the historical-critical commentaries I read, which read almost like phone books in their records of details I'd have to stretch to use to illuminate the passage. The pastor's discussion of context in a sermon is something like an archivist who goes into a scholar's office, pulls an unexpected book, shows that it is surprisingly careworn and dog-eared, and discusses how the three longest underlined passage illuminate the scholar's output. But the historical-critical commentary itself is like an archivist who describes in excruciating detail the furniture and ornaments in the author's office and the statistics about the size and weight among books the scholar owned in reams of (largely uninterpreted) detail.

And what is lost in this careful scholarship? Perhaps what is lost is why we have Bible scholarship in the first place: it is a divinely given book and a support to life in Christ. If historical-critical scholarship is your (quasi-scientific) approach to theology, you won't seek in your scholarship what I sought in writing my (non-scientific) [Doxology](#):

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?
For naught that I might say,
Nor aught that I may do,

Compareth to thy worth.

Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named,

The Glory for whom all glory is named,

The Treasure for whom treasures are named,

The Light for whom all light is named,

The Love for whom all love is named,

The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,

The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה,

Ο ΩΝ.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

Who art eternally praised,

Who art all that thou canst be,

Greater than aught else that may be thought,

Greater than can be thought.

In thee is light,

In thee is honour,

In thee is mercy,

In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.

For good itself is named after thee,

God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and humble.

What mighteth compare to thee?

What praise equalleth thee?

If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,

Only can it be,

Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,

And ten thousand things besides,

Thou who art One,

Eternally beyond time,

So wholly One,

That thou mayest be called infinite,

Timeless beyond time thou art,

The One who is greater than infinity art thou.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

The Three who are One,

No more bound by numbers than by word,

And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
The Word,
Divine ordering Reason,
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
Ο ΩΝ.

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

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

Monty Python and Christian theology

I would like to start winding down with a less uplifting note. A few years back, I visited a friend who was a Christian and a big Monty Python fan and played for me a Monty Python clip:

God: Arthur! Arthur, King of the Britons! Oh, don't grovel! If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people groveling.

Arthur: Sorry—

God: And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone it's 'sorry this' and 'forgive me that' and 'I'm not worthy'. What are you doing now!?

Arthur: I'm averting my eyes, O Lord.

God: Well, don't. It's like those miserable Psalms—they're so depressing. Now knock it off!

This is blasphemous, and I tried to keep my mouth shut about what my host had presented to me, I thought, for my rollicking laughter. But subsequent conversation showed I had misjudged his intent: he had not intended it to be shockingly funny.

He had, in fact, played the clip because it was something that he worried about: did God, in fact, want to give grumbling complaints about moments when my friend cried out to him in prayer? Does prayer annoy our Lord as an unwelcome intrusion from people who should have a little dignity and leave him alone or at least quit sniveling?

This is much more disturbing than merely playing the clip because you find it funny to imagine God bitterly kvetching when King Arthur tries to show him some respect. If it is actually taken as theology, Monty Python is really sad.

And it is not the best thing to be involved in Monty Python as theology

theology.

One can whimsically imagine an interlocutor encountering some of the theology I have seen and trying to generously receive it in the best of humor: "A book that promises scientific theology in its title and goes on for a thousand pages of trajectories for other people to follow before a conclusion that apologizes for not actually getting on to any theology? *You have a real sense of humor!* Try to avoid imposing Christianity on others and start from the common ground of what all traditions across the world have in common, that non-sectarian common ground being the Western tradition of analytic philosophy? *Roaringly funny!* Run a theological anthropology course that tells how liberationists, feminists, queer theorists, post-colonialists, and so on have to say to the Christian tradition and does not begin to investigate what the Christian tradition has to say to them? *You should have been a comedian!* Yoke St. Gregory of Nyssa together with a lesbian deconstructionist like Judith Butler to advance the feminist agenda of gender fluidity? *You're really giving Monty Python a run for their money!*" ... until it gradually dawns on our interlocutor that the lewd discussion of sexual theology is not in any sense meant as an attempt to eclipse Monty Python. (Would our interlocutor spend the night weeping for lost sheep without a shepherd?)

There are many more benign examples of academic theology; many of even the problems may be slightly less striking. But theology that gives the impression that it could be from Monty Python is a bit of a dead (coal miner's) canary.

Scientific theology does not appear to be blame for all of these, but it is not irrelevant. Problems that are not directly tied to (oxymoronic) scientific theology are usually a complication of (oxymoronic) secular theology, and scientific theology and secular theology are deeply enough intertwined.

The question of evolution is important, and it is no error that a figure like Philip Johnson gives neo-Darwinian evolution pride of place in assessing materialist attacks on religion. But it is not an adequate remedy to merely study intelligent design. Not enough by half.

If theology could, like bad pop psychology, conceive of its "boundary issues" not just in terms of saying "Yes" but of learning to stop saying "Yes" when it should say "No", this would be a great gain. So far as I have seen, the questions about boundaries with science are primarily not scientific ideas theology needs to assimilate, but ways theology has assimilated some very deep characteristics of science that are *not* to its advantage. The question is less about what more could be added, than what more could be taken away. And the best way to do this is less the Western cottage industry of worldview construction than a journey of repentance such as one still finds preached in Eastern Christianity and a good deal of Christianity in the West.

A journey of repentance

Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Repentance has been called unconditional surrender, and it has been called the ultimate experience to fear. But when you surrender what you thought was your ornament and joy, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And with letting go comes hands that are free to grasp joy you never thought to ask. Forgiveness is letting go of the other person and finding it is yourself you have set free; repentance is being terrified of letting go and then finding you have let go of needless pain. Repentance is indeed Heaven's best-kept secret; it opens doors.

I have doubt whether academic theology will open the door of repentance; it is a beginner's error to be the student who rushes in to single-handedly sort out what a number of devout Christian theologians see no way to fix. But as for theologians, the door of repentance is ever ready to open, and with it everything that the discipline of theology seeks in vain here using theories from the humanities, there trying to mediate prestige to itself science. Academic theologians who are, or who become, theologians in a more ancient sense find tremendous doors of beauty and joy open to them. The wondrous poetry of St. Ephrem the Syrian is ever open; the liturgy of the Church is open; the deifying rays of divine grace shine ever down upon those open to receiving them and upon those not yet open. The Western understanding is that the door to the Middle Ages has long since been closed and the age of the Church Fathers was closed much earlier; but Orthodox will let you become a Church Father, here now. Faithful people today submit as best they are able to the Fathers before them, as St. Maximus Confessor did ages ago. There may be problems with academic theology today, but the door to theology in the classic sense is never closed, as in the maxim that has rumbled through the ages, "A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian." Perhaps academic theology is not the best place to be equipped to be a giant like the saintly theologians of ages past. But that does not mean that one cannot become a saintly theologian as in ages past. God can still work with us, here now.

To quote St. Dionysius (pseudo-Dionysius) in [The Mystical Theology](#),

Trinity! Higher than any being,
any divinity, any goodness!
Guide of Christians
in the wisdom of Heaven!
Lead us up beyond unknowing light,
up to the farthest, highest peak
of mystic scripture,
where the mysteries of God's Word
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.
Amid the deepest shadow
They pour overwhelming light
on what is most manifest.
Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen
They completely fill our sightless minds
with treasures beyond all beauty.

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

Plato: The Allegory of the... Flickering Screen?

Socrates: And now, let me give an illustration to show how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! a human being in a darkened den, who has a slack jaw towards only source of light in the den; this is where he has gravitated since his childhood, and though his legs and neck are not chained or restrained any way, yet he scarcely turns round his head. In front of him are images from faroff, projected onto a flickering screen. And others whom he cannot see, from behind their walls, control the images like marionette players manipulating puppets. And there are many people in such dens, some isolated one way, some another.

Glaucou: I see.

Socrates: And do you see, I said, the flickering screen showing men, and all sorts of vessels, and statues and collectible animals made of wood and stone and various materials, and all sorts of commercial products which appear on the screen? Some of them are talking, and there is rarely silence.

Glaucou: You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Socrates: Much like us. And they see only their own images, or the

images of one another, as they appear on the screen opposite them?

Glaucon: True, he said; how could they see anything but the images if they never chose to look anywhere else?

Socrates: And they would know nothing about a product they buy, except for what brand it is?

Glaucon: Yes.

Socrates: And if they were able to converse with one another, wouldn't they think that they were discussing what mattered?

Glaucon: Very true.

Socrates: And suppose further that the screen had sounds which came from its side, wouldn't they imagine that they were simply hearing what people said?

Glaucon: No question.

Socrates: To them, the truth would be literally nothing but those shadowy things we call the images.

Glaucon: That is certain.

Socrates: And now look again, and see what naturally happens next: the prisoners are released and are shown the truth. At first, when any of them is liberated and required to suddenly stand up and turn his neck around, and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the images; and then imagine someone saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision, -what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is asking him to things, not as they are captured on the screen, but

in living color -will he not be perplexed? Won't he imagine that the version which he used to see on the screen are better and more real than the objects which are shown to him in real life?

Glaucon: Far better.

Socrates: And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take and take in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

Glaucon: True, he now will.

Socrates: And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and hindered in his self-seeking until he's forced to think about someone besides himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? He will find that he cannot simply live life as he sees fit, and he will not have even the illusion of finding comfort by living for himself.

Glaucon: Not all in a moment, he said.

Socrates: He will require time and practice to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the billboards best, next the product lines he has seen advertised, and then things which are not commodities; then he will talk with adults and children, and will he know greater joy in having services done to him, or will he prefer to do something for someone else?

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: Last of he will be able to search for the One who is greatest, reflected in each person on earth, but he will seek him for himself, and not in another; and he will live to contemplate him.

Glaucon: Certainly.

Socrates: He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and is absolutely the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Glaucou: Clearly, he said, his mind would be on God and his reasoning towards those things that come from him.

Socrates: And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Glaucou: Certainly, he would.

Socrates: And if they were in the habit of conferring honours among themselves on those who were quickest to observe what was happening in the world of brands and what new features were marketed, and which followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honours and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master" than to reign as king of this Hell, and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Glaucou: Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Socrates: Imagine once more, I said, such an one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness, and seem simply not to get it?

Glaucou: To be sure.

Socrates: And in conversations, and he had to compete in one-

upsmanship of knowing the coolest brands with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable) would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went with his eyes and down he came without them; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would give him an extremely heavy cross to bear.

Glaucou: No question. Then is the saying, "In the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king," in fact false?

Socrates: In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is crucified. Dear Glaucou, you may now add this entire allegory to the discussion around a matter; the den arranged around a flickering screen is deeply connected to the world of living to serve your pleasures, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the spiritual transformation which alike may happen in the monk keeping vigil or the mother caring for children, the ascent of the soul into the world of spiritual realities according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the Source of goodness appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally, either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

Glaucou: I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

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 demythologizing, 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 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?)

Part 3:
Engaging and Building on Lewis's
Favorite Old Book

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, '*Good God!*
That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, '*God and the Son of God,*
Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,'
[By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.](#)
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,

Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
[The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#),
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of [The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab](#).
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **Î§**, and **Î‘**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, "I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people's minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?"

The master said, "Inside your heart."

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?’

‘Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my [Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?](#) How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?’

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou

knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial asceticism of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from asceticism, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by her children,” of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.’

I stood in silence, all abashed.

Song II.

His Despondency.

The Saint spoke thus:
‘What then? How is this man,
A second rich young ruler become?
He who bore not a watch on principle,
Even before he’d scarce more than
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,
Weareth a watch built to stand out,
Even among later Apple Watches.
He who declined a mobile phone,
Has carried out an iPhone,
And is displeased to accept,
A less fancy phone,
From a state program to provide,
Cell phones to those at poverty.
Up! Out! This will not do,
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,
But that when it happened, he were sad.
For the rich young ruler lied,
When said he that he had kept,
All commandments from his youth,
For unless he were an idolater,
The loss of possessions itself,
Could not suffice to make him sad.
This man hast lost a cellphone,
And for that alone he grieveth.
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?
Would that he would recall,
The heights from which he hath fallen,
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.’

II.

Then the great Saint said, ‘But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?’

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

Song III.

A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’
Said Seneca the Younger,
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,
That full and ancient philosophy,

Can speak, act, and help today,
Among athletes and business men,
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,
An individualist pursuit deepening division,
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,
What of the philosophy,
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?
I stood amazed at God,
Trying to count my blessings,
Ere quickly I lost count.

III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.'

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, 'Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry

wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the [Philokalia](#):

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire

virtue.

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

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

'And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to

utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some

fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the asceticism of a mathematician or a member of the Ultraneet. 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 â€“ 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

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

Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the

Pleasant Life, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the [Philokalia](#): the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist

if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of

the [Philokalia](#) is [The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers](#). If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the [Philokalia](#) hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a

semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society's *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

'Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

'Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one's own poor, miserable demographic.

'But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled "Love Without Boundaries," and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it" on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father's love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of $\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^{1/2}\hat{I}$, $\hat{I}\hat{\diamond}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}$, (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. [The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis](#) hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology

there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The [Philokalia](#) is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the

main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of

women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book

about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?
Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?
For I have written much,
And spent much care,
In [The Luddite’s Guide to Technology](#),
And looked all the whilst,
Down the wrong end,
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
I have written of man and creation defiled,
Yet for all my concerns,
Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’
Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
Of our embodied state,
Where better to seek healing,
For an occult-free simulation,
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
Than in the perfect creaturely response,
‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to thy word.’
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
‘Behold thy Mother!’
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:
But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminã”d teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest [a Fluxx deck](#) to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed [the game of Fluxx](#), though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that

name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for [the royal race of men](#). Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, [thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home](#), and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, “blessed,” $\hat{I}1/4\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^0\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}\blacklozenge\hat{I}1\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}$, (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including [Young’s Literal Translation](#):

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness’ sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the [Amplified Bible](#) naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was *εὐδαιμονία*, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were

more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
Of a child starkly scant of mind,
Who received a glittering package, a gift,
And kept the glittering package,
Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
And after long time,

When the disposable wrapping paper,
Were well battered and now dingy,
An adult asked,
'Aren't you going to open the package?'
The child exclaimed with joy,
Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
And squealed with joy, saying,
"Oh, there's *another* present!"
My Lord and my God!
Perhaps I will never open,
[The Sermon on the Mount](#).

VI.

I said myself then, 'O John! O glorious Saint John! Canst thou lead me on a path into the [The Sermon on the Mount](#)? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.'

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not

only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
I programmed an Apple][,
In gradeschool adventure games and [a 4D maze](#),
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.
My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original ‘fat Mac’,
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of RAM.

My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
[And a simple video game](#), had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without frequent \$500
repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
[Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of Unix.](#)
When I asked about one cardinally important open source project,
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,
That the project needed to run,
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,
For when I asked a question,
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.

I sing a song to my late iPhone,
[Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,](#)
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.
I went to see an Apple Store,
And received a followup call,
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,
And found out also that Macs were as useless,
As my computer booted into Windows,
To Find My iPhone.
Once I had one from each four,
Offerings for Apple computers:
A laptop one, an iPad one,
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;
And ere I were negotiating,
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,

To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,
And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the [Philokalia](#),
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.

St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,

But we may not yet be in the clear.

And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under surveillance,"

Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,

To those that will reflect,

That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'

Is monitored by Big Brother,

But perhaps it is not just human agencies,

That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?

It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,

Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,

And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.

29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

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

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
'There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,

And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, "Michael,"
Which is, being interpreted,
"Who is like God?"
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
Sore losers one and all.
They remain to sharpen the faithful,
God useth them to train and make strength.
[Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?](#)
[Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?](#)
[As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,](#)
[Or as if the staff should lift up itself,](#)
[As if it were no wood.](#)
Therefore be not dismayed,
If one book of Holy Scripture state,
That the Devil incited King David to a census,
And another sayeth that God did so,
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,

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

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the [Philokalia](#) describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.’

The Saint told me, ‘Thou hast read part of [Prayers by the Lake](#), in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

‘Rememberest thou also that in the [Philokalia](#) we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediateth to some degree.’

I said, 'May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?'

He said, 'Speak on.'

I said, 'I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in [For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.'

He said, 'Hast thou not been astonished at God's perfect Providence of years betimes?'

I said, 'Yes.'

He said, 'What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.'

I asked, 'Will I reach monasticism?'

He smiled at me, and said, 'Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

He said, 'Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

'With death cometh a realization of, "I shall not pass this wise again."

'Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God's champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job

the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?’

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?’

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where notes and candles glewed purest white, and unlike mine own

and, where pain and chance glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I realized I was not a-weeping. I was the happiest I'd been in my life.

Part 4:
Commencement

An Invitation to the Dance

All the works in this collection are still snapshots of the Great Dance. Some are powerful. Some are piercing in their beauty. Some are masterful. But none of the still snapshots is the same as stepping into the Great Dance yourself.

One old friend (I speak of a specific literal person I know, but the story has been repeated many times), respected as a convert in the Orthodox Church, talked about asking Orthodox, when he was an inquirer into Orthodoxy, telling Orthodox, "I want to understand Orthodoxy. What books should I read?" and getting an unexpected answer: "You don't understand Orthodoxy by reading books. You understand Orthodoxy by visiting services."

When I came into Orthodoxy, my spiritual father asked me to read the standard English-language introduction to Orthodoxy, His Eminence KALLISTOS's *The Orthodox Church*, and pick up a book of prayers (but a book of prayers that you pray each day is different from an explanation). Besides that, he knew that I was a bookworm, but he made simple demands as far as reading went, and one of many surprises from clergy at the parish when I asked some question about improving my worldview.

If you are in the U.S., you may be able to find a legitimate Orthodox parish near you at OrthodoxyInAmerica.org. Whether or not you are in the U.S., you may read the stories of other people coming to Orthodoxy at journeytoorthodoxy.com.

The standard advice about how to choose a parish, if you are not already a member, is to make a single-issue decision about the character of the priest.

All else is subsequent. And, though it is spectacular in quite a different way from a good book, learn the steps of the dance. There may be many things that are strange, and some may hurt at first, or hurt for a long time. Those are growing pains, and none of the growing pains I've experienced are ones I've regretted. The services, the building, everything is filled with beauty and glory, and they provide an opportunity to put down roots that attach to something deeper than external majesty. Along the way, they are a way to connect to people who will be brethren to you, part of a parish family that is your home, should you join.

But don't make that commitment in a heartbeat unless your conscience compels you. Just go, and start to attend the services (the Orthodox Church has closed communion, meaning that only Orthodox may receive communion, and then only if they believe it is the body and blood of Christ and have gone to confession recently, but that rule is for your sake, not for members of an exclusive club), and take things in.

A journey of ten thousand miles begins with a single step. If you want to know more about Orthodoxy, this one book should be enough reading to go on for a while; take the next step and visit one service. Some parishes have Vespers services on Saturday evenings as well as a Sunday Divine Liturgy.

I pray the best for you!

Christ is risen, *His* joy!