

**The Luddite's Guide to
Technology:
*The Past Writes Back to
Humane Tech!***

From the "Best Works" series

CJS Hayward

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I hope you find food for thought in the works that follow.

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The *Silicon* Rule

I have stated, in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, a lot of theory and analysis, and I would like now to give some of what I practice myself.

Taking a second look at asking, “What would Jesus do?”

I looked down on the “What would Jesus do?” fad when it was hot, and I have never had nor wanted a pair of W.W.J.D. Christian socks; for that matter, I have never asked that question. However, now much later, I wish to offer a word in its defense.

The Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” is not just a directive from the Sermon on the Mount; most or all world religions at least touch on it. And it is ethically very interesting in that is a simple and short ethical directive that sheds quite a lot of light over a very broad collection of situations. That's a feat. Furthermore, it is also a feat represented by W.W.J.D. If you read the Bible regularly at all, the question “What would Jesus do?” brings clarity to many situations.

And I would like to provide another rule.

The *Silicon* Rule

The Silicon Rule, as I propose it, is a rule for guiding technology choices:

What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?

Now “What would Jesus do?” is only meaningful if you have some picture of what Jesus was like, and “What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?” may surprise you, although a search for “humane tech” might hit paydirt.

Jean-Claude Larchet, towards the end of his must-read *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul* talks about a fashionable private school and quotes glimpses of the private lives offered to children of Silicon Valley technology executives in Steve Bilton’s summary:

The Waldorf School of the Peninsula, in the heart of Silicon Valley, is rare in that it is not connected [to the Internet]. Three quarters of the pupils are children whose parents work in the area, with Google, Apple, Yahoo, or Hewlett-Packard. These people who work to develop the digital economy and propagate it into every level of society are especially glad that in this school, their offspring are completely sheltered from computers, tablets, and smartphones right up till eighth grade.

“So, your kids must love the iPad?” I asked Mr. Jobs [...]. The company’s first tablet was just hitting the shelves. “They haven’t used it,” he told me. “We limit how much technology our kids use at home.”...

Evan Williams, a founder of Blogger, Twitter and Medium, and his wife, Sara Williams, said that in lieu of iPads, their two young boys have hundreds of books (yes, physical ones) that they can pick up and read any time.

So how do tech moms and dads determine the proper boundary for their children? In general, it is set by age.

Children under 10 seem to be most susceptible to becoming addicted, so these parents draw the line at not allowing any gadgets during the week. On weekends, there are limits of 30 minutes to 2 hours on iPad and smart-phone use. And 10- to 14-year-olds are allowed to use computers on school nights, but only for homework.

“We have a strict no screen time during the week rule for our kids,” said Lesley Gold, founder and chief executive of the SutherlandGold Group, a tech media relations and analytics company. “But you have to make allowances as they get older and need a computer for school.”

Some parents also forbid teenagers from using social networks, except for services like Snapchat, which deletes messages after they have been sent. This way they don’t have to worry about saying something

online that will haunt them later in life, one executive told me.

Although some non-tech parents I know give smartphones to children as young as 8, many who work in tech wait until their child is 14. While these teenagers can make calls and text, they are not given a data plan until 16. But there is one rule that is universal among the tech parents I polled.

“This is rule No. 1: There are no screens in the bedroom: There are no screens in the bedroom. Period. Ever,” Mr. Anderson said. [...]

I never asked Mr. Jobs what his children did instead of using the gadgets he built, so I reached out to Walter Isaacson, the author of “Steve Jobs,” who spent a lot of time at their home.

“Every evening Steve made a point of having dinner at the big long table in their kitchen, discussing books and history and a variety of these things,” he said. “No one ever seemed to pull out an iPad or computer. The kids did not seem addicted at all to devices.

Examples could easily be multiplied, even if one is only quoting Larchet. This is, quite briefly, what Silicon Valley technology executives want for their children.

My own working model

I remember, on environmental issues, someone talking softly about how “subdue the earth” in Genesis 1 originally meant a very gentle mastery. That was everything I wanted to believe, and I’d still like it to be true, but it has been said

that the Hebrew has the force of, “trample it under foot!” In the Orthodox Church’s Greek Bible, the word here translated as “subdue,” κατακυρεω (*katakureo*) is the same verb that in the New Testament for how Orthodox leaders are not to relate to the rank and file, and can be translated “lord it over.” κυρεος (*kurios*) is the basic word for “lord,” and the prefix κατα (*kata*) in at least some places gives the word significantly more force.

Should we lord it over the earth? That’s one thing I think we have done disproportionately well. However, I bring this up for a reason. I believe we can, should, and perhaps need to *lord it over technology*, and the basis for our interactions, above the assumed life in the Church and frequent reception of sacraments, is the bedrock to how we should relate to technology. We should reject most use of technology along marketing propositions. Possibly I will be under the authority of an abbot and be directed not to engage in electronic communication at all. For now, I have the usual technologies, apart from any working smartwatch.

One way I have tried to explain my basic attitude is as follows. Most of us, most of the time, should not be calling 911. And my understanding is that you can get in trouble with the law without having what the law considers appropriate justification; you don’t call 911 because you’re bored and you want someone to talk to. However, the *single most important number* you can call is 911; if you are in a medical emergency or some other major problem, being able to call 911 can be a matter of life and death.

My prescription is, in caricature, carry a smartphone but only use it when you need to call 911.

Apart from the smartphone, I try to avoid TV, movies, radio and so on. Michael in *Stranger in a Strange Land* said that he had questions about what he saw on the “goddam-noisy-box”, and I really don’t think I’m losing out by not being involved in them. Television has over the years grown a heavy dose of MSG; watching even a clean movie hits me like a stiff drink. Silence is something precious, and it has been called the language of the world to come.

On my smartphone, I’ve watched maybe a couple of dozen movies and have nothing loaded for it as an iPod. I have no games, or at least none for my own use, nor amusement apps. Its use is governed by silence, *which means in large measure that it is used for logistic purposes and not used when I do not have a logistical reason to use it*. I only really use part or what appears on my home screen: Gmail, Calendar, Camera, Maps, Weather, Notes, App Store, Settings, Termius (software for IT workers), GasBuddy, PNC, Kindle, Flashlight, Pedometer, Libby, Translate, FluentU (for language learning), DuckDuckGo (a privacy-enhanced web browser), Phone, mSecure (a password manager), and Text. And of those, I do not really use Camera, Weather, Notes, or Kindle.

This may sound very ascetic, but it is a spiritual equivalent of good physical health. Jerry Mander’s *Four Arguments for the ELIMINATION of Television* looks about artificial unusuality, about how we connect with the kind of stimulation we receive, and how children not stimulated by television can be stimulated by the natural world. My seemingly austere use of my phone gives me luxuries that would have been unimaginable to Emperors and Popes in the ancient and medieval times. Even in the nineteenth century people were pushing the envelope on

keeping toilets from smelling nasty.

One area where I am learning now is to avoid making fake or ersatz connections by computer or phone. I use Facebook and Twitter to announce new postings; arguably I shouldn't do even that. They are an arena for idle talking, and for fake friendship. Larchet's term for a person hollowed out by technology is *Homo connecticus*, Man the Connected. There are numerous ways to be connected, all the time, in a way that is simply not helpful, and in fact an intravenous drip of noise. If I do not have an active conversation, I check my email by default about once an hour; though this might not be a good idea, I have turned off all sound notifications for text messages. In previous years, I had gone on "net.vacations" and avoided computers and electronic communication for a few days; more recently I have sometimes kept my phone on a permanent "Do not disturb." As far as my social life, I meet people (and cats) face-to-face when I can.

I also almost categorically try to avoid exposure to advertising, almost as if it were porn; both are intended to stimulate unhelpful desire. I tend to be a lot less likely to covet something and spend tight money on things I don't need. And really, if I need something only after an advertiser paints ownership beautifully, chances are I don't really need it.

All of this is how, in the concrete, I have tried to trample technology underfoot, and **really** trample its marketing proposition. This is something of a countercultural use, but it works remarkably well, and if you can rein in yourself, it won't suck out so much of your blood.

What is the advantage of having a phone then?

Wouldn't it be simpler to not own one? I personally think there is much to commend about not owning a smartphone, but it is a socially mandated technology. You should be able to get along well enough to have a paper planner and pad and a standalone GPS to navigate by, but this is how to skim the cream off of technology and not hurt yourself with its murkier depths.

All of this may sound excessively ascetic, or a feat that it isn't. Feel free to chalk it up to eccentricity or introversion. However, I would point out that the conversations in Silicon Valley technology executive's houses are quite lively.

1. Read a book by yourself.
2. Read a book and discuss it together.
3. Take up a new hobby, like woodworking. You can make a lot of interesting things woodworking.
4. Go to an Orthodox church.
5. Pick one topic and research it as far as you can in a fixed number of days. Share with others what you learned.
6. Buy a pair of binoculars and take up bird watching. Please note that local conservation society members, park districts, possibly libraries, and so on may have excellent advice on how to get involved.
7. Spend an hour in silence and just sit, just unwind.

8. Use older technologies and practices. Drive to visit someone instead of calling. Call instead of texting. Watch old 1950's movies that are at an F on special effects but an A on plot and storytelling. Go outside and play catch with a ball or frisbee.
9. Take a walk or a hike, or fish up a bicycle and take bike rides for fun.
10. Have a conversation about everything and nothing.

And trample technologies underfoot as much as it takes to have a life.

How to get there

What I have listed above is more a destination than a means how. As far as how goes, the basic method is to start whittling away at your consumption of noise bit by bit. If you watch television, you might decide in advance what you want to watch, and stick to only shows you've picked out. After that, vote one show per week off the island, until there is only one show, and then cut into the days you watch it. That is much more effective than through sheer force of will to stop watching together until you binge and decide you can't live without it. And the same principle applies with other things.

An Orthodox priest can be very good at helping you taper down and stop activities, and another perspective can really help. If you want to stick with a book, Tito Collander's *The Way of the Ascetics: The Ancient Tradition of Inner and Spiritual Growth* displays the discipline well. However,

a real, live encounter with an Orthodox priest gives a valuable second set of eyes, and making the pilgrimage and overcoming a bit of shyness are two good things you should want to have.

An orientation to this book

This chapter was written (almost) last, in an attempt to tie together and give entry to several threads that run through this book.

The nutshell that I chose was deliberate. If I had suggested a rule of thumb of taking a cue from the Lead Pencil Society, some people could accuse me of putting someone who hates chickens in charge of guarding the chicken coop. Now I have read *The Minutes of the Lead Pencil Society*, and while I would call them wrong in certain cases, I have difficulty seeing someone reading the book and calling the Lead Pencil Society unreasoning, and I would remind the reader of G.K. Chesterton: "We call a man a bigot or a slave of dogma because he is a thinker who has thought thoroughly and to a definite end." However, if leading lights in the realm of technology make strikingly Luddite choices in caring for their children, that's a little harder to dismiss.

Interested readers could take the principle and tighten it up by using a more focused figure than Silicon Valley. In that regard, the question of what Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children is not a last word. It is an outer boundary where there are inner depths to be had. It might be a feat to get inside the outer boundary, but there are things much further in, and I attempt to at least hint at these inner depths.

I would like to comment on one thing intended to orient this book and enable the reader to have some of its fruit, and that is a significantly different style of communication. Among Evangelicals, there is a central place given to working out ideas, and so what one gets is doctrine, ideas that can fill out a philosophical framework, systematic theology, or the stuff that worldview construction consumes. This is how one gets core doctrines which are not legitimately subject for debate, and the construction of personal theological opinion is in the image of working out necessary doctrine. Opinion differs chiefly in being recognized as opinion, not in being a different kind of thing from non-negotiable doctrines. Now there are what Orthodox would call *ascesis*, among which are quiet times reading the Bible and praying, tithing, church attendance, Bible studies, and mental prayer, but these spiritual disciplines occupy a supporting role compared to working out ideas from the Bible.

In Orthodoxy the relative importances are more or less reversed. As regard doctrines, these are not mainly developed individually. Some Orthodox have said that it reflects quite a high opinion of one's faculties to assert that one's unaided self can work out the doctrine of the Trinity just by studying the Bible. Now the doctrine of the Trinity is highly non-negotiable in Orthodoxy, but it did not come about through privately reading the Bible, not even in St. Athanasius and the like. Doctrine is figured out and explained through the Church in history. But *ascesis is another matter*.

This book is driven by concern for *ascesis* or spiritual discipline. It is not intended to be a systematic theology, something that is off-limits in Orthodoxy, alongside

worldview construction being a foreign object, and ideas that are present are usually there with the job of shedding light on ascesis. It may end up being dense in ideas, but without effort to present ideas systematically. If anything, rather than systematic exposition, it is intended to follow an old approach of *variations on a theme*. Apart from music, the exploration of variations on a theme is a boilerplate practice in medieval literature (and, for that matter, even Shakespeare). The intended effect is to offer a many-angled investigation of one core topic.

I, as the author, am adding these notes before submitting a revision for a review in the Midwest Book Review. I am writing during the COVID-19 cyber-quarantine, where societies are shifting one notch more from physical to virtual. I consider this book probably the one title that is most likely to be significant, and the foundation that was laid is all the more significant in our drift to the virtual.

What kind of ascesis or spiritual discipline do I think we need?

A hint is that Orthodox understanding of fasting is perennially relevant to consuming technologies without being consumed by them. Beyond that, that is the question I try to answer in the remainder of this book.

Cordially,
C.J.S. Hayward

55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine

(Note: Some of this is old and some of this is new. I'm not seeking to be original.)

1. Trust technology about as far as you can throw it, and remember that you can't throw software or the web.
2. When facing a situation, ask, "What would a Boomer do?"
3. If your priest is willing, ask for pastoral guidance in slowly but steadily withdrawing from technologies that hurt you. (Don't try to leap over buildings in one bound. Take one step at a time, and one day at a time.)
4. Practice the spiritual disciplines: prayer, fasting, generosity, church attendance, the sacraments, silence, etc.
5. Use older technologies.

6. Fast from technologies some of the time, especially on fasting days.
7. Use your phone only for logistics, never for games, entertainment, or killing time. (You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.)
8. Unplug your intravenous drip of noise, little by little. It may be uncomfortable at first, but it's worth it.
9. Own and read paper.
10. Leave your phone at home some days.
11. Read *The New Media Epidemic*.
12. Read *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, this collection, and in particular *The Consolation of Theology*.
13. Minimize or cut out completely your use of anti-social media. (By the way, spending time sucked into Facebook is a good way to enter a depression.)
14. Read up on Humane Tech and advice for how to take control, but do not limit yourself to that.
15. Do not own a television.
16. Do not feed the trolls.
17. Choose face-to-face meetings over Zoom meetings if you have a choice, and Zoom over any instant messaging.
18. Consider screen time, and multitasking, to be a drain on the mindfulness we are seeking from the East because we have rejected it in the West.
19. Turn off all phone notifications you have a live

option to do.

20. Look at your phone when it rings or buzzes. Do not check your phone unprovoked every five minutes to see if you missed a text.
21. When you are reading on the web, don't just scan the page. Read it, like a paper book, slowly.
22. When you type, type full words, not txtisms.
23. Don't trade your adequate, existing, working gadgets for the latest and hottest gadget.
24. Set a fixed bedtime, and then lights out is lights out.
25. Keep and charge your phone in some room that is away from your bedroom.
26. If you use porn, stop. If you find yourself unable to stop, bring it to confession, and *seriously* consider **XXXchurch.com**.
27. Do not store up treasures on earth, but own and use technology only so far as it advances the Kingdom of Heaven.
28. Live by a *Silicon* Rule of, "What technologies do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?" Steve Jobs, for instance, gave his kids walls of paper books and animated discussion, and so far as I am aware no iPads.
29. Reject contraception and Splenda.
30. Shop in real, local stores, even a local Wal-Mart, rather than making Amazon your first port of call.
31. Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need.

32. When you want to go shopping like some feel-good sacrament, do not buy it. You may buy it after you've let go of coveting after it, not before.
33. Limit your consumption of TED talks, and recognize them along psychology as something of a secular religion. (But if you need help, get help, without fear or shame.)
34. Write snailmail letters, preferably with your own handwriting.
35. Recognize that from the Devil's perspective, Internet is for porn—and he may have helped inspire, guide, and shape its development.
36. Expect Amazon and Google Books to delist priceless treasures. (This is already happening.)
37. Cultivate social skills, especially for face-to-face.
38. Cultivate the virtues.
39. If your conscience and applicable law permit, *maybe* consider owning and learning to use a gun. It's safer for everyone to have most criminals and some law-abiding citizens be armed than only have criminals be armed.
40. Seek theosis in the acquisition of the Spirit.
41. When shopping, use a debit card before a credit card, and use cash before either if you have a choice. Giving away paper bills and wondering what to do with change is a partial deterrent to buying things you do not need.
42. Never form an identity around the brands you

patronize, *and do not adopt a personal brand.*

43. Limit new technological intrusions into your life.
44. Repent of your sins.
45. Read aloud some of the time.
46. Cultivate connection with nature.
47. Drop it and drive.
48. Drop it and pay attention to the person you're with.
49. Keep good posture and take steps to avoid the diseases of civilization. Some approaches that have been taken to all be important include using Paleo diet (with fasts, eating vegetables in lieu of grain) and exercise, have a balanced ratio of Omega-3 to Omega-6 fatty acids, get real sleep, have engaging activities, and have social interactions.
50. Do not be surprised if you live to see the Antichrist rise to power.
51. Learn survival skills.
52. Recognize that we are already in an apocalyptic singularity.
53. Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people.
54. Keep a reasonable amount of cash available, at home or in a money belt.
55. **Read, and live, Fr. Tom Hopko's 55 Maxims.**

Beware of Geeks Bearing Gifts

Why did we call ourselves the Katana? It was in the excitement of a moment, and a recognition that our project has some off the elegance of a Katana to a Japan fan. We were more current than today's fashions and for that matter *made* today's fashions, but representing an unbroken tradition since Plato's most famous work, what *they* call the world's oldest, longest, least funny, and least intentional political joke: *The Republic*. Things would have been a lot easier if it weren't for *them*. *They* obstructed the Katana.

The Katana have a dynamic thousand-or-so goals, but there is only one that counts: the relentless improvement of the Herd. Some of the older victories have really been improving agriculture what seems like thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold, with mechanized engineering for farming and a realization that you can have meat costing scarcely more than vegetables if you optimize animals like you'd optimize any other machine, under conditions that turn out to be torture for farm animals. There are some lands where the

Herd has been imbued with enough progress that the middle class has about as much creature comfort as there is to be had, and for that matter among the poor the #1 dietary problem is obesity. Maybe we made the Herd look more like pigs, but please do not *blame* us! *We* aren't eating that much!

We are altruists through and through.

We have been providing the Herd with progressively greater "space-conquering technologies", as they are sold, which neuter the significance of their having physical bodies and the structure of life that was there before us. First we gave gasoline-powered Locomotives and great Aerobirds, devices that could move the meat of the human body faster. Now we are unfolding another wave of body-conquering technologies, which obviate the need to move meat. They are powered by a kind of unnatural living thing. Perhaps the present central offering in this horn of plenty, or what we present as a horn of plenty, is a Portal: a small device carried by many even in the poorest lands, that draws attention to itself and such stimulation it offers, disengaging from ancient patterns of life.

Things would be so much easier if it weren't for *them*. We tried to tell people that *they* hate women; now we've told people that *they* hate gays. *They* still get in the way of progress.

Yesterday there was a planned teleconference, a town hall among the Katana after an important document from *them* had been intercepted. It was encrypted with a flawed algorithm, but cryptanalysis is easy and semantics is hard, and we gave the document to the semanticians for analysis.

The title of the document was straightforward and one that the Katana was happy to see: "How to Serve Man". But

the head semantician came late, and his face was absolutely ashen. It took him some time to compose himself, until he said—"The book... How to Serve... How to Serve Man... *It doesn't contain one single recipe!*"

[With apologies to Damon Knight, "To Serve Man,"
[tinyurl.com/damon-knight-to-serve-man.](http://tinyurl.com/damon-knight-to-serve-man)]

How Can I Take My Life Back From My Phone?

*Is there someplace in the world that does not have
Internet?*

-A prolific poster on Twitter

The *Silicon* Rule

In “The *Silicon* Rule” below, I suggest that a good rule of thumb is to ask, “What do Silicon Valley technology executives choose for their children?” And Steve Jobs, for instance, did not have a nerd’s paradise for his kids. He had walls with big bookshelves and animated discussions. They hadn’t seen an iPad when it first entered the limelight. And employees of technology company chose what might seem some remarkably strict rules, because they didn’t buy into the mystique of hot gadgets. They knew better.

In *Bridge to Terebithia*, the author introduces Leslie as privileged with a capital P. The biggest cue is quite possibly not that money is not the issue, but that her family does not

own a television. Today that character might also be introduced as not having a smartphone, for several reasons.

People know on several levels that Facebook and smartphones suck the life out of their users. That's old news. This page is about an alternative.

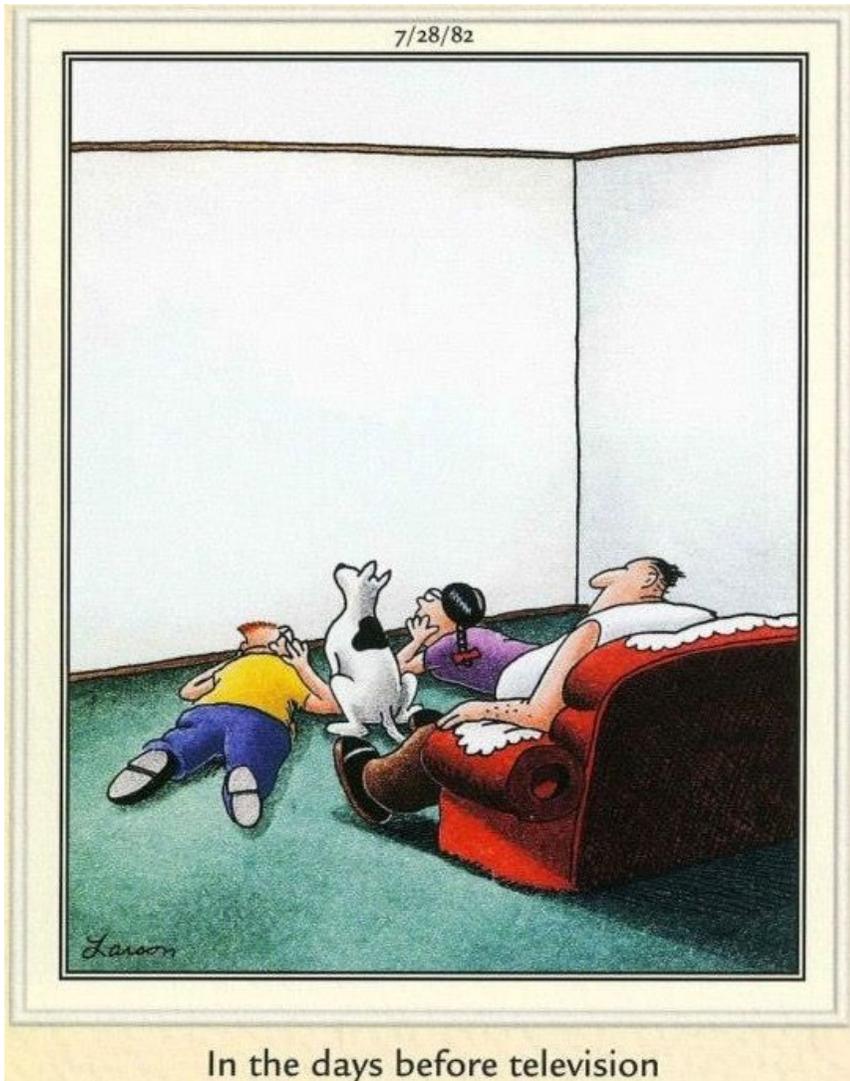
How I tamed my iPhone

I have what might be called a Holy Grail of iPhone usage. I carry my iPhone but I rule it and it does not rule me. It is often at hand, but I have domineered it well enough that I don't compulsively check it. I get almost all of the practical benefits with none of the hidden price tags.

How?

Prequel: How I tamed television

Before I became a strict iPhone user, I was a slightly relaxed television non-user. I grew up with limited television, one hour per day during the schoolyear and two hours during summer vacation, and I read Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in an Age of Show Business* and the more book-like Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and also books like Stephen Covey's *First Things First*. And I slowly checked out the rest of the way from television. And as an older child and later a young man, I had the vibrancy one associates with an unhindered imagination: the days before television, or something that as might as well be the days before television:



The irony of the Far Side cartoon is that time before television sucked the life out of everything was much more vibrant, not a family huddled around a vacant spot by a wall.

Prequel: Weston A. Price diet

I'm not specifically interested in converting people to Western A. Price or Paleo diets beyond saying that it is my opinion that your body's engine merits pure premium fuel, but I wanted to comment on something very specific about *Nourishing Traditions*. As one friend pointed out, some of the ways food is produced are really gross; most vegetable oils besides olive, avocado, and coconut oils have to be extracted under conditions that goes rancid immediately, like popped popcorn, and are then made yellow and clear and not smelling bad by chemical wizardry, or the artificial phenomenon of getting four gallons of milk from a cow per day and then manipulations to make 2% milk (“*No significant difference has been shown between milk derived from rbST-treated and non-rbST-treated cows except for the additional ingredients of blood and pus.*”). It overall builds a sense of “This is really gross and unfit for human consumption,” and that's good.

It is worth your while to read books about how, for instance, standard smartphone use is reprogramming our brains to be bowls of tapioca. I gave, and meant, five stars to Jean-Claude Larchet's *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*. My own title in the same vein is *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*.

Now on to my iPhone

I check my iPhone at intervals: once per hour, or perhaps once per day. That breaks the spine of constant checking, at least eventually. My phone has three games, all of them for my little nephews, and I've come to dodge

showing them games on my smartphone, because when I show them a real, physical toy, they can wait turns and share, while smartphone games are addictive enough that when I take out my phone and let them play with it, squabbles consistently follow. In good spirit, when they wanted to play pinball games on my phone, I deleted the pinball game and then made a crude pinball machine out of some leftover wood, nails, rubber bands, large ball bearings, and a plastic pipe. They were initially disappointed, but when they had some time to play with it, they began to be imaginative in a way I have never seen with a smartphone video game.

Returning to my smartphone, I use it for utilitarian purposes, including making bottom-liner use of Facebook and Twitter. Bottom-liner use of Facebook can be constructed, but having it fill the hours is depressing to anyone.

Specific suggestions for iPhone and Android smartphones

On this point I would say that there are few things you *must* do, but many things you *might* do. Probably the single best advice I know is to work with an Orthodox priest who is comfortable freeing you from your chains to technology. Good advice is to make a small change to start, and then slowly but steadily build up until what you have in place is working for you.

I would also underscore that these are suggestions, that some people have found helpful. I do not use all the rules others have found helpful, and I've found benefit in getting

stricter with myself as time has passed. However, you don't owe a duty to make all of these your own.

1. **Learn from Humane Tech, humanetech.com.**
Humane Tech is a movement to mitigate some of turning people's brains to tapioca, and it is well worth attending. I don't believe they go far enough; I believe that Orthodox asceticism and fasting provide a good backbone, but knowing which apps make you happy and which apps make you sad is at very least a good start. Three Humane Tech pages you should know about include the following:
 1. The homepage at humanetech.com, for general orientation.
 2. Take control.
humanetech.com/resources/take-control gives many concrete suggestions. I've thought about all of them and implemented some of them.
 3. Familiarize yourself with app ratings at humanetech.com/resources/app-ratings. All apps are not created equal in terms of their effect on how you feel. If you want to get your head out of your apps, this is another page I would at least recommend familiarizing yourself with.
2. **Make a conscious adult decision about what you carry.** I would recommend choosing between four primary options:

1. *Keep a smartphone, but be sure that you are the one in charge.* This is the option I go with, but only after not carrying a cell phone when they were becoming common, and have less plugged in days of only checking email once per day. I do more frequent usage, and think that checking it once per hour is also a good baseline, but I only check things more frequently when I have a specific logistical reason. The strongest reason for this may be less the inner logic of dominating your technology, than smartphones being socially mandated.
2. Maybe *carry* a phone, but keep it turned off (not “sleep” and awake if you touch a button;” “OFF” all the way, so you have to power it up again to use it, And then turn it off, all the way, when you are done using it. *It has been said that if you keep a guitar in its case and take it out of the case when you use it, and then put it back in its case when you're done using it, you'll spend less time playing guitar.*
3. *Don't carry a smartphone.* Kings, Emperors, Popes and Patriarchs before the twentieth century lived in great luxury without having any kind of phone access, ever. They weren't deprived. You most likely don't need it.
4. *Carry alternate gear.* What about, instead of carrying a smartphone, you carry a standalone GPS, an old-school handset that only does talk

and text with a numeric keypad, a paper planner or a small paper pad for your scheduling, todo, and scratchpad use, and maybe a book or Kindle? That sounds like a lot, but it fits nicely, with room to spare, in my favorite messenger bag.

Admittedly these things are not the same convergence device, but it really may be possible to carry everything you want without difficulty. And by the way, their not including social media isn't a defect; it's a feature.

3. **Read *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*, and this book.** Pay close attention to the rules in *The New Media Epidemic* as taken from Silicon Valley tech Moms and Dads. Chapter 13 is rich in practical application, mentions a #1 rule of no phones in bedrooms ever, and “Alex Constantinople... said her youngest son, who is 5, is never allowed to use gadgets during the week, and her older children, 10 to 13, are only allowed 30 minutes a day on school nights.” Not an absolutely different rule from what my parents had for me. Other aspects covered include having the network's router shut off outside of a certain window of time.
4. **Take an attitude of “Everything is permitted... maybe, but not everything is beneficial.”** We are tempted to try to get the most use out of our investment, when a better use might be more sparing. As far as TV goes, I have sought out to see one Simpsons episode in the past five or so years.

Somewhere along the way, I stopped seeing as much television as I was allowed. Don't use as much as you will let yourself use, and recognize that the most beneficial uses are sometimes the ones with the lightest touch. A smartphone in "Do Not Disturb" mode is just as much capable of calling 911 in a bad situation as any other cell phone.

5. **Have an attitude of having a life outside of online activity.** When I grew up, I was taught to cast a line with a fishing rod. I didn't end up catching much of anything, but my father taught me the basics, face-to-face, with a genuine fishing rod. Young people today are far more likely to learn to cast a line with the accelerometer on a smartphone, and that was a deprivation. I did my studies through traveling to campuses face-to-face even if I used email as well. This is a human baseline that is a survival from the Middle Ages, for that matter a survival from the animal world where young wolves are not handed tools necessarily but are taught how to interact with their environment to hunt, face-to-face with other wolves. And I would suggest that traveling to a college campus and also using some email is a pretty good baseline for technology use. And in relation to this, we have:

6. **Take up a hobby and give smartphones some competition.** It can be hard to just pull back from habitual technology use. It is somewhat easier, even if it is not really easy, to pull back from the draw of technology and engage in something else, such as

candle making. Having a constructive hobby can be very helpful as something else to do instead.

Meetup groups and other local organizations can be great.

Meetup groups can be found at meetup.org, and an online hobby picker can be found at cjshayward.com/hobby.

7. **Use your phone for a purpose, and never to treat boredom.** A practice of reaching for your phone when you need it to do something, and not much else, can be great. Your phone can be genuinely nice when you use it to contact an acquaintance by any means, or to order a pair of shoes. It's a trap when you use it to just pass time or make boredom easier to deal with. The most miserable use of Facebook, for instance, is when you're always on.
8. **Use older technologies and fast from technologies.** Fasting from technologies is explored in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, and while it may not be possible, there are times where you can make a phone call instead of sending an email, or drive to see someone face-to-face instead of making a phone call. In general, using older space-conquering technologies instead of newer space-conquering technologies can uncover a forgotten richness. Some have had days of no electricity. *A Lead Pencil Society* day here and there can

produce just a little freedom, or even just write a single hand-written, lead-pencil letter to a loved one, or perhaps buy a single, paper book instead of an ebook.

9. **Treat porn as a real danger**, and get help whenever you need it. Porn is the disenchantment of the entire universe; it is our day's biggest attack on men; it is preparation for committing rape. Take things to a father confessor; use a support group; use xxxchurch.com.

10. **Don't look at your phone as a treasure from a magic world**. A phone can feel exotic until you're already hooked, but I think of people in the second world where a smartphone may seem a relic from the wonderland of the first world. In fact the U.S. may have more seeking of escape than Uganda. In fact material treasure may be found much more easily in the U.S.—and with it spiritual poverty. I believe that smartphones have uses, but as an experience they are not really helpful if you're an American, and not really helpful if you're a Ugandan friend. There are uses, and you can read ebooks for instance, which is really sweet. However, being sucked into a phone is not really a helpful way of using it. On those grounds I would advise friends both in the U.S. and Uganda to use phones, maybe, but know that God has placed people around you, and a person is infinitely better than a smartphone. Enjoy the *real* treasures!

All of this may seem like a lot, but it is very simple at heart:

Start walking on the path and put one foot in front of the other.

That is all you need.

Technology Is Part of Our Poverty

The reason for this work

This piece arose from a conversation with a fairly bright friend I had where I realized I had been putting important points of data out but not explaining or clarifying very well how they were connected, assuming connections were obvious when they weren't. This piece is not intended to add anything new to my portfolio of documents, but to explain and/or re-explain with more "connective tissue" where the reader will be told how they fit together.

Clearing away one distraction

The effort to go virtual made more painfully apparent the resource disparities affecting the underprivileged. I acknowledge such, but my point has nothing really to do with that. No objections to such discussion, but I am not attempting such a discussion here. I am discussing

something else.

An example of a gap

To illustrate the kind of gap I am talking about, I would like to look at *Bridge to Terebithia*, which is partly driven by a cultural gap between a poor farmboy and an urban gal whom the author marks as being Privileged with a capital P. Although the Wikipedia for the book. It's not just that, as the [Wikipedia article](#) points out, that her family is the one family in town where "Money is not the issue." **Her family does not own a television**, a point which prompted the farmboy to assume her family is too poor to own a television. Other markers where the author attaches a bold-font label of "Privileged" are that she does not know the Easter story, but listens to it with some wonder and says it's like the story of Socrates's trial and death, or Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

The story is largely a story of cross-cultural encounter, and it is so no less because the two central characters are both U.S. citizens, both white, of the same age, and for that matter are both can *run*. The privilege is not just that the girl's parents are wealthy and purchase a rural house to take a break and re-evaluate their priorities. Not owning a television is a major marker of the girl's Privileged family, and I will consider that very important in the points that follow. But my other major reason for presenting this, besides my wanting to underscore that the girl's family *Does Not Own a Television*, is that studying and exploring a gap across what really amounts to culture is a large portion of what drives this story and makes this Newberry Award winner interesting.

Gaps like these, in my opinion, are well worth paying attention to, and it is my intent in this post to understand a few gaps and reap something very worthwhile from minding the gaps.

Why I disagree with “In the future, we’ll all be Harry Potter”

Jakob Nielsen in “In the future, we’ll all be Harry Potter” writes:

By saying that we’ll one day be like Harry Potter, I don’t mean that we’ll fly around on broomsticks or play three-dimensional ballgames (though virtual reality will let enthusiasts play Quidditch matches). What I do mean is that we’re about to experience a world where spirit inhabits formerly inanimate objects.

Much of the Harry Potter books’ charm comes from the quirky magic objects that surround Harry and his friends. Rather than being solid and static, these objects embody initiative and activity. This is precisely the shift we’ll experience as computational power moves beyond the desktop into everyday objects.

Next-Generation Magic

...

I do not contest Jakob Nielsen’s assertion that in the future we will have technology that sounds astounding by

today's standards. That much is indisputable. However, **I strongly dispute the implication that to people living in that reality, it will be a world of wonder, or a world that we could wish were real to us, the way Harry Potter fans wish on some level they could live at Hogwarts.**

I wish to assert, unfold, and unpack that however much some technologies may initially wow people who don't have them, the future is this shimmering, desirable place the way Harry Potter's Hogwarts is a place people so much wish that they could be their real world.

A meme about a gap: Old Economy Steve

There is a group of memes that rub in the smiling, pimply white face of some poor guy's high school yearbook photo with a generic, mid-70's hairstyle. They spitefully rub things in about a clueless, out-of-touch *Old Economy Steve*, and rub in that he is specifically clueless about the gap separating young people from himself:

Goes to law school.

Pays student loans with first paycheck.

Brought a house in his 20's with a 9 to 5 job that didn't require a bachelor's degree.

"Kids these days have it easy."

“When I was in college my summer job paid the tuition.”

Tuition was \$400.

Pays into Social Security.

Receives benefits.

Becomes homeowner at 22.

Tells son's generation it should feel “privileged” because it can afford \$200 smartphones.

“At my first job I only made \$15k a year.”

In 1979 that was the equivalent of \$47k.

Got my dream job,

By answering a classified ad.

“Why don't you call and ask if they're hiring?”

Hasn't been on a job hunt since 1982.

"I worked all summer to buy a car."

Corvette!

Grows up in one of the world's best economies.

Creates the worst global economy the world has ever seen.

("And all this before COVID," one might add!)

Now I would like to ask you to keep one eye on what Old Economy Steve doesn't get about our economy today, and watch a series of famous 1993 ad campaign run by AT&T.

In all or almost all of these things, we have pretty much what the advertisement stated, or something that makes said prediction simply obsolete. I admit readily that electronic toll collection is far more convenient than keeping track of various denominations of coins and stopping at a tollbooth and trying to throw the coins into one of those funnels, and the demolition derby to get back on to the regular highway. For that matter I see our toll collection as more convenient than what the commercial promises: we don't even need to swipe a credit card through a reader to pay a toll; we just drive through at full speed and are charged the toll...

...but the actor in the ad displays an almost sexual thrill at being able to pay a toll while driving at full speed,

and whatever the experience is like for us to whom it is an everyday activity, our experience is hardly an orgasm.

What we have now is simply not Old Economy Steve's economy with draining charming and wonderful phones tacked on. And this has something to do with why I believe *technology is part of our poverty*.

You can see the commercials at tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company

Here and now, I submit, we are already living “In the future, we’ll all be Harry Potter.” The clarification on Jakob Nielsen’s part of “By saying that we’ll one day be like Harry Potter, I don’t mean that we’ll fly around on broomsticks or play three-dimensional ballgames” is already obsolete: we *have* flying motorcycles and with some basic Internet of Things features we could make three-dimensional ballgames no more dangerous than Harry Potter’s Quidditch. And it is probably child’s play, for initiates, to print an ornamental level of broomstick-themed decoration, even though a flying motorcycle may still look like a flying motorcycle.

“In the future we’ll all be Harry Potter” and “YOU WILL and the company that will bring it to you is AT&☞☺☻.*T” meet together. The prediction that we will carry our medical records in our wallets is obsolete because we have Internet-enabled health records. It is beside the point that a credit card sized device can carry our medical records. It is also obsolete to predict that in the future we will be able to get custom concert tickets from an ATM. We can buy tickets, pick seats, and show a QR code on our smartphones. And there is something quaint about the image of an enchanted mother giving best wishes to a baby through video phone booths; we can Zoom chat with laptops and mobile devices

but some of us find mandatory Zoom chats depressing next to conversing face-to-face.

All this said, we ain't in Old Economy Steve's economy any more, and technology is part of our poverty.

In one post to a friend, I wrote,

Have you ever drained yourself by compulsively checking your phone easily a hundred times a day?

Have you ever had several Big Brothers know your every every step, every heartbeat?

Have you ever had every keystroke you've ever typed be recorded and available to use against you for all your remaining life?

Have you ever met people from the last generation that remembers what life was like before the world went digital?

YOU
WILL

and AT&T ain't the only company that will bring it to you!

Conclusion: My own privilege

Having discussed how we have at least *somewhat* "Harry Potter"-like technologies, but we ain't enjoying Old

Economy Steve's "Hasn't applied for a job since Jimmy Carter—'You need to hit the bricks to find work. That's what I did.'" living conditions any more, I would like to add an additional note, and tie in something from the beginning of this article, the Privileged girl in *Bridge to Terebinthia*.

I am in at least one privileged position comparable to the girl whose family doesn't have a television.

I own a cellphone, and it doesn't run my life.

(One I purchased a couple of years ago, used.)

I used to get sucked into social media, but have backed away to 5-10 minutes' social media interaction per month, generally to announce something.

I read (among others) Jean-Claude Larchet's *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul*, and realized I was compulsively checking email and checking my phone a hundred times per day. I now check email often just once or twice a day, not compulsively. I also don't really check my cellphone. I've turned off almost all notifications that I can. I still use my phone, for instance for GPS navigation, but on an opt-in basis. I try to limit what is initiated by my phone, and avoid what I have elsewhere called an intravenous drip of noise like the plague.

I've seen a very frequent Twitter poster ask, "Is there anywhere in the world that does not have Internet?" and in one sense the answer is almost a complete "No:" every continent, including the poorest continent of Africa, has expensive phones as common possessions." But in another sense, the answer is, "It's right under your nose. But don't go to buy airfare. Read a couple of books, and *make some lifestyle changes, and in an older word, repent.*"

I would ask the reader to buy two books: **The New Media Epidemic** and my own **The Luddite's Guide to Technology**. Please consider buying both of them in *paper* (“kids-go-ask-your-grandparents”), and if you buy just one, buy the first. I’ve found that it is possible to have an oasis or at least a relative oasis. It is not entirely easy, and it is even less *obvious*, but it exists for real. *The New Media Epidemic* also covers, as I do not, clinics and programs that exist for smartphone / internet addiction. **(This is also somewhere a good Orthodox priest can help.)**

I have other privileges besides having taken charge, at least mostly, of my cellphone and internet usage. I’m really book-smart, and I can’t simply give that to you, though I can write brainbuilding materials. I am also, in some circles, a famous author, or at least I’ve been told my name has triletted on Facebook to “CSH,” i.e. “C.S. Hayward,” along the lines of “C.S. Lewis,” and even a scathing personal attack mentions that I am well-known among conservative converts to Orthodoxy. Despite all this Amazon has ways of interpreting its contracts so my income from Kindle books is a total of about \$10 to \$20 per month (I think I earn more if you buy one of the *paperbacks* from my bookshelf (or the *one* hardcover worth mentioning, but I’m not clear my income from Amazon will break three figures monthly, as it did before Amazon reinterpreted its contracts). I have, in God’s Providence, everything I need; I am retired on disability, and it is not uncommon for me to receive some boost on top of that. I really try to pray “Give us today our daily bread,” and beyond that cast my cares upon the Lord and upon a favorite saint, St. Philaret the Merciful, whose life is a testimony to everything the Sermon on the Mount

says about treasures in Heaven and proper use of wealth.

And the Sermon on the Mount, with its teachings on wealth, is the true Oasis amidst a parched technoscape. Almost everything else that is good to be had is first drunk from that Fountainhead.

And the Oasis, so terribly difficult to see from the outside, is unfathomably vast from the inside. It is the Oasis, poured through my humble pen, into Paradise, into an a work reminiscent of C.S. Lewis in *The Angelic Letters*, into an Akathist hymn to dear St. Philaret the Merciful, into an extreme, dark, and unexpected path to glory in “Fire in the Hole,” into the deep mercy of “The Consolation of Theology,” and into the rising hymn of triumph in Doxology. And I have nothing of the treasures in this Heavenly Oasis that does not beckon to you, too!

Epilogue:

Phones can be turned off, folks!

“If you keep your guitar in the case and get it out before you play it and put it away afterwards, you’ll spend less time playing your guitar.”

This advice was mentioned in reference to another Internet addiction, but I recently leveled up about not having my phone control my life.

I carry my phone turned off completely. Not sleeping and ready for action when I hit the sleep/wake button. *Off. Completely.* As off as it can go.

If I have a legitimate justification to use it, I turn it on for long enough to do whatever I need to do, and then I immediately turn it all the way off. It’s *wonderfully* inconvenient, and it lets me keep my phone with me as

much as I want, have it available, but then be in a place in the world that does not have *convenient*, non-stop Internet access. And I can get there without needing to shell out for an expensive plane ticket to some faroff forgotten world, or for that matter shell out any money for anything at all.

Extra credit for fuller benefit: Don't piggyback multiple activities at a time. If you use your phone to do GPS navigation, and realize you need to send a text, turn your phone off completely, when you arrive at your destination, then turn it on again, then send the text, then turn it off again completely, and you're off!

And while you're at it, upgrade to a watch that cannot be controlled by the government or hacked into by faceless intruders from across the globe, perhaps the watch you had before getting a smartwatch—mine is a Casio Men's Pathfinder Casual Watch PRW2500T-7CR Titanium. (Though I felt very small and shamed when I saw a doctor wearing a cheap \$5 digital watch with no special features.)

What to Own for Happiness (and what not)

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

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

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

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

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

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

[See the TED talk at

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

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

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

A rugged outdoors computer

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

If you spend a fair amount of time on a laptop or desktop computer, it is a great advantage to have a computer with a sunlight-readable display. Macs usually have a brighter display than normal PC's, but rugged PC's

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

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

A stand desk, if you work from a desk

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

Lambs EMF protective clothing

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

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

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

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

One possible caveat: Throwing protective clothing through the wringer by putting it through the regular wash

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

Infowars supplements

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

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

A sun lamp

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

Amber goggles

Conversely to sun lamps and light alarms, among other healthy sleep habits, a pair of blue-blocking amber goggles can block stimulating blue light, ideally worn one to two hours before bedtime.

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

It is my considered judgment that the more I learn about how foods are produced, the more I think most of what is sold in the grocery stores needs a materials safety data sheet. Something of that wakeup call is found in Sally Fallon's *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and Diet Dictocrats*, but the latter just looks at best solutions under conditions of civilization. The Paleo Solution looks at what humans have been optimized for hundreds of thousands of years longer than the paleontological eyeblink civilization has existed for.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Orthodox classics

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

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

The things you give away

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

The answer came, "Some of them."

"Which ones?"

"The ones you gave away."

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

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

And this isn't just a point about the next life; it is a

point about this life, too, and we profit more when we are generous: it is more blessed to give than to receive.

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

Things not to own

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

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

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

hold it to my head much, and I do not really want to hold a 5G EMF radiation source to my head at all. (Older phones are already plenty radioactive enough to cause brain cancer in kids who always have a phone at their ear—and always on the same side they held the phone to.)

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

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

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

"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

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

Mindfulness and Manners

“Mr. Jenkins One looked at his watch. “

Madeleine l’Engle, *A Wind in the Door*

“18. Consider screen time, and multitasking, to be a drain on the mindfulness we are seeking from the East because we have rejected it in the West.”

"55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine”

Declaring war on the pencil

I haven’t been able to trace my sources at all, but I vaguely remember a book like *Good to Great* talking about a company like Intuit making a decision for a product like Quicken, a decision, not just to have a collection of really nice tools, but to *declare war on the pencil*.

The core insight behind ?Intuit? declaring war on the pencil when it made ?Quicken? was that accounting and finance types using accounting software would also use pencil and paper, and possibly a calculator. The company’s decision was to do user research, find out when and why

finance users resorted to using pencil and paper, and then implement improvements to eliminate the need to resort to pencil and paper.

(?Intuit? has also been credited with a similar feat in making a lighter and cheaper version that was not just a more feature-limited version of mainstream accounting software, but would make sense to non-accountants who did not know all the technical terms as one would expect of finance and accounting professionals using the version of ? Quicken? made for accounting and finance professionals. Hence the change in terms to a dirt-simple “money in” and “money out.” This is an additional feat of user research and knowing your audience.)

I am interested in what might be called a “*neo-old-fashioned mindfulness*,” and an older part of this project relates to looking at your watch more than is necessary, an ancestor to “phubbing,” or snubbing someone socially by looking at your phone. I do not seek a new project, but articulate how we can continue an age-old Western pursuit of mindfulness with a few nuances updated to be mindful when using technologies not around when this aspect of manners came to be.

In a martial arts class, the teacher commented, “*Set your foot down because you want to, not because you need to.*” This was in reference to a swinging kick that started with picking up your leg from behind you and ended with setting it down in front. And in fact there is a difference between moving so that you have to set your foot down or else lose your balance, and moving so that you set your foot down because you choose to do so.

The difference is illuminating.

Face-threatening behavior and basically rude behavior

When I was taking Wheaton College's "linguistics and anthropology boot camp for missionaries," one theme that was underlined was the concept of "face-threatening behavior." The core concept in face-threatening behavior is behavior that could cause the other party to lose face, and it is normally polite to try to soften or remove the danger of causing the other party to lose face. The next time the lecturer was asked a question by someone in the audience, he pointed out the asker's politeness behavior: before asking the question directly, he offered some kind words to the person he was addressing. The social subtext? "I am asking you a question, but not because you're a bad lecturer, and I don't want to make you lose face." In other words, politeness leads people to usually try and avoid getting egg on someone else's face.

I remember visiting with a friend of about my age, some years back, where my friend had asked me to look at a printer. I looked at it briefly, but didn't immediately see how to fix it. I then apologetically asked if I could call my brother, who worked at a well-treated internal help desk. The social message? "I'm doing something that is basically rude, but I don't want to be rude to you." And this was when I was acting entirely out of concern for my friend. I had made a first approach to a difficulty he asked me to look at, and when that didn't resolve the issue, I made a sensible second approach. However, my behavior was an example of how to maintain politeness while doing something that is basically rude: *calling and talking with someone else on my phone when I was visiting him.*

On another level, I remember a post-graduation visit to a well-liked professor who, as we were talking, glanced at his clock and then apologized, saying that he looked at the clock because he was surprised it was dark so soon. This was a graceful recovery from a minor social blunder: needlessly looking at his clock, which is an example of basically rude behavior. When Madeleine l'Engle briefly states that Mr. Jenkins One "looked at his watch," this is a social shorthand to say that Mr. Jenkins One was tired with the present social situation, was wishing it would be over and he could be doing *something* else, perhaps *anything else*, and that he wondered how long it would continue to drag on and on. And the professor I was visiting, who has a profound ability to enjoy and be present to practically *anyone*, made a social recovery after a behavior that carries a message of "I wish this conversation were over."

Mindfulness and manners

Mindfulness as we use the term today derives from Buddhism, where Right Mindfulness is part of what in Buddhism is called "the Eightfold Noble Path," and what in classic Western philosophy would be called cardinal or hinge virtues. (A "cardinal" or "hinge" virtue is not just a virtue, but a virtue that others *hinge* on, *cardinal* being Latin for "hinge," with a cardinal virtue being a sort of gateway drug to further virtue. The "four-horsed chariot" of the cardinal virtues of classical antiquity lists *courage*, classically called "fortitude" or today "grit," *justice*, *wisdom*, and *moderation*, to which Christian Tradition has added *faith*, *hope*, and *love*, and perhaps implicitly, *humility*.) Now Buddhism's Eightfold Noble Path may be a different

list of cardinal virtues than those in Western philosophy, and the two may or may not be two equivalent ways of cutting up the same pie. This question need not concern us here.

Different traditions have different lists of virtues, and it does not take any particularly great stretch of the imagination for a Westerner interested in virtue to recognize, for instance, India's *ahimsa*, or not causing at least *needless* harm, as a virtue, and perhaps recognize it as a profound virtue and a cardinal virtue. It has also in my experience not been particularly difficult to get Western Christians to see mindfulness as a virtue, at least in some other tradition's way of cutting up the pie.

However, this is not because they do not see mindfulness as an obligation. It is because they see the obligation as falling under the heading of manners rather than moral virtue.

A friend I mentioned earlier talked about how decades back, when Walkmans were eating tapes, about how his mother or grandmother had commented that people running with Walkmans on were not paying due attention to their surroundings. I'm not entirely clear how much our society's concept of manners extends beyond treatment of other people (perhaps manners covers being gentle with your friend's pets, or at very least leaving them alone if they're not bothering you), but there is some sense in her remark that you owe attentiveness to your surroundings whether or not there are other people in the picture, and perhaps even that "being off in your own little world" is another name for *Hell*.

I am not specifically interested in establishing that mindfulness should be thought of as a department of

manners, nor am I interested in establishing that mindfulness is a department of virtue. In the interest of not holding my cards too close to my vest, I think it is mostly in an area where the heart of manners meets virtue, and I am inclined to regard it, as I am interested in virtues, as a virtue. However, this is not a point I am interested in establishing. It could be argued that if you owe attentiveness, *meaning mindfulness*, to nearby rocks and trees as well as other people, it is a virtue rather than just manners as conventionally understood, but possibly some reader will find in this article itself solid reasons to believe mindfulness is manners first and foremost and should not in the first instance be lumped in with virtues. I am genuinely not interested in the question.

However, I will remark, as curiously interesting, that while I've seen attention to mindfulness blanketing the air and I have been invited to share in mindfulness exercises, **not one of the mindfulness practices I have seen talks about old-fashioned manners to pay attention to others and the situation.** Mindfulness is discussed as a Far Eastern virtue or discipline. I have never heard it connected to old-fashioned Western manners.

Fr. Tom Hopko's famous (to Orthodox) "55 Maxims for the Christian Life" include:

1. Be always with Christ.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings. Cut them off at the start.
19. Be polite with everyone.
23. Live a day, and a part of a day, at a time.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
34. Be awake and be attentive.

These at least *overlap* with mindfulness; when I spoke to one martial artist heavily influenced by Buddhism and quoted, “Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings,” he said, “*That’s mindfulness!*”

Fr. Tom never uses the word “mindfulness,” but he calls for politeness to “everyone” and to be attentive, and it would at least be *consistent* with his call for unqualified politeness to say “When you are exercising, be attentive to your surroundings rather than using the time to be off in your own little world.” And I believe there are several maxims of his that a mindfulness practitioner would rightly interpret as being mindfulness or overlapping with mindfulness. And, while Fr. Tom is Eastern Orthodox and perhaps praying for all of us from Heaven, his 55 maxims are written almost entirely on terms the West should be able to make sense of, and the incredible number of search results for “fr tom hopko 55 maxims” attest that he has written something simple that people can connect to.

Manners are much more important, and much more than arcana about which is the salad fork. “The fork goes to the left, and the knife guards the spoon,” is a particular alphabet and language in which manners are translated. It is at the exterior of manners that, under some circumstances, you could be given a bowl of water to rinse your fingers in before eating. A much deeper glimpse into manners is afforded in that a distinguished visitor to a Queen picked up his finger bowl and then drunk it, then Her Majesty picked up her finger bowl and then drunk it, and then every person seated around the table picked up their finger bowls and drunk them.

Manners, at least according to older generations and according to our conversations about manners with prior generations, has a great deal to do with paying attention to other people. It was both manners and mindfulness if

Boomers and Gen X's teachers told us not to pass notes and throw paper airplanes in class, perhaps with exceptions for e.g. the last day of school, but the fact that this may have made life easier for the teacher is incidental to teachers using humble gradeschool arithmetic classes to teach a major life lesson, and a major life lesson that is not only for dealing with authorities. I remember talking to one friend with a spine of steel about children who do not respect adults, and the biggest takeaway I took from the conversation is not that children who do not respect adults grind down adult patience. It was that children who do not respect adults can hardly benefit from adult help, and it is far easier to do something that will benefit a child who respects adults than one who is hostile and disrespectful.

In Madeleine l'Engle's day, needless attention to a watch or clock was the go-to device to avoid practicing mindfulness for a time. It changed and told you where you are. This pint of beer that Boomers tried not to drink too many of has been replaced by a pint of rum in the smartphone, and a pint of Everclear in the smartwatch. Mr. Jenkins One looked at his plain old pre-digital watch, probably one without a second hand, while kids now enjoy (or are bored with) a virtual acid trip quickly surfing from one smartphone app to another.

If we care about mindfulness, an *excellent* starting point is to drink deeply of what we can learn about manners especially from Boomers *while we still can*.

My own rather counter-cultural technology choices

Some people seek great merit in being counter-culture.

I do not think counter-culture is too great an index of merit, and not just because I believe some countercultures, such as the Klu Klux Klan, are evil incarnate. I have sought, even if I have so far not achieved my goal, to reach life on Orthodox turf where I will not be working out a private heresy in counterculture. None the less, I believe that many of my most helpful technology choices amount to counterculture, whether or not I have the faintest desire to be counter-cultural.

I've tried to share some of my fruits in "55 New Maxims for the Cyber-Quarantine;" here I would like to zoom in on watches.

When I was in high school, and for far longer, I made it a matter of pride not to wear a watch. It helped me evade, for a certain age, the tyranny of the clock. Since then I have worked professionally where late is unacceptable, and I've been bitten by the personal information management and logistics bug; I have my own system for keeping track of calendar appointment, tasks, etc., so at a glance I can see a month or more of scheduled events and when they are scheduled for. And now I own an Apple Watch.

Any freedom I have from compulsively checking phone, email, or watch is a freedom on the other side of needing to deal with logistics.

But a funny thing happened along the way.

I've almost exclusively used the solar watch face because, while it may be beautiful, it is less distracting than the face of my industrial strength Pathfinder watch, which changes every second and shows patterns in the numbers (to a mathematician, 11:23:58 looks familiar). I have it set to a smaller analog clock face display within the solar face because from childhood I've found analog clocks harder to

read than digital. (If analog clocks were easier for me, I would have the digital display, and if I had the option to turn off the inset clock besides the outer solar display, I would turn it off.)

Taking a cue from Humane Tech, I have dug around in “Accessibility” settings and set the watch face to grayscale. It’s beautiful, and the analog clock face’s second hand, brown on blue when seen in color, blends in remarkably well. I have to strain to see it the one time I genuinely want to watch a second hand’s sweep. I also found, under “Display and Brightness,” how to turn off one of the key reasons I purchased an Apple Watch 5: its “Always on” display. It now takes just a little more work to check my watch, supplemented by wearing an oversized fleece whose sleeves tend to cover my watch face.

I’ve also turned on the hourly chime, also an accessibility feature. This reminds me to check the clock once an hour, and relieves me of having to constantly check. If I need to check email once an hour (my preference is to check it once a day), I don’t need to check either my watch or my email compulsively; my watch will remind me on the hour.

Furthermore, I set alarms for when I need to do something. Besides appointments and things like taking medication, I have followed a practice recommended by sleep advocates and set an alarm for when I should go to bed and not when I should get up.

I would briefly pause and acknowledge one objection to the technique above, which is that doing things according to a preset timer and quite possibly stopping when you have momentum going is not as good as working on tasks for as long as they naturally take. For

those no ancient or modern watch is needed. However, while I believe working on something for however long it takes to unfold naturally is often better than working for a fixed length of time set without knowledge of how things will unfold, I believe that use of intelligently set alarms is better than clock-watching. (One further aspect of intelligent use of alarms is to have two alarms for something: one five or ten minutes before, meaning when you look at your watch because of the “early warning” alarm, it’s time to start wrapping up; and one at the exact time, meaning it’s time to stop.)

I have almost completely unplugged logistic need to check my watch unprovoked, and I may have the most unobtrusive, if still most expensive, watch I’ve owned. Every non-Apple watch I’ve owned had a digital display, and most recent ones have been gadgety (I have owned three Pathfinders). However, the gadgetry is almost always there if I summon it, and I can take shortcuts by twiddling with complications.

The Apple Watch is designed and marketed as the next level of integrating digital and everyday life, and in my opinion that is not a wise thing to be wishing for at all.

However, it is also powerful enough that judicious choices mean it can be tamed into unobtrusiveness further than any previous watch I’ve owned.

I’m glad for my Apple Watch. For as long as I’ve owned a timepiece, my Apple Watch is the biggest friend of mindfulness to grace my wrist yet.

A few closing words

I would recall a few words from *Seeing Through*

Native Eyes. The main speaker recounted a visit to Kalihari bushmen, who retain hunter-gatherer life unhindered today, and an elder asked him in reference to a device, "Is that a timepiece?"

He said, "Yes."

The elder said, "Then I don't like it."

He said, "Why not?"

The elder said, "Every time you look at it, the next thing you do is rude."

If you want mindfulness, cultivate an inexhaustible interest in manners.

Ask for the Ancient Ways

Readers familiar with my site might have read “Exotic Golden Ages and Restoring Harmony with Nature: Anatomy of a Passion,” which complains about attempts to break from the past, such as the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, Vatican II’s *ressourcement* and *aggiornamiento*, and perhaps I should have included neo-Paganism, on the assertion that they bring a decisive break with the recent past and ultimately from the older past they seek to resurrect as well. So what is my point about asking for the ancient ways now?

Simply this: the cyber-quarantine for Coronavirus has brought us to a newer and virtual way of doing things, and however much we may long for the real thing in the moment, they are in some cases convenient, above and beyond a field training exercise for the next level of virtual living.

When we can, we would do well to resume what we were doing, in for instance meeting with people face-to-face and perhaps driving to do so. I applaud Civil War re-enacting, not specifically as a means of resurrecting something long past, but because it is a kind of face-to-face meeting (and community!) that has been part of our present

and that we would do well to resume. And participate in church life as you are able, and the door remains open. I am not at all impressed that my own governor has decided to keep churches closed, but in Orthodoxy there is a very simple rule: in matters pertaining to the Church, obey your bishop first and Caesar second. That is all. (I do not know other bishops' positions to comment on them, nor perhaps should I comment on them). My own archbishop has said to obey the law and work within the quarantine, which has now included having online services and allow one person at a time to enter the cathedral building to receive communion. It is a hardship, perhaps, but the Orthodox position is very simple.

There is something ancient and beautiful in a real (not virtual) hug, a picnic on the lawn, seeing your co-workers face-to-face (some places are discovering remote work now, which gives people a private office such as has been banished from mainstream businesses, first for cubicles and then for open plan offices, and discovering that employees work remarkably better when they can hear themselves think, but this is a separate issue). In the "Old Technologies" section of "The Luddite's Guide to Technology," I wrote:

There is a Foxtrot cartoon where the mother is standing outside with Jason and saying something like, "This is how you throw a frisbee."—"This is how you play catch."—"This is how you play tennis." And Jason answers, "Enough with the historical re-enactments. I want to play some games!" (And there is another time when he and Marcus had been thrown out of the house and were looking at a frisbee and

saying, “This is a scratch on the Linux RAID drive.”)

I remember one time when I was visiting a friend, and his son and two best friends were holding close to each other and each playing a video game on a portable device. I'm not going to endorse video games, but I will comment that three little boys were having fun together face-to-face, and if they were all playing video games, they were still playing them face-to-face, friends like in time immemorial.

So some of the things we can do when the quarantine is relaxed (or lifted) include ordering a paper book from Amazon, reading it outside and putting it on a bookshelf and taking care of it so it is available afterwards, or driving to a new restaurant via GPS to have a meal together, or just go to church, or spending some days in the office face-to-face to maintain social connection with your co-workers. Note that I am commenting less on using or not using new technologies (but really it is also possible to do purely older things like take a stack of blank sheets of paper and hold a physical brainstorm about how to make paper airplanes, or origami—which I mention not because it is of Asian origins but because it is a recognized thing in my time and place). Or build something with Legos, old or new (I might comment that the decidedly new-school Lego Mindstorms robots offer a whole new dimension for creativity). What all of these share is that they are sharing something classic and organic, regardless of how much (or little) they *use* technology. Churches may have signs saying, "Cellphones that go off in the service will be dunked in holy water," but while some avoid or minimize digital technology usage while fasting for the Eucharist, there is presently little policing of cellphone usage in getting to the church.

We have one more door open, doors to something unclean. Perhaps now there is not legitimate choice, and if our bishops say "Obey the quarantine" we should obey the law. Those inclined to increasingly virtual life have had a good practice at handling things virtually, and so have those not so inclined. And there is something practically good, if not always in trying to recover long-lost glory, at very least at continuing in living traditions we know how to do, and to be able to get up from the new normal, get off our back ends, and reclaim ancient and still living glory that remains open to all of us, even if it turns out to be surprisingly more convenient not to drive (another technology) and meet people face-to-face.

For what it's worth...

Beyond the Unbearable Burden of Non-Being

Dark: How did he explain things? Was he bitter?

Light: Oddly, no. Or someone who knew him better than I did would say, “Obviously, no.” He was too busy living, “*Christ is risen!*“

When he was asked why he was a prisoner in the camps that served as role models for Nazi death camps, he said, “I violated the rules of my profession.” When he asked how, he said, “There was a new rule in place that I needed a permit to celebrate a marriage. And the officials were really dragging their heels, and people were assembled, a pig had been slaughtered, and still no permit came, the bride looked up and said, ‘You baptized me. Why can’t you marry me?’ And so I married the couple, which was now an act of professional misconduct, and I became a prisoner for my professional misconduct.” He also made some effort to make light-hearted excuses for the soldiers who destroyed his beehives; he apparently felt sorry for them.

And now we've left the older new rules of marriage in the dust; the new rules of his profession now are that people stand six feet apart in a service, and not more than ten people may attend, and not only for marriage, but all new services. The ancient pattern of worship, among Orthodox, heretics, pagans, all others of meeting together to worship are set aside for Hindu as much as Christian.

Dark: But don't we have promise of technology? A chicken in every pot, really?

Light: We have delivered, if you will, a *tofu virtual chicken in every pot*. Tofu is not a new invention, even if it is a form of plant protein. There are several cultures that have refined a proper use, and they invariably consume it in limited measure and *never* as a replacement for meat!

Dark: And there is a world to be said there. You do not know what a sacrament simple face-to-face conversation is until you have abhorrently grasped telepresence, until you have grasped relating to others in no way but telepresence.

Light: So it is.

Dark: It is, and is not, a matter of technology. Perhaps one could say that it is centered on technology once one has stepped into and embraced the illusion. Dorothy Sayers, our close contemporary, speaks largely in the past about the framing of things that finds that "ideas,

like machines, grow rust and need to be replaced,” but she could almost as well have been writing about the future.

The business book *Good to Great*, which has been critiqued on various grounds as a book in business, is in fact a book in business with little pretension to be anything else, including spiritual gurudom. But it comments that actors in successful companies tend to downplay and de-emphasize technological advances even when they were being praised for groundbreaking advances. It comment, and pointedly not as a point about Einstein, that Einstein was Time Magazine’s Person of the Century; relativity on his claim would have come within five or ten years without him, and the fact that Einstein eclipses Mother Theresa among Man of the Year laureates says nothing about Einstein (or Mother Theresa) and everything about us.

The book does not particularly talk about World War I showing off the U.S.’s mechanized new army and trying and failing to catch a Mexican bandit who was harassing Californians; it does talk about Vietnam and makes the case that “Our cool gadgets will win the war for us” has never in history been a real military strategy, or at least not the kind that can win wars.

Moreover, we keep getting installments of the new normal. It’s like George Orwell’s 1984 in which the realization sweeps past that Oceania had always been at war with Eastasia.

In technology, there has been a widespread phenomenon of things becoming obsolete. CFL's are particularly interesting in that they were promoted on environmental grounds, were much more environmentally toxic than their predecessors, and we could have just used LED's a few years later. But this *particular* version of "Out with the old, in with the new" was not the classic obsolescence where oil lamps couldn't compete with electric light in the marketplace. And what is going on is rapid social change that is sliding over the line, or has already slid, from a technology transition where oil lamps mostly disappeared because they couldn't compete with incandescent bulbs, to a transition that is mandated in the next installment, where the dead hand of government intervention and not the invisible hand of the free market enforced the transition.

After a certain point, you didn't just include white people in pictures; there was an unspoken rule about other races being represented. Then, as one more installment of the new normal, some of the women were wearing hijabs. Sometime along the way came the first size 22 supermodel, and then the astonishing sight of swimsuit models with a medically healthy weight. As another installment, if you are going to do weddings, you have to do queer ones too. And this present installment looks very dubiously about one quarantine among others that will be lifted once it has served its purpose. This quarantine is different in that it cuts presence but not telepresence; things must be passed through the funnel of telepresence, and this is not the

same.

Light: Truly you have a dizzying grasp of the situation.

Darkness: But wait until I get going! Can you say anything like this?

Light: Three words known to the priest: “Christ is risen!” whether he had the faintest need to say them or not.

He lost a beehive that never really was his to begin with. Must he lose his temper too?

Such might St. John say after a failure, the St. John Chrysostom who wrote, *A Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself*. His colleague St. Basil played a similar sibilant tune, when a prefect was sent to intimidate him:

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

Saint Basil said, “If you take away my possessions, you will not enrich yourself, nor will you make me a pauper. You have no need of my old worn-out clothing, nor of my few books, of which the entirety of my wealth is comprised. Exile means

nothing to me, since I am bound to no particular place. This place in which I now dwell is not mine, and any place you send me shall be mine. Better to say: every place is God's. Where would I be neither a stranger and sojourner (Ps. 38/39:13)? Who can torture me? I am so weak, that the very first blow would render me insensible. Death would be a kindness to me, for it will bring me all the sooner to God, for Whom I live and labor, and to Whom I hasten."

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

"Perhaps," the saint remarked, "that is because you've never spoken to a bishop before. In all else we are meek, the most humble of all. But when it concerns God, and people rise up against Him, then we, counting everything else as naught, look to Him alone. Then fire, sword, wild beasts and iron rods that rend the body, serve to fill us with joy, rather than fear."

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

Light: And perhaps this is helpful in viewing civil liberties that have never been ours to begin with; it's been easily decades that libertarians have worn T-shirts with the text of the Bill of Rights, on top of them stamped, **VOID WHERE PROHIBITED BY LAW.**

The attitude of a priest or a heirarch may be most fitting within Church authorities, but none of this is marked

“for Church authorities only.” The treasure is available to you and me, not just saints.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky took on the problem of evil, and he had no faint desire to water down his opponent’s position to be easier to fight. He tried to state the case for evil as strongly as possible, and some of the book’s inwards are gruesome. But the end shows a light touch in which good has triumphed all along. It is a bit like the Book of Job, where Satan tears off layer after layer of what Job can claim, to show that there is nothing inside, and then God peels off the nothing and shows that everything is inside. Some people think the book ends more strongly if Job does not in the end receive double for what has been taken, and Job just meets God. God disagrees. However, the position is worth mentioning because when Job loses his children and refuses to curse God, and then loses his health and refuses to curse God, this is as such victory. Job stands as a champion for God before the Slanderer, and the Slanderer’s defeat begins as he acts on permission to harm Job, and God wins in his champion’s response.

You are, I believe, one born in the Evangelical tradition?

Dark: Yes; I was received as a reconciled heretic. I have repented at length.

Light: I hope you have not repented of the fervor of faith or devoted study of the divine oracles of Scripture, but

instead found a deeper root for what you only possessed in part.

And what do you believe about reconstructing the Early Church?

Dark: It is a cottage industry needed by Evangelicals, but entirely absent in the Early Church.

Light: You have answered well. You do well to have repented, but may I suggest something?

His Eminence Metropolitan KALLISTOS in *The Orthodox Church*, suggests that Orthodox Christians today may be in a position more like the Early Church than has since happened in history. And the suggestion has more *gravitas* now.

One finding in Church history, frustrating to some people today, was that at least some Roman persecution of the Church was not rightly understood simply as persecution of the Christian Church as such. There were, it was perceived, a sprawling bazaar's worth of corrupting religious influences, and Christians were not always persecuted under a conception of Christianity. Christianity was sometimes not seen as distinct, but somewhat more like a department of New Age's sprawl.

The saints' lives record, and there is no real reason for a scholar to find this impossible, that when Christians refused to bow deeply before the idol, officials asked if they would just give a pinch of incense. Now this may

have been what it seemed in temptation, and in my thought it is a possible injected in the officials' minds by the diabolic host. However, the officials at least sometimes just wanted compliance, and hardly really wanted to make martyrs.

Furthermore, there is a social chasm surrounding holidays of pagan deities. Almost everybody in an area would be excited at a holiday, and Christians were saying something effectively inconceivable. In Chicago in recent years, there was a billboard showing the Chicago Bears and saying, "You're a fan or you're a tourist," and there was tremendous enthusiasm with people happily paying thousands of dollars for tickets for when the Cubs won the world series. The position of the Early Christian communicating with pagans was, in some measure, what the position would be in Chicago when the Bears, Bulls, Hawks, or Cubs were doing some spectacular winning, and refused on principle to say a word of enthusiasm about either team. I do not otherwise wish to compare sports fandom to idolatry, but this may be suggested: that refusing on principle to give an inch's participation to a merry and pleasant holiday may not be something pagans conceived or rejected; in some cases it may be something they couldn't be able to conceive of as something one *could* reject.

Now when victories are made by gay rights, there is a clear and distinct case of opposition and a change of society, but the Christian who does not see such things as obvious improvements may run into some level of

the “You’re a fan or you’re a tourist” syndrome. *That* one disagrees may be communicable; the *substance* or even *nature* of the disagreement is harder to convey even if it were to queerly meet a sympathetic ear.

And pan-eroticism is not just another point of contact between our time and that of the Early Church; it is one of many false forms of living. The ascendancy of telepresence makes for Christianity like under Roman paganism; so for that matter does the ascendancy of Islam.

But in all this there is something easy to forget. When, under Rome, Constantine ended the persecution against Christians, saints complained that easy times rob the Church of her treasures. It is said that the faithful need temptations in order to be saved. And whether or not we are the New Early Christians matters surprisingly little. We are under the care of an awesome God, and Heaven is wherever the saints are. Even if our priest does get arrested for marrying a youth and maiden without the required permit.

And that is why even know, when the blows are coming, and the Antichrist keeps knocking at the door, there is nothing to fear where we are. For the Christians there is no Antichrist, only Christ, who is ever risen and ever alive.

Christ is risen! The story of the Passion is long and detailed. And three words, “Christ is risen!” peel off the nothing and show that everything is inside. The

Antichrist is knocking at the door; I know that as well as you. But then Christ will triumph, and an eternal glory will come next to which the worst persecutions of the Antichrist do not possess a shadow that is measurable at all.

Christ is risen!

"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 Schaefer'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” 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 them 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 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	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 observer who remains	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, it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>What aspect of yourself do you know with?</i>	<p>Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.</p>	<p>detached— and the ordinary believer may be at a marked disadvantage .</p>	<p>personal experience.</p>
	<p>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</p>	<p>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</p>	<p>We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that allows this reasoning to shine.</p>

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>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</p>	<p>philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.</p>	

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	which is the spiritual eye, the <i>nous</i> .		
<i>What should teachers cultivate in their students?</i>	Teachers should induce students into <i>discipleship</i> and should be exemplary disciples themselves.	They should train students who will not be content with their teachers' interpretations but push past to their own takes on the matter.	They should train students to develop experiments and theories to carefully challenge the "present working picture" in their field.
<i>What is tradition, and how does your tradition relate to knowing?</i>	One may be not so much <i>under</i> Tradition as in Tradition: Tradition is like one's culture or language, if a culture and language breathed on by the Holy	Something of the attitude is captured in what followed the telling of an anecdote about a New Testament Greek class where the professor	As Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman observed, "You get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>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 mother.</p>	<p>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!")</p>	."

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
<i>How much emphasis do you place on creativity?</i>	It reflects some degree of fundamental confusion to measure the value of what someone says by how original it is. That which	was presented by the academic theologian retelling this story as full warrant to suggest that scholars should not view themselves as bound by tradition with its blind spots. Publish something <i>original</i> , or perish. Better to say something original but not true than not have any ideas to claim as "mine." If	Continue to push the envelope. Are you an experimental physicist? If you cannot observe anything new by the layman's means of

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>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.</p>	<p>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.)</p>	<p>observation, pioneer new equipment or a clever experiment to push the envelope of what can be observed. Publish something <i>original</i> or perish.</p>
<p><i>Where does your discipline place its empiricism?</i></p>	<p>There is a very real sense of empiricism, albeit a sense that has very little directly to do with</p>	<p>Theologians are just as empirical as physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics. We have</p>	<p>As much as theology's empiricism is the empiricism of a knowledge of the "spiritual eye" and the whole</p>

Question	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>empirical science. Knowledge is what 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.</p>	<p>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 this</p>	<p>person, our empiricism is 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</p>

<i>Question</i>	Orthodox Christianity	Academic Theology	Modern Science
	<p>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.</p>	<p>judged by secular history's standards.</p>	<p>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.</p>

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.

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,
 O 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 vouç,
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.

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 in 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!

Branding is the New Root of All Evil

Sometimes letting go is hard.

She spoke as if she were being paid by the word, the cognitive tax was profound, and I couldn't pay attention to the road.

So I stopped the car in the middle of the street, put it in park, and turned fully to face my mother.

"I can do one of two things. *Either* I can attend to you, *or* I can drive this car, *but I cannot do both*. Which **one** of these things would you rather have me do?"

That shut off the *incessant* backseat driving.

My reason for talking about my parents, though, is not mainly to give a striking memory, but to talk about something I am grateful to them for. From a very young age, my parents tried to free me from advertising's allure and the sacramental shopping of buying into brands. This did not, at least immediately, stop me from telling my parents I needed to have shoes or whatnot for which I had seen a really well-done ad, but it did take root, enough so

that I was unpleasantly surprised when reading in a high school science class how in recording duplicable detail for a science experiment, the brand and model of all scientific equipment should be recorded among other details to try to give a scientific reader the ability to reproduce the experiment.

This may have been an overshoot, and I don't think my parents would have failed to see a legitimate exception if they had been posed the question, but my parents gave me a head start on something I would carry for life.

Where did branding come from, anyway?

Before there was really a brand economy, at least some cattle owners would brand animals with a hot branding iron to make a mark that would make it clear whose property a given bovine was. However, this is not at least in its form what we know as *branding*. There is an unsexy practice today that carries on branding cattle: in the business world, it is seen as due diligence to attach a label to equipment saying "Property of ABC Corporation," and maybe add a serial number, and maybe add that there is a permanent, indelible mark under the sticker that police could trace. And perhaps corporate legal counsel would see this designation of property to be desirable as a matter of course, but this "brand" is not branding in the sense of today's advertisements; the brand (in today's sense) would be Apple, HP, or whoever else made a corporate asset. Perhaps no one really needs to put an equipment tag so it covers the manufacturer's logo and says "I'm hiding who made this, to better claim it as OUR company's property now." And

perhaps no marketer's counsel was sought in the design of these branding asset tags; their job is to keep and maintain the company's brand, or a product's or the line of product, consistently presented and sold to the general public. Marketers do not normally need to make corporate property asset tags tell their company's brand story so customers can better relate, any more than they normally feel the need to make markerboard markers or pads of paper tell their company's brand story.

And what is wrong with branding, anyway?

I once told an economist that he didn't understand money.

I was not much older than 20 at the time, so right time to be brash and arrogant, but I maintain my position.

What I stated then was that economics was a well-developed answer to the wrong question. The wrong question it addresses is, "How can a culture be manipulated so as to maximize economic endeavors?" when the question it should be asking is, "How can an economy best support a beneficial culture?" He answered, "We take people's desires for granted."

That response was a party line, was almost certainly entirely sincere, and was almost certainly entirely wrong. Somewhere in there I adapted a famous question: "Was economic wealth created for man, or man for economic wealth?"

The entire enterprise of marketing and a brand economy tacitly acknowledges that people's natural greed will not stimulate enough purchases to meet the economy's

needs. Advertising isn't reining in the horse of love of money and things. *It isn't even laying the reins on the horse's neck.* It's kicking the horse in the side with your spurs as hard as you can kick.

I remember a later conversation where a professor echoed back what he heard me saying, and said, "So you're an anti-capitalist?" and I winced. Usual objections to capitalism are Marxist in character and critique capitalism from the left. There is also a conservative vein of anti-capitalism, the perspective that motivated Dorothy Sayers to write "The Other Six Deadly Sins," in which Sayers complains, "A man may be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous, and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct—and still we are ready to say of him that he is not an immoral man." I quote at length what she wrote in the context of a rationed World War II England, because copies of titles with the essay are rare on Amazon:

Let us seize this breathing space [about gluttony in its crassest form], while we are out of temptation, to look at one very remarkable aspect of the sin of [gluttony]. We have all become aware lately of something very disquieting about what we call our economic system. An odd change has come over us since the arrival of the machine age. Whereas formerly it was considered a virtue to be thrifty and content with one's lot, it is now considered to be the mark of a progressive nation that it is filled with hustling, go-getting citizens, intent on raising their standard of living. And this is not interpreted to mean merely that

a decent sufficiency of food, clothes, and shelter is attainable by all citizens. It means much more and much less than this. It means that every citizen is encouraged to consider more, and more complicated, luxuries necessary to his well-being. The gluttonous consumption of manufactured goods had become, before [World War II], the prime civic virtue. And why? Because machines can produce cheaply only if they produce in vast quantities; because unless the machines can produce cheaply nobody can afford to keep them running; and because, unless they are kept running, millions of citizens will be thrown out of employment, and the community will starve.

We need not stop now to go round and round the vicious circle of production and consumption. We need not remind ourselves of the furious barrage of advertisements by which people are flattered and frightened out of a reasonable contentment into a greedy hankering after goods that they do not really need; nor point out for the thousandth time how every evil passion—snobbery, laziness, vanity, concupiscence, ignorance, greed—is appealed to in these campaigns. Nor how unassuming communities (described as backward countries) have these desires ruthlessly forced on them by their neighbors to find an outlet for goods whose market is saturated. And we must not take up too much time in pointing out how, as the necessity to sell goods in quantity becomes more desperate, the people's appreciation of quality is violently discouraged and oppressed. You must not buy goods that will last too long, for production cannot be kept going unless the goods wear out, or fall

out of fashion, and so can be thrown away and replaced with others.

If a man invents anything that would give lasting satisfaction, his invention must be bought up by the manufacturer so it may never see the light of day. Nor must the worker be encouraged to take too much interest in the thing he makes; if he did, he might desire to make as well as it can be made, and that would not pay. It is better that he should work in a soulless indifference, even though such treatment should break his spirit and cause him to hate his work. The difference between the factory hand is that the craftsman lives to do the work he loves; but the factory hand lives by doing the work he despises. We know about all this and must not discuss it now, but I will ask you to remember it.

The point I want to make now is this: that whether or not it is desirable to keep up this fearful whirligig of industrial finance based on gluttonous consumption, it could not be kept up for a single moment without the cooperating gluttony of the consumer. Legislation, the control of wages and profits, the balancing of exports and imports, elaborate schemes for the distribution of surplus commodities, the state ownership of enterprise, complicated systems of social credit, and finally wars and revolutions are all invoked in the hope of breaking down the thing known as the present economic system. Now it may well be that its breakdown would be a terrific disaster and produce a worse chaos than that which went before—we need not argue about it. The point is that, without any legislation whatsoever, the whole system would come

crashing down if every consumer were voluntarily to restrict purchases to the things really needed. "The fact is," said a workingman the other day at a meeting, "that when we fall for these advertisements we're being had for mugs." So we are. The sin of gluttony, of greed, of overmuch stuffing ourselves, is the sin that has delivered us into the power of the machine.

In the evil days between [World War I and World War II], we were confronted with some ugly contrasts between plenty and poverty. Those contrasts should be, and must be, reduced. But let us say frankly that they are not likely to be reduced so long as the poor admire the rich for the indulgence in precisely that gluttonous way of living that rivets on the world the chain of the present economic system, and do their best to imitate rich men's worst vices. To do that is to play in the hands of those whose interest is to keep the system going. You will notice, that under a war economy, the contrast is being flattened out; we are being forced to reduce and regulate our personal consumption of commodities and revise our whole notion of what constitutes good citizenship in the financial sense. This is the judgment of this world; when we will not amend ourselves by grace, we are compelled under the yoke of law. You will notice also that we are learning certain things. There seems, for example, to be no noticeable diminution in our health and spirits due to the fact that we have only the choice of say, half a dozen dishes in a restaurant instead of forty.

In the matter of clothing, we are beginning to regain our respect for stuffs that will wear well; we can

no longer be led away by the specious argument that it is smarter and more hygienic to wear underlinen and stockings once and then throw them away than to buy things that will serve us for years. We are having to learn, painfully, to save food and material and salvage waste products; and in learning to do these things we have found a curious and stimulating sense of adventure. For it is the great curse of gluttony that it ends by destroying all sense of the precious, the unique, the irreplaceable.

But what will happen to us when the war machine to consume our surplus products for us? Shall we hold fast to our rediscovered sense of real values and our adventurous attitude of life? If so, we shall revolutionize world economy without any political revolution. Or shall we again allow our gluttony to become the instrument of an economic system that is satisfactory to nobody? That system as we know it thrives on waste and rubbish heaps. At present the waste (that is, sheer gluttonous consumption) is being done for us in the field of war. In peace, if we do not revise our ideas, we shall ourselves become its instruments. The rubbish heap will again be piled on our doorsteps, on our own backs, in our own bellies. Instead of the wasteful consumption of trucks and tanks, metal and explosives, we shall have back the wasteful consumption of wireless sets and silk stockings, drugs and paper, cheap pottery and cosmetics—all of the slop and swill that will pour down the sewers over which the palace of gluttony is built...

It was left for the present age to endow

covetousness with glamor on a big scale and give it a title that it could carry like a flag. It occurred to somebody to call it enterprise. From the moment of that happy inspiration, covetousness has gone forward and never looked back. It has become a swaggering, swash-buckling, piratical sin, going about with its had cocked over its eye, and pistols tucked into the tops of its jackboots. Its war cries are “Business Efficiency!” “Free Competition!” “Get Out or Get Under!” and “There’s Always Room at the Top! It no longer works and saves; it launches out into new enterprises; it gambles and speculates; it thinks in a big way; it takes risks. It can no longer be troubled to deal in real wealth and so remain attached to work and the soil. It has set money free from all hampering ties; it has interests in every continent; it is impossible to pin it down to any one place or any concrete commodity—it is an adventure, a roving, rollicking free lance. It looks so jolly and jovial and has such a twinkle in its cunning eye that nobody can believe that its heart is as cold and calculating as ever.

Sayers’s critique, in this passage, has aged extremely well. The chief differences I would note today are:

1. The factories are not first world factories in front of us but third world sweatshops whose workers could only drool over the conditions of first world factories, and:
2. Everything in “The Damned Backswing” is true and we are being stripped of even moderate consumption

as the damned backswing plays out past decades' gluttonous consumption that continues today.

3. So far as I can discern, Sayers does not open or foresee the Pandora's box of branding.

This is, I would underscore, a *conservative* critique of *capitalism*. It touches on Marxist critique, or Marxism rather touches on this line of critique, when contrasting the craftsman and the factory hand; but even a stopped clock is right twice a day, including Marxism.

It is an essentially conservative outlook in Robert Grootzaard's *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, which makes at least one point I hadn't thought of but almost instantly agreed with once I saw it. As a Christian economist, he studied the Mosaic Law and saw a blueprint for paradise, including both gleaning for the poor and an environment where it was very "difficult to get rich." And his work can be taken as a brief, for a book, commentary on the premise that economic wealth is made for mankind and not mankind for economic wealth.

St. Paul wrote, "Love of money is the root of all evil," (I Tim 6:10, KJV), and he did not do so in the context of our ecosystem of brands. He took up the task of taming the horse and reining it in; perhaps he has almost never been completely obeyed, but most of the Bible's advice for a good life has almost never been completely obeyed. The verse has been softened in some translations to say, "Love of money is a root of all kinds of evil," (NIV), but no other sin receives the same indictment from St. Paul, and it is characteristic of the theology of the east that avarice or the love of money is not only named among the eight demons that would

become the West's seven deadly sins, but it is one of the top three "gateway sins" that opens the door to all others.

One lunch with Bruce Winter, the head of Tyndale House, commented on what advertising now sees as a sort of dark age before advertising would essentially get its act together. Before that, an ad advertising (for instance) fur coats, would show a fur coat, maybe with someone in it or maybe not, and the word "SALE" once or maybe repeated several times. (It strikes me as a stroke of brilliant wit that one nearby antiques dealer has, out front, a letter sign with the words "ANTIQUES! ANTIQUES! ANTIQUES!" That kind of nostalgic advertising might work for nothing else, it is perfect for communicating antique goods that in some cases would fit how some antiques were originally advertised.) Bruce mentioned the older school, and said that it comes from before advertisers understood what motivates people. Now, he commented, car ads sell on the premise that they are "mysterious, sensual, and intimate:" as I would later observe, one glitzy car ad ended with a woman's low voice saying, "When you turn your car on... *does it return the favor?*" Bruce Winter was, I might underscore, *not* someone who would raise an objection to having something be "mysterious, sensual, and intimate" as such, and he spoke of it with awe. He was merely suggesting that we seek something "mysterious, sensual, and intimate" in the setting where we can enjoy it best.

(Australia is a bit of a special case as far as advertising goes. Advertising is legal as such, but advertisers have to sell their wares on the grounds of what their product actually provides; presenting that a product as making you magically irresistible to the opposite sex is off the agenda.)

One of many features of a favor that favors

consumption has to do with fashion. In the Middle Ages, clothing styles subtly changed, perhaps once in a generation. It is not clear to me how long a garment would last, but clothing was not casually discarded. Today, fashion provides a social mechanism for frequent purchase of clothing, and the one truly good piece of advice I found in *Tiptionary* was to go for classic clothing rather than what is currently in vogue. Clothing is not built to last, and even if it would last, we have a social mandate that keeps selling us (mostly sweatshop) clothes. (*One way* to reduce one's patronage of sweatshops is to keep clothing until it becomes genuinely unserviceable.)

Another change in habits has to do with why an appliance repair shop in my hometown closed down, having lost their lease. When an appliance breaks down, most people don't want a fix that will restore the status quo. Most people prefer to find an occasion to upgrade. For another example, a senior I know has cookware made in the 1940's or 1950's. His cookware has plenty of use remaining before it will eventually decay. Its expected life, over a half century after when it was first made, is longer than brand new cookware because new cookware is specifically not built to last. Planned obsolescence is another form of life that keeps factory wheels turning. It's not enough to have a darling brand in cars, phones, etc.; people feel an almost entirely unnecessary need to have the latest model.

Sacramental shopping

I have been aware in my own life of a practice that I call "sacramental shopping." Another term is "retail therapy," and perhaps today the lexicon includes "Amazon therapy."

It is *shopping that functions as an ersatz sacrament*, and it may be the chief sacrament in the ersatz religion of brand economy.

I might comment briefly, in a book that I've persisted in trying to track down, an analysis which says that brands do the work of spiritual disciplines for many today. The author commented that in one class he asked college students, "Imagine your future successful self. With which brands do you imagine yourself associating?" Not only could all of the students answer the question and furnish a list of brands, but he didn't see any puzzled looks, a signal that would have blipped loud and clear on his radar as a teacher.

I believe that an example from my own life could be instructive.

When I was getting ready to study theology, in 2002 I purchased a computer that would see me through my studies up through 2007. It was an IBM ThinkPad, a brand and line that were respected and for good reason, and I purchased a computer with ample screen real estate, a 1GHz processor that was probably overkill for my needs, and maxed-out 1G RAM. And after I did my research and set my heart on a particular purchase, and my conscience held me back. I ran from my conscience and then faced up to it, a conscience saying, "No." And I let go of buying it altogether, and as soon as that my conscience gave me an instantaneous green light.

There were a couple of issues going on here. One of them was the purchase of a practical computer all but necessary for my studies. But the other part was that I was drooling over a major purchase in sacramental shopping, and the way things unfolded was an unfolding grace that let me buy a practical and useful computer but not making a

purchase of sacramental shopping.

Now some of you may be wondering why I named and endorsed a brand of computer; my response is that I was not acting on a mystique, but on rational analysis of a brand's track record. Though a Ford was not my first choice, I drive a Ford now, as a brand that creates physically sturdy vehicles that hold up well in a collision. One accident, in which I was hit from behind when I stopped, left me hitting the Honda Accord in front of me, and... um... I saw very directly why people refer to a Honda Accord as a "Honda Accordion." The Accordion suffered severe damage in its trunk. I suffered a bent front license plate. When I went computer shopping, I wanted a good computer that would last, and several years after purchasing it I gave it to my brother in working order. The specs were carefully chosen, and the five or so years I used it vindicated my purchase.

Nonetheless, I believe that moment was permitted me so I could acquire the computer without it being an act of sacramental shopping, which is something quite significant. It has been my experience that when my conscience says, "Let it go, all the way," sometimes I am freed from XYZ forever, and sometimes the instant I fully let go is the instant I get an unexpected green light. After years of struggle about posting from my story at Fordham, at all, ever, I let go... and my conscience gave me a surprisingly sudden green light, the only condition being that I not name individual figures. So I posted "Orthodox at Fordham."

It is a great gift to be able to stop drooling before you buy something, or maybe instead of buying something. It is a price of inner spiritual freedom—and a doorway to contentment, for it is the characteristic of items purchased

in sacramental shopping to lose their allure surprisingly quickly.

Advertising promotes a spirit of perennial discontent and a failure to be able to enjoy the things one already has. By rejecting sacramental shopping, perhaps, I was able to enjoy the ongoing use of that one laptop for several years.

Do I have a personal brand? Should I?

I don't think we should buy into personal brands, no matter how many people exhort us to do.

The front matter to *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* notes a fall that had occurred, from a character ethic to a personality ethic with characteristic exhortations to believe in yourself. Now we have had a second fall, from genuine (if shallow) personality with glimpses of character, to recommended best practices being to post stuff to Twitter that's about 70% professional and 30% personal, giving a persona and an illusion of personality but not giving people even your real personality when the rubber hits the sky.

I do not speak highly of personal branding, but I would like first to field an objection that may occur to some of my readers: do I, great critic of brands as I am, am unusually gifted, an Orthodox author who writes in the fashion of some of the great English-language apologists, see things from a different angle, and so on; and, also, I have a distinctive look to my favorites among the books I have written. It would make sense to say, "If it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, isn't it a personal brand?"

My response, beyond saying that the objection is entirely understandable, is to talk about what some figures

have called a “canon within the Canon.” Now this is a perspective that isn’t particularly Orthodox and I usually only invoke it with good reason, but there is a tendency for authors in theology to disproportionately quote certain areas in the canon. I imagine if you were to tally Scriptural references in my own writing, you would find heavy reference to the Sermon on the Mount, and the Pauline letters. Now I have no reticence about a debt to the Sermon on the Mount. However, one professor talked about St. Paul as “the Apostle to the heretics,” because heretics of many stripes pay disproportionate attention to the letters of St. Paul. So, while I might say “I hope to live up to it” if I am asked how I relate to the Sermon on the Mount, I am more inclined to regard my primary heavy citations of St. Paul as a liability, a holdover from when I was Protestant, and a way I have failed to live up to the Bible’s grandeur.

So, if you are to ask, “Do you have a canon within the Canon?” I would answer, “Yes, and I’m not proud of it.”

However, this is an “after the fact” canon within the Canon. I never set out to focus on the Sermon on the Mount and the letters of St. Paul, they were what came to mind when I was recalling from a lifetime of reading Scripture. I never decided to privilege the letters of St. Paul; I just gravitated a certain and imperfect way.

Some considerable distortion, and perhaps a practice that does little to warm Orthodox hearts to the whole concept of canon within the Canon, is in academic theologians who make step one of an article being to identify the canon within the Canon. Honestly, no. That doesn’t cut it. An author’s “after the fact” canon within the Canon may be to some extent unavoidable, but the idea that you start by taking a scissors to the Bible goes beyond

putting the cart before the horse. It is trying to unload the cart at its destination *before* packing it at its source.

I may well enough have an “after the fact” personal brand. (Also, my brief popping in and out of social media when I have something to announce is not intended as the message I want my brand to portray; it is because I feel a need to sharply reduce and limit my time in these unsavory neighborhoods.) And as branding is identified and explained, your brand is the one thing that is essentially you. Besides the points mentioned above about what may be my personal brand, I have had a profound interest in social and religious aspects of technology, and it may well be that my lasting contribution to the conversation will be *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* and not my general-purpose collection of theological favorites in *The Best of Jonathan's Corner*. Social implications of theology are a central and guiding emphasis, but not in any way that engenders an exclusive fidelity. I hardly see “The Angelic Letters” or the even more exalted “Doxology” as peripheral to my “after the fact” marketing proposition, even if I do not recall either saying much about technology and even if my autobiography is titled *Orthodox Theology and Technology*.

However, out of all this there have been few things intended to address concerns of branding. My website has a distinctive and beautiful appearance and background image; and that visual identity flows onto book covers. And in a case of “Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you,” from (appropriately enough) that Sermon, I have been told that my work is largely known and often endorsed among conservative converts to Orthodoxy, and I've even been told that my name has triletted on Facebook to CSH (meaning C.S.

Hayward) which caught me off guard. And I would briefly like to address one question some people have: why am I happy to have fame among conservative converts to Orthodoxy? Why not write for all Orthodox? My answer, I believe, lies in communication style. *Any Orthodox Christian, along with other interested parties, are welcome to read my writing.* However, the way I write is shaped by English language apologists, as is probably a shared experience with many more converts than people who grew up in the Church, and writing style may be a barrier. There have been some times I have tried to write with a more patristic style, such as “The Arena,” “Apprentice gods,” and “Technonomicon,” but it is a liability and a limitation to my stature as an Orthodox writer that people raised in the Orthodox Church might not as easily connect with my writing.

And in any case, I have not made a marketing decision to specifically target conservative converts to Orthodoxy. I have instead attempted to write works of wonder and beauty such as I am able to and have not found already written. I judge my readership to be a case of “Man proposes and God disposes.” And I regard the fact that I have an audience at all is to me astounding. I have prayed for God to guide, help, and support me as I write. I have never prayed to be a household name among certain people.

The human cost of a brand economy: a *decoy* answer

Vincent J. Miller, in *Consuming Religion* (a Marxist text which I checked out because I confused it with Tom Beaudouin, *Consuming Faith*, which I read at Fordham),

writes in his introduction, in reference to voluntary simplicity:

[Marketers] want to know where the nerves are so they can position their products to hit them. A stroll through the supermarket illustrates this marketing strategy. Foodstuffs and personal care products are packaged as plain, simple, and honest. The color schemes of labels as well as the products themselves are muted. Beige, lavender, and pale green provide the palette for iced tea and shampoo, risotto mixes, and aroma therapy candles. At the checking, we encounter this color scheme again, this time on the cover of a magazine that includes articles on getting organized, simplifying family life, and making Campari-grapefruit compote. It is full of glossy photo spreads of food, interiors, and clothing. A soft, minimalist aesthetic dominates these images—a hybrid of Martha Stewart and Zen Buddhism. The target audience of this magazine is professional women with incomes above \$65,000 a year. Its title? *Real Simple*. Examples could be multiplied.

Before the point where I dropped reading the title, it also talked about how marketers made a real extravaganza of the 150th anniversary of the printing of the *Communist Manifesto*.

I mention this as an example of a distraction I would like to clear out. I had people say I wasn't sure what I was doing at a jobhunter's group where I balked at creating a personal brand to serve my jobhunt. However, I do not want to gaze endlessly down this chasm.

Albert Einstein is popularly quoted (or misquoted—for the moment I only care about the words) as saying, “The problems we face cannot be solved by the kind of thinking that created them.” And here I would say, while I honestly do not know and honestly do not care whether I am representing Einstein, that level of analysis and critique is valid up to a point but we need to move beyond them if we are to reach higher ground.

An inflection point towards the *real* answer

The Orthodox Church in America saints page has, for Great and Holy Thursday, words from Fr. Alexander Schmemmann about a love that is pure, and also about a love that is destructive:

Two events shape the liturgy of Great and Holy Thursday: the Last Supper of Christ with His disciples, and the betrayal of Judas. The meaning of both is in love. The Last Supper is the ultimate revelation of God’s redeeming love for man, of love as the very essence of salvation. And the betrayal of Judas reveals that sin, death and self-destruction are also due to love, but to deviated and distorted love, love directed at that which does not deserve love. Here is the mystery of this unique day, and its liturgy, where light and darkness, joy and sorrow are so strangely mixed, challenges us with the choice on which depends the eternal destiny of each one of us. “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour was come... having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end...” (John 13:1). To understand the meaning of the Last Supper we must

see it as the very end of the great movement of Divine Love which began with the creation of the world and is now to be consummated in the death and resurrection of Christ.

God is Love (1 John 4:8). And the first gift of Love was life. The meaning, the content of life was communion. To be alive man was to eat and to drink, to partake of the world. The world was thus Divine love made food, made Body of man. And being alive, i.e. partaking of the world, man was to be in communion with God, to have God as the meaning, the content and the end of his life. Communion with the God-given world was indeed communion with God. Man received his food from God and making it his body and his life, he offered the whole world to God, transformed it into life in God and with God. The love of God gave life to man, the love of man for God transformed this life into communion with God. This was paradise. Life in it was, indeed, eucharistic. Through man and his love for God the whole creation was to be sanctified and transformed into one all-embracing sacrament of Divine Presence and man was the priest of this sacrament.

But in sin man lost this eucharistic life. He lost it because he ceased to see the world as a means of Communion with God and his life as eucharist, as adoration and thanksgiving. . . He loves himself and the world for their own sake; he made himself the content and the end of his life. He thought that his hunger and thirst, i.e. his dependence of his life on the world—can be satisfied by the world as such, by food as such. But world and food, once they are deprived of

their initial sacramental meaning—as means of communion with God, once they are not received for God’s sake and filled with hunger and thirst for God, once, in other words, God is no longer their real “content,” can give no life, satisfy no hunger, for they have no life in themselves... And thus by putting his love in them, man deviated his love from the only object of all love, of all hunger, of all desires. And he died. For death is the inescapable “decomposition” of life cut from its only source and content. Man thought to find life in the world and in food, but he found death. His life became communion with death, for instead of transforming the world by faith, love, and adoration into communion with God, he submitted himself entirely to the world, he ceased to be its priest and became its slave. And by his sin the whole world was made a cemetery, where people condemned to death partook of death and “sat in the region and shadow of death” (Matt. 4:16).

But if man betrayed, God remained faithful to man. He did not “turn Himself away forever from His creature whom He had made, neither did He forget the works of His hands, but He visited him in diverse manners, through the tender compassion of His mercy” (Liturgy of Saint Basil). A new Divine work began, that of redemption and salvation. And it was fulfilled in Christ, the Son of God Who in order to restore man to his pristine beauty and to restore life as communion with God, became Man, took upon Himself our nature, with its thirst and hunger, with its desire for and love of, life. And in Him life was revealed, given, accepted and fulfilled as total and

perfect Eucharist, as total and perfect communion with God. He rejected the basic human temptation: to live “by bread alone”; He revealed that God and His kingdom are the real food, the real life of man. And this perfect eucharistic Life, filled with God, and, therefore Divine and immortal, He gave to all those who would believe in Him, i.e. find in Him the meaning and the content of their lives. Such is the wonderful meaning of the Last Supper. He offered Himself as the true food of man, because the Life revealed in Him is the true Life. And thus the movement of Divine Love which began in paradise with a Divine “take, eat. ..” (for eating is life for man) comes now “unto the end” with the Divine “take, eat, this is My Body...” (for God is life of man). The Last Supper is the restoration of the paradise of bliss, of life as Eucharist and Communion.

But this hour of ultimate love is also that of the ultimate betrayal. Judas leaves the light of the Upper Room and goes into darkness. “And it was night” (John 13:30). Why does he leave? Because he loves, answers the Gospel, and his fateful love is stressed again and again in the hymns of Holy Thursday. It does not matter indeed, that he loves the “silver.” Money stands here for all the deviated and distorted love which leads man into betraying God. It is, indeed, love stolen from God and Judas, therefore, is the Thief. When he does not love God and in God, man still loves and desires, for he was created to love and love is his nature, but it is then a dark and self-destroying passion and death is at its end. And each year, as we immerse ourselves into the unfathomable

light and depth of Holy Thursday, the same decisive question is addressed to each one of us: do I respond to Christ's love and accept it as my life, do I follow Judas into the darkness of his night?

The human cost of a brand economy is that it draws us into the love of Judas Iscariot.

Fr. Alexander, in this passage, is extremely clear that Judas is not dead to love: he loves what should not be loved, and he loves in the wrong way. He loves "silver:" one could just as well say "even worse, *brands*." And the love we love when we covet brands—and it is love—is love of what is unworthy and the same destructive love by which Judas renounced his Lord to obtain a pittance of silver, the price of a slave and nothing more.

We can do one of two things. We can love God and our neighbor, **or** we can attend to brands, *but we cannot do both*.

Conclusion

This takes us to the doorstep of all things great and wonderful, and all things beautiful and small, the Tradition has to offer. It takes us to St. Paul's hymn to charity and St. John's first epistle on loving one another, to the *Philokalia* and the Divine Liturgy, to morning and evening prayers and *The Way of the Pilgrim*. The right thing to do is to simply step beyond brands and enter one of these doors of love, and love God, including loving God *in* our neighbor.

Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Asceticism

1. Many people are concerned today with harmony with nature. And indeed there is quite a lot to living according to nature.
2. But you will not find something that is missing by looking twice as hard in the wrong place, and it matters where one seeks harmony with nature. In monasticism, the man of virtue is the quintessential natural man. And there is something in monasticism that is behind stories of the monk who can approach boar or bear.
3. Being out of harmony with nature is not predominantly a lack of time in forests. There is a deeper root.
4. Exercising is better than living a life without exercise. But there is something missing in a sedentary life

with artificially added exercise, after, for centuries, we have worked to avoid the strenuous labor that most people have had to do.

5. It is as if people had worked for centuries to make the perfect picnic and finally found a way to have perfectly green grass at an even height, a climate controlled environment with sunlight and just the right amount of cloud, and many other things. Then people find that something is missing in the perfect picnic, and say that there might be wisdom in the saying, "No picnic is complete without ants." So they carefully engineer a colony of ants to add to the picnic.
6. An exercise program may be sought in terms of harmony with nature: by walking, running, or biking out of doors. Or it may be pursued for physical health for people who do not connect exercise with harmony of nature. But and without concern for "asceticism" (spiritual discipline) or harmony with nature, many people know that complete deliverance from physical effort has some very bad physical effects. Vigorous exercise is part and parcel to the natural condition of man.
7. Here are two different ways of seeking harmony with nature. The second might never consciously ask if life without physical toil is natural, nor whether our natural condition is how we should live, but still recognizes a problem—a little like a child who knows nothing of the medical theory of how burns are bad,

but quickly withdraws his hand from a hot stove.

8. But there is a third kind of approach to harmony with nature, besides a sense that we are incomplete without a better connection to the natural world, and a knowledge that our bodies are less healthy if we live sedentary lives, lives without reintroducing physical exertion because the perfectly engineered picnic is more satisfying if a colony of ants is engineered in.
9. This third way is ascesis, and ascesis, which is spiritual discipline or spiritual exercise, moral struggle, and mystical toil, is the natural condition of man.
10. The disciples were joyous because the demons submitted to them in Christ's name, and Christ's answer was: "Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you in my name. Rejoice instead that your names are written in Heaven." The reality of the disciples' names being written in Heaven dwarfed the reality of their power over demons, and in like manner the reality that monks can be so much in harmony with nature that they can safely approach wild bears is dwarfed by the reality that the royal road of ascesis can bring so much harmony with nature that by God's grace people work out their salvation with fear and trembling.
11. The list of spiritual disciplines is open-ended, much like the list of sacraments, but one such list of spiritual disciplines might be prayer, worship,

sacrament, service, silence, living simply, fasting, and the spiritual use of hardship. If these do not seem exotic enough for what we expect of spiritual discipline, we might learn that the spiritual disciplines can free us from seeking the exotic in too shallow of a fashion.

12. The Bible was written in an age before our newest technologies, but it says much to the human use of technology, because it says much to the human use of property. If the Sermon on the Mount says, "No man can serve two masters... you cannot serve both God and money," it is strange at best to assume that these words applied when money could buy food, clothing, and livestock but have no relevance to an age when money can also buy the computers and consumer electronics we are infatuated with. If anything, our interest in technology makes the timeless words, "No man can serve two masters" all the more needed in our day.
13. Money can buy everything money can buy and nothing money cannot buy. To seek true glory, or community, or control over all risk from money is a fundamental error, like trying to make a marble statue so lifelike that it actually comes to life. What is so often sought in money is something living, while money itself is something dead, a stone that can appear deceptively lifelike but can never hold the breath of life.
14. In the end, those who look to money to be their

servant make it their master. "No man can serve two masters" is much the same truth as one Calvin and Hobbes strip:

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

Hobbes: That must have been scary!

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

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

15. There was great excitement in the past millenium when, it was believed, the Age of Pisces would draw to a close, and the Age of Aquarius would begin, and this New Age would be an exciting dawn when all we find dreary about the here and now would melt away. Then the Age of Aquarius started, at least officially, but the New Age failed to rescue us from finding the here and now to be dreary. Then there was great excitement as something like 97% of children born after a certain date were born indigo children: children whose auras are indigo rather than a more mundane color. But, unfortunately, this celebrated watershed did not stop the here and now from being

miserable. Now there is great hope that in 2012, according to the Mayan "astrological" calendar, another momentous event will take place, perhaps finally delivering us from the here and now. And, presumably, when December 21, 2012 fails to satisfy us, subsequent momentous events will promise to deliver us from a here and now we find unbearable.

- 16.If we do not try to sate this urge with New Age, we can try to satisfy it with technology: in what seems like aeons past, the advent of radio and movies seemed to change everything and provide an escape from the here and now, an escape into a totally different world. Then, more recently, surfing the net became the ultimate drug-free trip, only it turns out that the web isn't able to save us from finding the here and now miserable after all. For that, apparently, we need SecondLife, or maybe some exciting development down the pike... or, perhaps, we are trying to work out a way to succeed by barking up the wrong lamppost.
- 17.No technology is permanently exotic.
- 18.When a Utopian vision dreams of turning the oceans to lemonade, then we have what has been called "a Utopia of spoiled children." It is not a Utopian vision of people being supported in the difficult ascetical pursuit of virtue and ultimately God, but an aid to arrested development that forever panders to childish desires.

19. Technology need not have the faintest conscious connection with Utopianism, but it can pursue one of the same ends. More specifically, it can be a means to stay in arrested development. What most technology offers is, in the end, a practical way to circumvent asceticism. Technological "progress" often means that up until now, people have lived with a difficult struggle—a struggle that ultimately amounts to asceticism—but now we can simply do without the struggle.
20. Through the wonders of modern technology, we can eat and eat and eat candy all day and not have the candy show up on our waistline: but this does not make us any better, nobler, or wiser than if we could turn the oceans to lemonade. This is an invention from a Utopia of spoiled children.
21. Sweetness is a gift from God, and the sweeter fruit and honey taste, the better the nourishment they give. But there is something amiss in tearing the sweetness away from healthy food, and, not being content with this, to say, "We think that eating is a good thing, and we wish to celebrate everything that is good about it. But, unfortunately, there is biological survival, a holdover from other days: food acts as a nutrient whether you want it or not. But through the wonders of modern science, we can celebrate the goodness of eating while making any effect on the body strictly optional. This is progress!"
22. Statistically, people who switch to artificial

sweeteners gain *more* weight. Splenda accomplishes two things: it makes things sweeter without adding calories, and it offers people a way to sever the cord between enjoying sweet taste, and calories entering the body. On spiritual grounds, this is a disturbing idea of how to "support" weight loss. It is like trying to stop people from getting hurt in traffic accidents by adding special "safety" features to some roads so people can drive however they please with impunity, even if they develop habits that will get them *killed* on any other road. What is spiritually unhealthy overflows into poorer health for the body. People gain more weight eating Splenda, and there are more ways than one that Splenda is unfit for human consumption.

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

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

Fasting pursued wrongly can do us no good, and it is the wisdom of the Orthodox Church to undergo such ascesis under the direction of one's priest or spiritual

father. But the core issue in fasting is one that matters some for the body and much more for the spirit.

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

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

26. St. John Chrysostom wrote,

Where is there murder before birth? You do not

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

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

Now, the Spirit expressly says that in the last days some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences have been seared with a hot iron: for they forbid marriage and demand avoidance

of foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

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

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

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

31. Contraception is chosen because it serves a certain way of life: it is not an accident in any way, shape, or form that Planned Parenthood advertises, for both contraception, "Take control of your life!" For whether one plans two children, or four, or none, Planned Parenthood sings the siren song of having your life under your control, or at least as much under control as you can make it, where you choose the terms where you will deal with your children, if and when you want.
32. Marriage and monasticism both help people grow up by helping them to learn being out of control. Marriage may provide the asceticism of minding children and monasticism that of obedience to one's elder, but these different-sounding activities are aimed at building the same kind of spiritual virtue and power.
33. Counselors offer people, not the help that many of them seek in controlling those they struggle with, but something that is rarely asked: learning to be at

peace with letting go of being in control of others, and the unexpected freedom that that brings. Marriage and monasticism, at their best, do not provide a minor adjustment that one manages and is then on top of, but an arena, a spiritual struggle, a training ground in which people live the grace and beauty of the Sermon on the Mount, and are freed from the prison chamber of seeking control and the dank dungeon of living for themselves.

34. "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than them? And why do you worry about the lilies of the field: how they grow. They neither toil nor spin;" they have joy and peace. The height of technological progress in having pleasure without losing control—in artificial sweeteners, contraceptives and anything else—utterly pales in comparison.
35. Technology is not evil. Many technologies have a right use, but that use is a use to pursue maturity and ascesis, not an aid to living childishly.
36. Wine was created by God as good, and it has a right use. But the man who seeks in wine a way to be happy or a way to drive away his problems has already lost.

37. One classic attitude to wine was not "We forbid drinking wine," or even "It would be better not to drink wine at all, but a little bit does not do too much damage," but goes beyond saying, "The pleasure of wine was given by God as good" to saying: "Wine is an important training ground to learn the asceticism of moderation, and learn a lesson that cannot be escaped: we are not obligated to learn moderation in wine, but if we do not drink wine, we still need moderation in work, play, eating, and everything else, and many of us would do well to grow up in asceticism in the training arena of enjoying wine and be better prepared for other areas of life where the need for the asceticism of moderation, of saying 'when' and drawing limits, is not only something we *should not* dodge: it is something we *can never* escape."
38. The ascetical use of technology is like the ascetical use of wine. It is pursued out of maturity, and as a support to maturity. It is not pursued out of childishness, nor as a support to childishness. And it should never be the center of gravity in our lives. (Drinking becomes a problem more or less when it becomes the focus of a person's life and pursuits.)
39. The Harvard business study behind *Good to Great* found that the most effective companies often made pioneering use of technology, but technology was never the center of the picture: however many news stories might be printed about how they used technologies, few of the CEOs mentioned technology at all when they discussed their company's success,

and none of them ascribed all that much importance to even their best technology. Transformed companies—companies selected in a study of all publicly traded U.S. companies whose astonishing stock history began to improve and then outperformed the market by something like a factor of three, sustained for fifteen years straight—didn't think technology was all that important, not even technologies their people pioneered. They focused on something more significant.

40. *Good to Great* leadership saw their companies' success in terms of people.

41. There were other finds, including that the most effective CEOs were not celebrity rockstars in the limelight, but humble servant leaders living for something beyond themselves. In a study about what best achieves what greed wants, not even one of the top executives followed a mercenary creed of ruthless greed and self-advancement.

42. If people, not technology, make businesses tremendously profitable, then perhaps people who want more than profit also need something beyond technology in order to reach the spiritual riches and treasures in Heaven that we were made for.

43. The right use of technology comes out of asceticism and is therefore according to nature.

44. In Robert Heinlein's science fiction classic *Stranger*

in a Strange Land, a "man" with human genes who starts with an entirely Martian heritage as his culture and tradition, comes to say, "Happiness is a matter of functioning the way a human being was organized to function... but the words in English are a mere tautology, empty. In Martian they are a complete set of working instructions." The insight is true, but takes shape in a way that completely cuts against the grain of *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

45. One most immediate example is that the science fiction vision is of an ideal of a community of "water brothers" who painstakingly root out natural jealousy and modesty, and establish free love within their circle: such, the story would have it, provides optimal human happiness. As compellingly as it may be written into the story, one may bring up studies which sought to find out which of the sexualities they wished to promote provided the greatest pleasure and satisfaction, and found to their astonishment and chagrin that the greatest satisfaction comes, not from any creative quest for the ultimate thrill, but from something they despised as a completely unacceptable *perversion*: a husband and wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, working to become one for as long as they both shall live, and perhaps even grateful for the fruitfulness of their love. Perhaps such an arrangement offers greater satisfaction than trying to "push the envelope" of adventuresome arrangements precisely *because* it is "functioning the way a human being was organized to function."

46. People only seek the ultimate exotic thrill when they are unhappy. Gnosticism is a spiritual porn whose sizzle entices people who despair: its "good news" of an escape from the miserable here and now is "good news" as misery would want it. Today's Gnosticism may rarely teach, as did earlier Gnostic honesty, that our world could not be the good creation of the ultimately good God, but holding that we need to escape our miserable world was as deep in ancient Gnostics' bones as an alcoholic experiences that our miserable world needs to be medicated by drunkenness. Baudelaire said, in the nineteenth century: "Keep getting drunk! Whether with wine, or with poetry, or with virtue, as you please, keep getting drunk," in a poem about medicating what might be a miserable existence. Today he might have said, "Keep getting drunk! Whether with New Age, or with the endless virtual realities of SecondWife, or with the ultimate Viagra-powered thrill, as you please, keep getting drunk!"
47. What SecondLife—or rather SecondWife—offers is the apparent opportunity to have an alternative to a here and now one is not satisfied with. Presumably there are merits to this alternate reality: some uses are no more a means to escape the here and now than a mainstream business's website, or phoning ahead to make a reservation at a restaurant. But SecondWife draws people with an alternative to the here and now they feel stuck in.
48. It is one thing to get drunk to blot out the misery of

another's death. It is another altogether to keep getting drunk to blot out the misery of one's own life.

49. An old story from African-American lore tells of how a master and one of his slaves would compete by telling dreams they claimed they had. One time, the master said that he had a dream of African-American people's Heaven, and everything was dingy and broken—and there were lots of dirty African-Americans everywhere. His slave answered that he had dreamed of white people's Heaven, and everything was silver and gold, beautiful and in perfect order—but there wasn't a soul in the place!

50. Much of what technology seems to offer is to let people of all races enter a Heaven where there are luxuries the witty slave could never dream of, but in the end there is nothing much better than a Heaven full of gold and empty of people.

51. "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.

52. There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of asceticism. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to

relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving one's immediate presence.

53. "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
54. Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and *never* use it to replace meat.
55. We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.
56. Today the older generation seems to grouse about

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

57. The older generation kvetching about how the younger generation today has it so easy with toys their elders never dreamed of, never seem to connect their sardonic remarks with how they went to school with discipline problems like spitwads and the spoiled younger generation faced easily available street drugs, or how a well-behaved boy with an e-mail address may receive X-rated spam. "The youth these days" have luxuries their parents never even dreamed of—and temptations and dangers their parents never conceived, not in their worst nightmares.

58. Elders have traditionally complained about the young people being rude, much of which amounts to mental inattention. Part of politeless is being present in body and mind to others, and when the older generation was young, *their* elders assuredly corrected them from not paying attention in the

presence of other people and themselves.

59. When they were young, the older generation's ways of being rude included zoning out and daydreaming, making faces when adults turned their back, and in class throwing paper airplanes and passing notes—and growing up meant, in part, learning to turn their back on that arsenal of temptations, much like previous generations. And many of the older generation genuinely turned their backs on those temptations, and would genuinely like to help the younger generation learn to honor those around with more of their physical and mental *presence*.
60. Consumer electronics like the smartphone, aimed to offer something to youth, often advertise to the younger generation precisely a far better way to avoid a spiritual lesson that was hard enough for previous generations to learn without nearly the same degree of temptation. Few explains to them that a smartphone is not only very useful, but it is designed and sold as an enticing ultra-portable temptation.
61. Literature can be used to escape. But the dividing line between great and not-so-great literature is less a matter of theme, talent, or style than the question of whether the story serves to help the reader escape the world, or engage it.
62. In technology, the question of the virtuous use of technology is less a matter of how fancy the

technology is, or how recent, than whether it is used to escape the world or engage it. Two friends who use cell phones to help them meet face-to-face are using technology to support, in some form, the timeless way of relating to other people. Family members who IM to ask prayer for someone who is sick also incorporate technology into the timeless way of relating to other people. This use of technology is quiet and unobtrusive, and supports a focus on something greater than technology: the life God gave us.

63. Was technology made for man, or man for technology?
64. Much of the economy holds the premise that a culture should be optimized to produce wealth: man was made for the economy. The discipline of advertising is a discipline of influencing people without respecting them as people: the customer, apparently, exists for the benefit of the business.
65. Advertising encourages us to take shopping as a sacrament, and the best response we can give is not activism as such, but a refusal of consent.
66. Shopping is permissible, but not sacramental shopping, because sacramental shopping is an ersatz sacrament and identifying with brands an ersatz spiritual discipline. At best sacramental shopping is a distraction; more likely it is a lure and the bait for a spiritual trap.

67. We may buy a product which carries a mystique, but not the mystique itself: and buying a cool product without buying into its "cool" is hard, harder than not buying. But if we buy into the cool, we forfeit great spiritual treasure.
68. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and all of your life and all of your mind and all of your might, love your neighbor as yourself, and use things: do not love things while using people.
69. Things can do the greatest good when we stop being infatuated with them and put first things first. The most powerful uses of technology, and the best, come from loving those whom you should love and using what you should use. We do not benefit from being infatuated with technology, nor from acting on such infatuation.
70. The Liturgy prays, "Pierce our souls with longing for Thee." Our longing for transcendence is a glory, and the deepest thing that draws us in advertisements for luxury goods, does so because of the glory we were made to seek.
71. But let us attend to living in accordance with nature. Ordinarily when a technology is hailed as "space-conquering," it is on a deep level *body-conquering*, defeating part of the limitations of our embodied nature—which is to say, defeating part of our embodied nature that is in a particular place in a particular way.

72. Technologies to pass great distance quickly, or make it easy to communicate without being near, unravel what from ancient times was an ancient social fabric. They offer something of a line-item veto on the limits of our embodied state: if they do not change our bodies directly, they make our embodied limitations less relevant.
73. A technology can conquer how the body takes nourishment from food, for instance, and therefore be body-conquering without being space-conquering. But whether celebrated or taken for granted, space-conquering technologies are called space-conquering because they make part of the limitations of our embodied nature less relevant.
74. There is almost a parody of asceticism in space-conquering technologies. Asceticism works to transcend the limited body, and space-conquering technologies seem a way to do the same. But they are opposites.
75. "The demons always fast:" such people are told to instill that fasting has a place and a genuine use, but anyone who focuses too much on fasting, or fasts too rigidly, is well-advised to remember that every single demon outfasts every single saint. But there is something human about fasting: only a being made to eat can benefit from refraining from eating. Fasting is useful because, unlike the angels and demons, a man is not created purely a spirit, but created both spirit and body, and they are linked together. Asceticism knows better, and is more deeply

attuned to nature, to attempt to work on the spirit with the body detached and ignored.

76. Even as asceticism subdues the comforts and the body, the work is not only to transfigure the spirit, and transform the body.
77. In a saint the transfiguration means that when the person has died, the body is not what horror movies see in dead bodies: it is glorified into relics.
78. This is a fundamentally different matter from circumventing the body's limitations. There may be good, ascetical uses for space-conquering technologies: but the good part of it comes from the asceticism shining through the technology.
79. The limitations of our embodied existence—aging, bodily aches and pains, betrayal, having doors closed in our face—have been recognized as spiritual stepping stones, and the mature wonder, not whether they have too many spiritual stepping stones, but whether they might need more. Many impoverished saints were concerned, not with whether their life was too hard, but whether it was too easy. Some saints have been tremendously wealthy, but they used their wealth for other purposes than simply pandering to themselves.
80. Some might ask today, for instance, whether there might be something symbolic to the burning bush that remained unconsumed which St. Moses the

Lawgiver saw. And there are many layers of spiritual meaning to the miracle—an emblem of the Theotokos's virgin birthgiving—but it is not the proper use of symbolic layers to avoid the literal layer, without which the symbolic layers do not stand. If the question is, "Isn't there something symbolic about the story of the miracle of the burning bush?", the answer is, "Yes, but it is a fundamental error to use the symbolic layers to dodge the difficulty of literally believing the miracle." In like fashion, there are many virtuous uses of technology, but it is a fundamental error to expect those uses to include using technology to avoid the difficult lessons of spiritual asceticism.

81. Living according to nature is not a luxury we add once we have taken care of necessities: part of harmony with nature is built into necessities. Our ancestors gathered from the natural world, not to seek harmony with nature, but to meet their basic needs—often with far fewer luxuries than we have—and part of living according to nature has usually meant few, if any, luxuries. Perhaps there is more harmony with nature today in driving around a city to run errands for other people, than a luxurious day out in the countryside.

82. Some of the promise the Internet seems to offer is the dream of a mind-based society: a world of the human spirit where there is no distraction of external appearance because you have no appearance save that of a handle or avatar, for instance, or a world

where people need not appear male or female except as they choose. But the important question is not whether technology through the internet can deliver such a dream, but whether the dream is a dream or a nightmare.

83. To say that the Internet is much more mind-based than face-to-face interactions is partly true. But to say that a mind-based society is more fit for the human spirit than the timeless way of relating, in old-fashioned “meatspace,” is to correct the Creator on His mistaken notions regarding His creatures' best interests.
84. People still use the internet all the time as an adjunct to the timeless way of relating. Harmony with nature is not disrupted by technology's use as an adjunct nearly so much as when it serves as a replacement. Pushing for a mind-based society, and harmony with nature, may appeal to the same people, especially when they are considered as mystiques. But pushing for a mind-based society is pushing for a greater breach of living according to nature, widening the gulf between modern society and the ancient human of human life. There is a contradiction in pushing for our life to be both more and less according to nature.
85. There is an indirect concern for asceticism in companies and bosses that disapprove of clock watching. The concern is not an aversion to technology, or that periodically glancing at one's watch takes away all

that much time from real work. The practical concern is of a spiritual state that hinders work: the employee's attention and interest are divided, and a bad spiritual state overflows into bad work.

86. In terms of ascesis, the scattered state that cannot enjoy the present is the opposite of a spiritual condition called *nepsis* or, loosely, "watchfulness."
87. The problem that manifests itself in needing to keep getting drunk, with New Age and its hopes for, at the moment, 2012 delivering us from a miserable here and now, or needing a more and more exotic drugged-up sexual thrill, or fleeing to SecondWife, is essentially a lack of *nepsis*.
88. To be delivered by such misery is not a matter of a more radical escape. In a room filled with eye-stinging smoke, what is needed is not a more heroic way to push away the smoke, but a way of quenching the fire. Once the fire is quenched, the smoke dissipates, and with it the problem of escaping the smoke.
89. *Nepsis* is a watchfulness over one's heart, including the mind.
90. *Nepsis* is both like and unlike metacognition. It observes oneself, but it is not thinking about one's thinking, or taking analysis to the next level: analysis of normal analysis. It is more like coming to one's senses, getting back on course, and then trying to

stay on course. It starts with a mindfulness of how one has not been mindful, which then flows to other areas of life.

91. The man who steps back and observes that he is seeking ways to escape the here and now, has an edge. The same goes with worrying or other passions by which the soul is disturbed: for many of the things that trouble our soul, seduce us to answer the wrong question. This is almost invariably more pedestrian than brilliant metacognition, and does not look comfortable.
92. Metanoia, or repentance, is both unconditional surrender and waking up and smelling the coffee. It is among the most terrifying of experiences, but afterwards, one realizes, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!"
93. Once one is past that uncomfortable recognition, one is free to grasp something better.
94. That "something better" is ultimately Christ, and there is a big difference between a mind filled with Christ and a mind filled with material things as one is trying to flee malaise.
95. The attempt to escape a miserable here and now is doomed. We cannot escape into Eden. But we can find the joy of Eden, and the joy of Heaven, precisely in the here and now we are seduced to seek to escape.

96. Living the divine life in Christ, is a spiritual well out of which many treasures pour forth: harmony with nature, the joy of Eden and all the other things that we are given if we seek first the Kingdom of God and His perfect righteousness.
97. It was a real achievement when people pushing the envelope of technology and, with national effort and billions of dollars of resources, NASA succeeded in lifting a man to the moon.
98. But, as a monk pointed out, the Orthodox Church has known for aeons how to use no resources beyond a little bread and water, and succeed in lifting a man up to God.
99. And we miss the greatest treasures if we think that asceticism or its fruits are only for monks.
100. And there is something that lies beyond even asceticism: contemplation of the glory of God.

Veni, Vidi, Vomui: A Look at "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?"

See the video at cishayward.com/avatar

A Socratic dialogue triggered by "The Labyrinth"

Trimmed slightly, but "minimally processed" from an email conversation following "The Labyrinth,"
cishayward.com/labyrinth.

Author: P.S. My brother showed me the following video as cool. He didn't see why I found it a bit of a horror:
"Do You Want to Date My Avatar?"

Visitor: Oh gosh, that's just layers and layers of sad. It's all about the experience, but the message is kept just this

side of tolerable ("nerds are the new sexy" - the reversal of a supposed stigmatization) so it can function as an excuse for the experience. At least that's my analysis.

Author: Thanks. I just hotlinked a line of Labyrinth to Avatar...

...and added a tooltip of, "Veni, vidi, vom!".

Visitor: (*Laughs*) You have me completely mystified on this one, sorry.

However, you are welcome. And I'm glad to see that you're cracking jokes. (I think.)

No seriously, laughing out loud. Even though I don't exactly know why.

Is 'vomi' a made-up word? Men... when it comes right down to it you all have the same basic sense of humor. (I think.)

Author: Veni, vidi, vici: I came, I saw, I conquered.

Veni, vidi, vom!: I came, I saw, I puked.

Visitor: Yep... the basic masculine sense of humor, cloaked in Latin. I'm ever so honored you let me in on this. If the world were completely fair, someone would be there right now to punch your shoulder for me... this is my favorite form of discipline for my brother in law when he gets out of line.

But what's Avatar... and hotlink and tooltip?

Author: The link to "Do you want to date my Avatar?"
Hotlink is a synonym for link; tooltip, what displays if you leave your mouse hovering over it.

Visitor: Oh dear, I really didn't understand what you were telling me; I was just in good spirits.

OK, I find that funny - and appropriate.

Author: Which do you think works better (i.e. "The Labyrinth" with or without images):

Visitor: I have some doubts about the video showing up in the text.

Author: Ok; I'll leave it out. Thanks.

Visitor: Welcome.

I did like the Christ image where you had it. It encouraged a sober pause at the right place in the meditation.

Author: Thank you; I've put it in slightly differently.

Visitor: I like that.

Author: Thank you.

I've also put the video (link) in a slightly different place than originally. I think it also works better

there.

Visitor: Taking a risk of butting in... Would this be a more apropos place?

The true raison d'être was known to desert
monks,
Ancient and today,
And by these fathers is called,
Temptation, passion, demon,
Of **escaping the world.**

Unless I've misunderstood some things and that's always possible. (*laughs*) I never did ask you your analysis of what, in particular, horrified you about the video. But it seems like a perfect illustration not of pornography simple but of the underlying identity between the particular kind of lust expressed in pornography (not the same as wanting a person) and escapism, and that's the place in the poem where you are talking about that identification.

Author:: Thank you. I've moved it.

In *That Hideous Strength*, towards the end,
Lewis writes:

"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. Her 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 move and 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.

Pp. 270/271 are in fantasy imagery what has become quite literally true decades later.

Visitor: Yes, that would be what I was missing... that fantasy banquet at the end of the video feels particularly creepy now.

However the girl I was telling you about had among other things watched a show where a "doctor" talked about giving seminars where women learn to experience the full physical effects of intercourse, using their minds only. (Gets into feminism, no?)

That's why I was trying to tell her that "richter scale" measurements aren't everything...

In this hatred of the body, in putting unhealthy barriers between genders, and in seeing the body as basically a tool for sexual experience, fundamentalist Christianity and cutting edge worldliness are really alike. (I had a pastor once who forbade the girls in the church school to wear sandals because they might tempt the boys with their "toe cleavage.")

Author: I would be wary of discounting monastic experience; I as a single man, prudish by American standards, probably have more interaction with women than most married men in the patristic era.

But in the image... "eating" is not just eating. In the initial still image in the embedded version of "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?", I made a connection. The sword is meant as a phallic symbol, and not just as half of a large category of items are a phallic symbol in some very elastic sense. It's very direct. Queer sex and orgy are implied, even though everything directly portrayed seems "straight", or at least straight as defined against the gender rainbow (as opposed, perhaps, to a "technology rainbow").

Visitor: Yes, I see what you are saying. I suppose the opening shots in the video would also imply self-abuse. I was seeing those images and the ones you mention as just icky in themselves without thinking about them implying something else.

Author: P.S. My brother who introduced it to me, as something cool, explained to me that this is part of

the main performer's effort to work her way into mainstream television. She demonstrates, in terms of a prospect for work in television, that she can look beautiful, act, sing, dance, and be enticing while in a video that is demure in its surface effect as far as music videos go. (And she has carefully chosen a viral video to prove herself as talent.)

Not sure if that makes it even more disturbing; I didn't mention it with any conscious intent to be as disturbing as I could, just wanted to give you a concrete snapshot of the culture and context for why I put what I put in "The Labyrinth."

Visitor: It's making a lot more sense now.

I'm not remembering the significance of the technology rainbow.

Author: As far as "technology rainbow":

In contrast to "hetero-centrism" is advocated a gender rainbow where one live person may have any kind of arrangement with other live people, as long as everyone's of age, and a binary "male and female" is replaced by a rainbow of variety that is beyond shades of gray.

I was speaking by analogy: a "technology rainbow", in contrast to "face-to-face-centrism", would seek as normative any creative possibility, again excluding child pornography, where face-to-face relationships

are only one part of a "technology rainbow".

It might also help make the point that internet-enabled expressions of sexuality, for most of the men, aren't exactly straight. They do not involve same-sex attraction, nor animals or anything like that, but they depart from being straight in a slightly different trajectory from face-to-face relationships where heterosexuality is only one option.

Neither member of this conversation had anything more to say.

How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion

Introduction: A study of secularization

Thomas Dixon in “Theology, Anti-Theology, and Atheology: From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” offers a model of societal secularization intended to be a more robust than just seeing “theology vs. anti-theology,” “theology vs. theology in disguise,” or “theology vs. anti-theology in disguise.” He argues for a process that begins with full-blooded theism, such as offered by almost any strain of classic Christianity, and then moves to “thin theism,” such as Paley (today think Higher Powers), then “anti-theology” that is directly hostile to theism, then “atheology” which is alienated from theological roots but is

merely un-theological, “in much the same way as a recipe in a cookery book is un-theological.”

Dixon, like a good scholar, provides a good case study explored at greater length in his dissertation, and I am very interested in the case study he chose. He looks at the formation of a secular category of psychology, and the steps that have been taken to depart from older religious understandings situating the concept of passions, to a secular concept of emotions. The development of the secular category of emotions serves as a microcosm of a study of a society’s apostasy (a term Dixon does not use in his article) from understanding aspects of life as features of religion, to covering similar territory in terms of what is explained, but understanding things on secular terms, disconnected from religion. (Much prior to the transition Dixon documents, it’s difficult to see what the West would make of psychobabble about “*Feelings aren’t right. They aren’t wrong. They’re just feelings.*”)

If I may summarize Dixon’s account of the apostasy, while moving the endpoints out a bit, in the *Philokalia*, passions are loosely sin viewed as a state, with inner experience (and sometimes outer) related to how we live and struggle with our passions. Orthodox Christians have quite an earful to give (and sometimes the maturity not to give it) if someone from the West asks, “What are your *passions*?” In an Orthodox understanding, taken literally, that question has nothing to do with activities we enjoy and get excited about (unless they are wrong for us to engage in). It is more the matter of a habit of sin that has defaced their spiritual condition and that they are, or should be, repenting of. That is one of the more “Western-like” points we can take from the *Philokalia*; another

foundational concept is that many of the thoughts we think are our own, and make our own (such as authentic handling of non-straight sexuality as is broadly understood today), are the unending attempted venomous injections of demons and we need to watchfully keep guard and destroy what seems to be our own thoughts. This is not present, nor would be particularly expected, in Dixon's account. However, the "before" in Dixon's "before and after" clearly situates what would today be considered feelings as markers and features of spiritual struggle, spiritual triumph, and spiritual defeat. The oldest so-to-speak "non-influence" figure Dixon attends to lives well after the Orthodox eight demons, that attack us from without, were revised to become our own internal seven deadly sins.

The first alternative Dixon studies is a concept of emotion that is paper-thin. The specific text he studies, which is remarkably accurately named, is Charles Darwin's *The Expressions of Emotion in Man and the Animals*. The title does not directly herald a study of *emotion*, but the *expressions* of emotion, with an a priori that diminishes or removes consideration of human emotional life being distinctive (contrast Temple Grandin, *Animals in Translation*; she believes very much that animals have a psyche, but takes a sledgehammer to all-too-easy anthromorphization of animal psyches). Furthermore, an emotion is something you feel. Emotion is not really about something, and emotional habits are not envisioned. Darwin's study was a study of physiologically what was going on with human and animal bodies approached as what was really going on in emotion.

Later on, when atheology has progressed, this begins to change. After a certain point people could conceive that

emotions are about something; another threshold crossed, and you could speak of emotional habits; another threshold crossed, and you could regard a person's emotional landscape as healthy or unhealthy. All of this fits Dixon's category of atheology if one is using his framework. There remain important differences from either the *Philokalia* or the earliest models Dixon studies: it is today believed that you should let emotions wash through you until they have run their course, an opinion not endorsed by any framing of passions that I know. However, I would recall G.K. Chesterton on why it was not provocative for him to call the Protestant Reformation the shipwreck of Christianity: the proof is that, like Robinson Crusoe, Protestants keep on retrieving things from the Catholic ship.

Perhaps the fullest atheological rediscovery of the concept of a passion I am aware of is the disease model of alcoholism lived out in Alcoholics Anonymous. The passions are, in the *Philokalia*, spiritual wounds or diseases of some sort, and the dominant metaphor for a father confessor is that of a physician or healer. While the important term "repent" is not included in the wording of the twelve steps, the twelve steps paint in powerful and stark relief what repentance looks like when it puts on work gloves. The community is in many ways like a church or perhaps is a church. Steps may be taken to qualify strict doctrine, but the teaching and resources are a sort of practical theology to help people defeat the bottle. (One thinks of Pannenberg's essay "How to Think About Secularism" suggests that secularism did not arise from people grinding an axe against all religion; it arose from people wanting to live in peace at a time when it was mainstream to wish that people on the other side of the

divide would be burned at the stake.) There is a bit of haziness about “God as I understand him,” but this is decidedly not the result of hazy thinking. The biggest difference between Alcoholics Anonymous and the Orthodox Church may be that Alcoholics Anonymous helps with one primary disease or passion, and the Church, which could be called Sinners Anonymous, doesn't say, “Hi. I'm Joe, and I'm an alcoholic.” It believes, “Hi. I'm Joe, and I'm the worst sinner in history.”

Where is the Orthodox Church in all of Dixon's study?

At a glance, there may not be much visible. The Orthodox Church is not mentioned as such, the text seems to focus on English-speaking figures from the 17th century onwards, and the only figure claimed by the Orthodox Church is the Blessed Augustine, who is first mentioned in a perfunctory list of influences upon authors who retained significant grounding in older tradition. (The next step seems to jump centuries forward to reach Thomas Aquinas.) The text does not seem to have even a serious pretension to treat Orthodoxy as far as the case study goes. Furthermore, while passions were and are considered important in Orthodoxy, the theological *affections* that counterbalance theological passions in the “before” part of “before and after” are obscure or nonexistent in Orthodox faith.

However, there is something that would feel familiar to Orthodox. To the Orthodox student in a Roman university, there may be the repeated effect of a Catholic student conspiratorially explain that the Roman Catholic Church has been doing that was daft and wrong, but now Rome is getting its act together, has progressed, and has something genuinely better to offer. To Orthodox, this whole topos

heralds something specific; it heralds the dismantling of one more continuity that Rome used to have with Holy Orthodoxy. And while Dixon does not discuss “Catholic” or “Protestant” as such and does not even have pretensions of treating Orthodoxy, he offers a first-class account of Western figures dismantling one more continuity with Holy Orthodoxy. To many Orthodox, the tune sounds all too familiar.

Quasi-Mystical-Theology

In Orthodoxy, all theology is “mystical theology”, meaning what is practically lived in the practice of Holy Orthodoxy. Systematic theology is off-limits, as a kind of formal book exercise that is not animated by the blood of mystical theology.

Clinical psychology offers what Dixon terms quasi-theology, and I would more specifically term quasi-mystical theology. Not all psychologists are clinical practitioners; there are a good number of academic research psychologists who explore things beyond the bounds of what a counselor would ordinarily bring up. For instance, academic psychology has developed theories of memory, including what different kinds of memory there are, how they work, and how they fit together. These are not only more detailed than common-sense understandings, but different: learning a skill is considered a type of memory, and while it makes sense on reflection, the common, everyday use of “memory” does not draw such a connection.

This is a legitimate finding of research psychology, but it falls outside of common counseling practice unless the client has some kind of condition where this information is

useful. Clinical practitioners attempt to inculcate aspects of psychology that will help clients with their inner state, how to handle difficulties, and (it is hoped) live a happier life. All of this is atheology that is doing something comparable to theology, and more specifically mystical theology; the speculative end is left for academics, or at least not given to clients who don't need the added information. In Dixon's framing, some atheology is additionally *quasi-theological*, meaning that it offers e.g. overarching narratives of life and the cosmos; he mentions science-as-worldview as one point. Clinical psychology offers a different, humbler, and vastly more powerful quasi-theological project. It offers an attempt at a secular common ground that will let people live their lives with the kind of resources that have been traditionally sought under religious auspices. As far as the *Philokalia* as the Orthodox masterwork for the science of spiritual struggle goes, at times the content of clinical psychology runs parallel to the *Philokalia* and at times it veers in a different and unrelated direction from the *Philokalia*, but it is almost a constant that clinical psychology is intended to do *Philokalia* work that will help overcome bad thoughts, preventable misery, regrettable actions, being emotionally poisoned by people who are emotionally poisonous, etc. There is of course an additional difference in that the works in the *Philokalia* are concerned with building people up for eternal glory, but clinical psychology is meant to build people up for a positive life, and that much is common ground.

What is a religion? Can religion be secular?

Q> *With so many religions [in India], how do you stay united ?*

A: *A common hatred of stupid Americans.*

(An FAQ list written by an exasperated Indian)

The term “religion” etymologically comes from Latin, “religare”, which means to bind. It is the same root as in “ligament” in the human body, which do a job of connecting bones to each other. And while the FAQ list contains some astonishingly silly questions, there is some degree of insight reflected in a realization of many religions in India leading to a question of, “*How do you stay united?*”

I bristled when I read scholars saying that courtly love and chivalry was the real religion of knights and nobles late in the Middle Ages, but some years later, the claim makes a lot more sense to me. The medieval versions of Arthurian legend I read before and during *The Sign of the Grail* repeatedly talked about how people didn’t love (in courtly fashion) anything like the days of King Arthur, which is a signal warning that courtly love was present in a sense that was unthinkable in the claimed days of King Arthur’s court. The first widespread version of Arthurian legends outside of Celtic legend were in the twelfth century; the dates reported, with mention of St. Augustine of Canterbury, put Arthur as being in the sixth century. The number of intervening centuries is roughly the same as the number of years between our time and the tail end of the medieval world.

Furthermore, I have not read *Harry Potter* but I would offer some contrasts. First of all, Harry Potter is produced, offered, and among the more mentally stable members of the fan base, received as a work of fiction. The version of King Arthur that first swept through mainland Europe was a work of pseudohistory produced mostly out of thin air, but was presented and received as literal history. Secondary, Harry Potter mania is not expected to be a fixture for all of a long lifetime: the cultural place we have is like nothing else in its heyday, but it is a candidate for a limelight that shone on many other things before it and is expected to shine on many things after it. The Arthurian legends were more of a Harry Potter without competition. Today one can walk in the bookstore and see fantasy novels representing many worlds; Arthurian legends tended to absorb anything beside them that was out there (like the story of Tristan and Yseult, included in Sir Thomas Mallory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*). It might be pointed out that the present Pope as of this writing is named after a medieval Western saint, Francis of Assisi, who was named under the inspiration of France and more specifically French troubadours. I am not sure where the troubadours' lyrics began and ended, but Arthurian legends entered the vulgar (i.e. common, instead of Latin) tongue in France and troubadours were part and parcel to what spread. Notwithstanding that the Arthurian legends take place in England, they are to this day as well-known, or better-known, in France, than the story of the (French) Roland and his paladins. The Roman Catholic Church forbade reading "idle romances," meaning, essentially, all Arthurian literature, but it seems that, in the circles of courtly love, the active endeavors of chivalry were much more on the front burner with Christianity assumed to be

on the back burner, and chivalry was more of one's real religion to knights and nobles than Christianity.

One Orthodox student, perhaps not making himself particularly well-liked in a theology program by complaining about Karl Rahner's reliance on Western analytic philosophy (one particularly memorable cart-before-the-horse heading was "The presence of Christ in an evolutionary worldview"), and was answered by saying that it was to reach the unbeliever. He responded and said that he did not see why the common ground between all world religions was Western analytic philosophy. The professor said that it was to reach the unbeliever in *us*. The student said that Western analytic philosophy did not speak to the unbeliever in him. (The conversation moved on from there, but without uncovering any particular reason why Western analytic philosophy should fit the job description Rahner was conscripting it to do.)

In psychology today, the common ground that is legitimately given the job of a secular and artificial religion in a sense of what common ground binds us together is material derived by Buddhism and Hinduism (whether or not their incarnations would be recognized by the religious communities). Jainism is omitted perhaps because of a lack of familiarity with Indian religion. (The term "yoga," for instance, means a spiritual path, in which sense it would be natural for a Christian to claim to be practicing the Christian yoga, but yoga in the usual sense is lifted from Hinduism. As to whether Orthodox may practice yoga, as always, ask your priest; I do not see why Christians need yoga, but many priests are much more lenient than I would be.) What is presented in psychology today is a secular religion, not specifically requiring one to reverence certain

deities or providing as complete a moral code as world religions, and for that matter expected to be markedly different than the secular religions offered ten years in the past and ten years in the future, and no less meant to do a religion's job because it is concocted.

Why are we seeking mindfulness from the East? Perhaps because we because we have dismantled it in the West.

Fr. Thomas Hopko's "55 Maxims for the Christian Life":

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
4. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 or 30 minutes a day.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
23. Live a day, or even part of a day, at a time.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present wherever you are.

35. Flee imagination, analysis, fantasy, figuring things out.

34 is not the only item that exhorts us to be mindful.

But we are rediscovering mindfulness after having dismantled it at home. One friend talked about how his grandmother complained about Walkmans, that if you are running through natural surroundings and listening to music, you are not paying due attention to your surroundings. There has been a stream of technologies, from humble, tape-eating Walkmans to the iPod's apotheosis in an iPhone and Apple Watch pairing, whose marketing proposition is to provide an ever-easier, ever-more-seductive, ever-more-compelling alternative to mindfulness. Now an iPhone can be awfully useful (I have a still-working iPhone 7), but *using technology ascetically and rightly is harder than not using it at all*, and Humane Tech only reaches so far.

One CEO talked about how she wanted to share one single hack, and the hack she wanted to share was that her mother gave you her full attention no matter who you were or what you were doing. And evidently this was something the CEO considered important both to do and to invite others to do. However, her mother's behavior, however virtuous, and virtuously mindful, was nothing distinctive in her generation, nor was it presented as such. Even with no concept of mindfulness as such, people in her mother's generation were taught in life, faith, and manners to give mindful attention to everyone you dealt with.

G.K. Chesterton exposes the sadness of laboring in the prison of one idea, and something similar might be said by laboring in the prison of one virtue, especially if that is not a cardinal virtue that opens to a vista of other virtues.

Mindfulness, for instance, is much more worthy of attention when viewed as part of an Eightfold Noble Path of interlocking virtues. A TED talk about what makes people beat the odds, presented as original research to a virtue the presenter calls “grit,” which (however much research is done) is quickly recognizable as the standard virtue of perseverance.

There may be hope for a TED talk about an interlocking family of virtues. Tim Ferris's talk about Stoicism does not discuss virtue as such, but does introduce the oblong concept that life lessons learned in ancient times can be relevant and useful today, and discusses Stoicism as the substance of a play George Washington used to strengthen his troops, and discovered as a kind of ultimate power tool by some of the top coaches in the NFL.

The first book of the *Philokalia*, moved to an appendix by formerly Protestant editors, was misattributed to one saint and the stated reason for its banishment was that it was spiritually insightful but not written by a Christian; it was Stoic and not Christian in certain respects. That may be true, but the *Philokalia* is universally human and its authors have usually been quick to borrow from, and respect, Stoic virtue philosophy.

One influential book from the West is Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*. C.S. Lewis gives its reception a cardinal place in *The Discarded Image*, and contests a tendency to have to choose between Boethius's Christianity and his philosophy. Both should be taken seriously, and the book, among other excellences, shows a Christian who has profited from the best pagan philosophy had to offer, including important Stoic elements.

We've seen a TED talk that doesn't name virtues but shows enthusiasm for ancient philosophy in which virtues were important. Perhaps someday we may have a TED talk about an ancient or modern *family* of virtues.

“Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic,” is fundamentally not an “affirmation.”

I would like to look at the phrase, “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic” to dismiss two ideas that might already be obviously ridiculous.

The first is that it’s sadistic, Alcoholics Anonymous rubbing member’s noses into the dirt because of some cruel glee. The practice of introducing yourself as an alcoholic is part and parcel of a big picture intended to free alcoholics from a suffering you wouldn’t wish on your worst enemy, perhaps reminding members that someone who has been fifteen years sober can return to bondage to alcohol. Furthermore, the main intended beneficiary of saying “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic,” is simply the alcoholic who says it.

The second is that it’s wishful thinking. Perhaps there are some confused people who believe that it would be nice to be drunk all the time and drink more and more. However, for someone who knows the incredibly destructive suffering alcoholism inflicts on oneself and those one loves, it is an absurdity to think of “Hi, my name’s Joe, and I’m an alcoholic” as a way to talk something into being, for someone who’s been stone cold sober lifelong to wish to be in cruel slavery to alcohol. “Hi, my name’s Joe,

and I'm an alcoholic" being an "affirmation" of wishful thinking belongs in a Monty Python sketch. The introduction as an alcoholic falls under the heading of facing already present reality.

"Here is a trustworthy saying which deserves acceptance: Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Such said St. Paul, and such is enshrined in two brief prayers before communion. Confessing oneself the chief of sinners is not a positive affirmation: but it is a handmaiden to being one Christ died for, and another saying which has rumbled down the ages, "The vilest of human sins is but a smouldering ember thrown into the ocean of God's love." The confession as the chief of sinners is not an endpoint. It is a signpost lighting up the way to, "Death is swallowed up in victory." However vile the sins one owns up to, they are outclassed in every possible way by the Lord who is addressed in, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." ("Mercy" is said to translate *chesed*, a Hebrew word usually translated as "lovingkindness.")

How do modern psychological affirmations look to a theist? A bit like trying to nourish yourself by eating cotton candy, but I'd really like to give more of an argument than an unflattering comparison. The introduction to *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* describe a shift in wisdom literature (written and other materials about how to live life well; the concept heavily overlaps both theology and psychology). The shift is from a *character ethic*, which says that you get ahead by moral character or moral virtue, to a *personality ethic* which does not call for submitting to inner transformation, and whose hallmarks include exhortations to "Believe in yourself." (Since Covey wrote his

introduction, the jobhunting world is not the only arena to undergo a second fall into a personal brand ethic, but affirmations have not gotten to that point, or at least not that I'm aware of.)

Spirituality and organized religion

One Orthodox priest mentioned, for people who want to be spiritual but express distrust of organized religion, “If you don't like organized religion, you'll love Orthodoxy. We're about as disorganized as you can get.” But he also had a deeper point to make.

That deeper point is that “objection to organized religion” is usually at its core “objection to someone else holding authority over me.” And that is deadly, because someone else having authority over you is the gateway to much of spiritual growth.

Spirituality that is offered as neutral, and has been castrated enough not to visibly trample any mainstream demographic's religious and spiritual sensitivities, may have some effect, but true growth takes place outside of such spiritual confines.

Fr. Alexander Schmemmann's *For the Life of the World* almost opens on “spirituality.” He discusses its vacuity, and how it exacerbates an already secular enough life. The reader is directed to him for what one might have that is better than taking a secular life and adding spirituality.

For lack of knowledge my people perish

I would like to take a moment to talk about mental illness.

The teaching of the Orthodox Church on what we understand as mental illness (see some “hard pill to swallow” prayers), as articulated by an Orthodox MD/PhD, is that the terrain we frame as mental illness has already been analyzed and addressed. Mental illnesses, or what are called such, are tangles of passion. But the psychiatrist was clear that he could and did prescribe medications to lessen patients' suffering.

One bugbear that needs to be addressed is the idea that if you are suffering from mental illness, you need more faith, and/or you just need to snap out of it. Now all of us really need more faith, and if you suffer from a mental illness, you obviously should pray. *However*, trying to pray hard enough to make it go away may not work any better than trying to snap out of it.

Now, with caveats, I would recommend Orthodox Christians with mental illness to see a psychiatrist and/or a counselor. Their methods can be very effective, and for all my writing about ersatz religion, they can significantly reduce suffering.

The caveat I would give is not theologically motivated. It is that there are excellent psychiatrists and counselors, but psychology is a minefield, with counselors who will tell you to use pornography and masturbate. If I were looking for a provider, I would do research and/or ask someone you trust to do research for you (if, for instance, you are depressed enough that it's difficult to get out of bed). And if

your provider seems to be acting inappropriately or displaying incompetence, it may be the entirely right decision to switch providers.

However, there is one piece more that the secular category of psychology does not understand. **Mental illness can improve dramatically when you delve into new layers of repentance.** While it doesn't work to just try harder to have more faith, as you walk the Orthodox journey of repentance you will see things to repent of, and some of that repentance can slowly help untangle the knot of passions that the Fathers of the *Philokalia* knew, and St. Isaac the Syrian, a saint who has benefitted many mentally ill people.

The reason this section is titled "For lack of knowledge my people perish" is that we usually don't see what we need to repent of to work at that level. We don't know the steps. The solution I would expect is to work hard to repent, and make your confession include that one sin that you are wishing to forget when you confess. But walk on the journey of repentance: Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Monasticism is rightly called repentance, but the treasure of repentance is for everyone.

For those for whom this is a live option, the care of a spiritual director receives a central endorsement in *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, a classic which says that if patristic spiritual direction were to be introduced today, it would not likely be classified as religion so much as a therapeutic science. A good, experienced spiritual director who is familiar with mental illness as understood in Orthodoxy can be a much better alternative to fumbling around until you find out what sin you need to repent of and reject to turn your back on a particular point of mental

illness. “For lack of knowledge my people perish” can be greatly alleviated by a spiritual director who understands classic Orthodox teaching on mental illness.

One more thing: a wise Orthodox protopresbyter said, “Avoid amateur psychologists. They usually have more problems than the rest of us!”

Et cetera

There are other things I do not wish to treat in detail. After it has been observed that clinical psychology often takes a person who is miserable and raise that person to feeling OK, but not rise above feeling OK, there has been a “positive psychology” meant for everyone, to help people rise above OK and make use of great talents. I would comment briefly that monasticism is both a supreme medicine for those of us who need some extra structure, *and* a school for positive excellence, and the latter is more central than the former.

In terms of “Christian psychology,” Cloud and Townsend’s *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No* is consistently violent to Biblical texts in the process of presenting secular boundaries as Christian. The Parable of the Good Samaritan is ludicrous hyperbole, and not properly understood until it is recognized as ludicrous hyperbole, in which the Good Samaritan goes through a road infested by brigands, gambles with his life when he gives in to what would ordinarily be the bait to brigands’ oldest and deadliest trick in the book, and so on. It was made to make the listener who asked Christ, “Who is my neighbor?” profoundly uncomfortable. Cloud and Townsend, however, present the Good Samaritan as giving

a moderate and measured response, and asks us to imagine the rescued victim asking the Samaritan to give even *more*, and the Good Samaritan wisely saying, “*No.*”

If you have to be that violent to the Bible to make it agree with you, you’re almost certainly wrong.

And there are other things. I’m not going to try to detail life without thinking in terms of boundaries, beyond saying that Christianity, and almost certainly not only Christianity, has a concept of “Love your neighbor as yourself” that unfolds into right relations with other people, but without psychology’s concept of boundaries.

Let me mention one more point.

Honest?

Perhaps most striking of all was a session under the heading of honesty, and showed a TED talk where a psychiatrist shared (in retrospect and in context, this seems like a deliberate name-drop) that he was named after his father, a Baptist minister. Then he came out as an illegitimate child, and I would like to repeat why my own parents do not like the term “bastard.”

While they wanted to teach polite language, my parents did not object to the term “bastard” because it is forceful enough to be a rude word. They objected to the term “bastard” because the term refers to someone who did not and could not have any say or any agency in a wrong decision. If there is a term forceful enough to be a rude word in this context, and the relevant act was consensual, the abrasive word should refer to the parents and not the child. And now that we’ve mostly retired the use of words like “adulterer” and “fornicator”, we have an abrasive term

for the victim who had no choice in a matter and not those who made the victimhood and the victim. If the worst TMI delivery in the TED talk was that the psychiatrist was an illegitimate child, one could have answered, "Well, Christ was also born from a scandalous pregnancy." But in fact this is not all the TMI psychiatrist was "sharing."

Back to the TED talk. Coming out as a bastard was a softening up of the audience for behavior in which the psychiatrist genuinely *did* have agency. He then came out as a philanderer; he did not use any negative terms, but talked about honesty and authenticity when he opened up to his wife, now his 2nd ex-wife whom he presents as not really harmed, and shared to her, of himself, that he was both *married* and *dating*. It was, to adapt a striking phrase from Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, a confession with total absence of contrition or repentance.

No light bulbs went on above staff members' heads when patients complained that this was the most autistic version of honesty they had yet seen endorsed by a mental health professional, and explained that you don't open a coat and say "Here's all there is to see, whether or not seeing it will help you," or that you don't bleed all over a casual acquaintance who asks "How are you?" in passing; as sometimes has to be explained to the autistic patient, it is rarely a shirking of due honesty to withhold a full-strength informational answer in responding to a merely social question.

And perhaps no light bulbs should have gone on over staff heads because the session on honesty had nothing to do with honesty. Staff members were in fact not ignorant of the major concept of "negative politeness" and that right

speech usually both conceals and reveals. Ostensible “honesty” was just how an unrelated payload was delivered.

To spell it out, the payload is that whatever sexual practices you find yourself most drawn to pursue, and others pursue, is your real, authentic self, and honesty takes that as a non-negotiable foundation. The lecture was devoid of any clear or even vague reference to any stripe of queers (or whatever they are called this week), and if the speaker’s philandering tried out dating a guy, he did not disclose this point. But as much as coming out as an illegitimate child paved the way for coming out as a philanderer, accepting his coming out as a philanderer on the terms he presented was masterfully crafted to pave the way to saying the *only* real payload to that TED talk: “The sexual practices you are most drawn to engage in are your real, authentic self, and authenticity starts with accepting these practices as its foundation,” and if one labors under the delusion that a successful straight marriage is what happens when one man, and one woman, lay the reins on the horse’s neck, one is in a position that has little to no ground to dissent from a position of, “If you allow straight marriage to be authentic, you have to give queers the same right too.”

The entire session ostensibly offered to teach honesty was itself treacherously dishonest.

(Queer advocacy has long since been baked into the societal common ground that psychology deems inoffensive to all religions.)

Conclusion: Beyond solipsism

The goal and lesson of psychology is quite often solipsistic. There are exceptions: positive psychology may

cover three versions of the good life, the last and deepest version being the meaningful life, a non-solipsistic life of service to others. (Though this is seldom covered in psychology, service to others gives a real happiness). However, a session on boundaries covers how to establish and maintain our own boundaries, but probably does not cover respecting other boundaries, including when someone draws a boundary when you think it would be so much better not to establish the boundaries. The further you go, the tighter the constriction of solipsistic self-care. The endgame approached by most pillars of counseling psychology is a client with self-contained happiness.

In Orthodoxy, we do one better: "Only God and I exist."

"Only God and I exist." What does that mean? In a nutshell, the only standing that ultimately matters is your standing before God. Now the Orthodox Church has various forms of mediated grace, and that mediation may be included. However, the only one you need seek to please is God; if you are pleasing God, it doesn't matter what people may do, or even the demons. Arrogance has a place; we are summoned to be rightly and properly arrogant towards the demons in pleasing God. And trample them.

One major difference between ancient Judaism and its neighbors was that, as God's people knew, there was only one God, and our problem before him was sin; if one has sinned, the one and only necessary remedy was atonement. The polytheistic neighbors believed in something much less rational, not to mention far less humane, was that one could do things that offended one or more gods, and the solution to this situation was to appease the offended deity, but unfortunately what appeased one deity could offend another. The unfortunate picture was much like the fool's

errand of simultaneously pleasing everyone in a bickering junior high.

St. Moses is in fact one who confessed what Orthodox believe as “Only God and I exist.”

Once one has crossed that ground, and found that there is only one God to serve and offer our repentance, we move beyond the junior high of our life circumstances... and find that the one God is in fact the Lord of the Dance and the Orchestrator of all Creation. And this time everything besides oneself again becomes real, but not ultimately real. There are billions of people in the world whom we should love, and we should show virtue and politeness to all we meet, but in the end only God has the last word.

Psychology offers a narrower and narrower constriction if you take it a guide to living with others. It offers happiness on the terms of a solipsist. By contrast “Only God and I exist,” opens wider and wider and wider, in a solipsism that is vaster than the Heavens that it, also, embraces. It is a solipsism in which you are summoned to dance the Great Dance with your neighbors and all Creation!

If you need psychology and psychiatry, by all means, use them. *But remember that only God and you exist!*

All Orthodox Theology Is Positive Theology

The state of psychology

Martin Seligman, a giant in the psychological community, kicked off a major TED talk by talking about how a TV station wanted a sound bite from him, and it should be one word. He said, “*Good.*” Then they decided that as the president of the American Psychological Association he was a figure of such stature that they would let him have two words, and he said, “*Not good.*” Finally, they decided he was of such stature that he would be allowed *three* words, and his three words were, “*Not good enough.*”

What he was getting at was essentially as follows: clinical psychology had a goal which was remarkably well accomplished: the complete classification of behavioral health condition, along with effective psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy that could take pretty miserable people and bring them up to feeling basically OK. He didn't really underscore the magnitude and implications of this goal; apart from the fact that public figures know they at least need to act humble publicly, sometimes greatness brings real humility and he was trying to lead people to see there was more to ask for than just getting someone to feel merely adequate, and he did not suggest that clinical psychology

is the kind of tool that lets people of all kinds to thrive in every way. He called for a positive psychology to help people thrive, have fulfilling and delightful living, and enable high talent not to go to waste. And the point that I know him for is his calling for positive psychology.

What is systematic theology?

What is mystical theology?

What is positive theology?

One distinction between Eastern Orthodoxy and Rome is that in Rome, all theology is systematic theology, and in Orthodoxy, all theology is mystical theology. This much is true to point out, however it invites confusion.

Thomas Aquinas, were he alive today, couldn't cut it for "publish or perish" academia. He is revered as one of the greatest giants in history, but he would not obviously be welcome as an academic today. While there are many ideas in his *Summa Theologiae*, few if any have the faintest claim to originality. Some people, including me, don't think that a single original idea is to be found. Others think that there are a few, very few: I have not read anyone attribute even a dozen original ideas in his quite enormous work. But what he did provide was a system: an organized set of cubbyholes with a place for everything and everything in its place. And the claim that all Roman theology is systematic theology means that everything fits somewhere in the system, whether Thomas Aquinas's or something else.

The claim that all theology in Orthodoxy is mystical theology is a different sort of claim. It is not a claim that everything fits under some kind of classification scheme. It says that all true theology meets a particular criterion, like saying that all true fire brings heat. Systematic theology as such is not allowed, and trying to endow the Orthodox Church with its first systematic theology is a way to ask the Church hierarchy for a heresy trial. "Mystical" in mystical theology means theology that is practiced, experienced, and lived. The claim to "study" a martial art can involve reading, especially at the higher levels, but if you are going to study karate, you go to a dojo and start engaging in its

practices. In that sense, while books may have some place in martial arts mastery, but “studying” ninjutsu is not something you do by burying your nose in books. It is a live practice.

All theology is positive theology, and my assertion is like saying that all theology is mystical theology, and not that all theology is part of systematic theology.

As to the relationship between positive psychology and positive theology, I honestly hope for an interesting conversation with some of the positive psychology community. I do not assert that positive theology contains positive psychology as we know it, or that positive psychology contains positive theology. I do, however, wish to suggest that something interesting and real is reflected in the claim that all theology is positive theology.

A wonderful old world

I wish to make one point of departure clear in the interest of framing what I am attempting.

There is a certain sense that this work could be seen as novel; for all I know it may be the first work discussing all Orthodox theology as being positive theology, but I follow Chesterton's footsteps here (or rather fall short of them). **I am not seeking to invent a positive theology.** I am in fact attempting no novelty of any sort other than a new articulation of timeless truths that are relevant to the conversation. And I am seeking to offer something better than something wonderful I invented. I want to talk about wondrous things that I believe God invented, as old as the hills.

A deliberately jarring example

What is positive in the psychology of the Orthodox Church? To get off to a good start, I would like to say “repentance from sins.” And one of my articles unfolds “Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret.”

The Philokalia says that men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them. Repentance is terrifying. It is an unconditional surrender. But once you have made that surrender, you receive a reward. You realize that you needed that sin like you need a hole in the head—and you are free of a trap. It is

something like a spiritual chiropractic massage, that you walk away from in joy with a straighter spine. And in my own experience, I'm not sure I am ever as joyful as when I am repenting. And the effect is cumulative; repentance represents a rising spiritual standard of living.

Monasticism, which I discuss in *A Comparison Between the Mere Monk and the Highest Bishop*, represents a position of supreme privilege within the Orthodox Church. Now I love my Archbishop dearly and wouldn't want to take him down one whit, but part of the point of the piece is that if you are given a choice between being the greatest bishop in the world and being an ordinary monk, "ordinary monk" is hands down the better choice to choose. The overriding concern in that environment is the spiritual, human profit of its members. Poverty, obedience, and chastity are all conditions to one of two routes to salvation, and however wonderful marriage may be, monasticism is even better. And as well as other terms, monasticism is spoken of as "repentance." To live in a monastery is to work at a place that is minting spiritual money and giving all members as copious pay as possible.

The Utopia that is nowhere absent

Robert Goudzward, in *Aid for the Overdeveloped West*, talked about Old Testament law as representing a paradise, and part of the picture is that it represented a paradise in which it was hard to get rich. A sage in the Bible asks, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," and there is a sense that having more and more money is not good for us as humans.

This world was created to be a paradise. The Old Covenant represented a paradise. The New Covenant represents a paradise. Marriage represents a paradise. Monasticism represents a paradise.

We were made for human flourishing, and part of what the Church attempts is to provide for each person to flourish as that person should flourish. Abbots (and everyone else) are not to colonize and clone; the authority is profound, but it is a profound authority in restoring a damaged icon—and helping the icon look like itself, not like something it isn't. If you read the saints' lives over time, all the saints represent Christ, but there is incredible

diversity among how the saints represent Christ.

What does God ask from us?

If we look at the question of what God commands and what he requests, there is fundamental confusion in thinking God is asking us to fill his needs. God in Heaven is perfect, and has no conceivable needs except in the person of our neighbor. God makes demands of us, not to fill his needs like an incompetent therapist, but to give *us* what is best. St. Maximus the Confessor divides three classes of obedience: *slaves*, who obey out of fear, *mercenaries*, who obey to obtain benefits, and *sons*, who obey out of love. Now all obedience is in at least some sense obedience and sometimes obedience out of fear is just what the doctor ordered, but if you obey as a slave you can be saved, if you obey as a mercenary you do better, and if you obey as a son even better than that. However, none of this is a setup to fill God's needs. The point is not that it is best for God if we obey out of love; the point is that it is best for *us* if we obey out of love.

A better kind of affirmation

This may come across very strangely to a psychologist who endorses affirmations, but the two main affirmations in Orthodoxy are "Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am first," and "All the world will be saved, and I will be damned."

Part of this stems from beliefs that I will explain but I do not ask you to subscribe to. Religion has enough of a reputation for focusing on the afterlife that it is provocative for a social gospel poster to say, "We believe in life before death." This life is of cardinal and incomparable significance; it is a life in which inch by inch we decide whether we will embrace Heaven or Hell when our live ends and no further repentance is available. But it has also been said that birth and death are an inch apart whilst the ticker tape goes on forever, and reform is only possible before we die. What the "affirmations" (of a sort) that I have mentioned do is prepare people like plaintiffs to press forth for maximum awards in their favor. The statements are for our good, and they help before death. Furthermore, it is believed that God doesn't do everything in our good works for us, but he allows a genuine

cooperation of combined powers where we do part of it. We are told, though, that we are not to take credit for one single achievement in our life, but give all the merit to God... but come Judgment Day, all good deeds we have done our part to are reckoned as if we did them entirely ourselves and without any help from God. I do not ask you to believe this or think it makes sense, but I suggests it is a part of a picture where an overriding concern is God blessing us as much as we will accept.

Dr. Seligman's lecture linked at the beginning of this article talked about how French vanilla ice cream tastes exquisite for the first bite, but by the time you get to the fifth or sixth bite, the flavor is gone. In the first candidate for the good life, people habituate quickly.

I have slightly opposite news about Orthodox affirmations: when you make them central to your life, the sting crumbles. Furthermore, if you see yourself as the worst sinner in a parish, or a monastery, or all prehistory and prehistory, that's the time that real growth and even real joy appear. Orthodoxy's affirmations unlock the door to repentance, and there is no end of treasure to be mined from that vein.

Stoicism and virtue

I've seen TED talks about how stoicism is being taken as some sort of ultimate power tool, and secret weapon, within the professional handegg community.

Part of my thought was, "Duh!" and with it a thought that it is a mischaracterization of philosophy to assume it's just something for odd and eccentric people, including yours truly, who have their noses in books. Stoicism is legitimately a power tool, but it is one of many power tools that have garnished quite a following and have been as powerful to their practitioners might have been.

I have said elsewhere, "Orthodoxy is pagan. Neo-paganism isn't," and The Philokalia preserves the very best of pagan philosophy with its profound endowment of virtues. N.B. the same word in Greek means "virtue" and "excellence," and if you want to help people thrive and develop giftedness, the four-horsed chariot of courage, justice, wisdom, and moderation has really quite a lot to go for it, and all the more if these are

perfected by the virtues of faith, hope, and love. All of these are called “cardinal” or “hinge” virtues, meaning that not only are they good, but they are positive “gateway drugs” to other and perhaps even greater virtue.

And I would like to say one thing that the authors of *The Philokalia* simply can't much of ever stop talking about. This does not seem an view of yourself that you would want to have, but I've had some pretty arrogant and abrasive people try pretty hard to teach me about humility. But I will say this: humility is the Philosopher's Stone and maybe the Elixir of Life. It opens your eyes to beauty pride may not see, and I need humility in my daily living more than I need air. I'm not going to try to further argue for an unattractive virtue, but I will say that it looks tiny and constricted from the outside, and vast and spacious from the inside. And for another Chesterton name drop: “It takes humility to enjoy anything—even pride.”

If we are going to look at world traditions, the Greek term for virtue, *arete* also meant excellence, and *arete* (I both mean ‘virtue’ and ‘excellence’) represents a tradition well worth heeding. Bits and pieces have been picked up on TED talks; Stoicism is a power tool among the professional handegg community, and another TED talk talks about how “grit” (also known as fortitude or courage) makes a big difference in success. But the tradition of virtue itself, and virtue philosophy, is worth attention.

Value-free spirituality?

I haven't read the title, but I have read Fr. Richard John Neuhaus talk about his title *The Naked Public Square*, in which he argues essentially that a religiously neutral public square is an impossibility, and the attempt to produce a naked public square will, perhaps, result in a statist religion.

If serious inner work without the resources of religious tradition is a possibility, I haven't seen it. Present psychotherapy has changed much faster than core humans have changed, and uses yoga practices from Hinduism, mindfulness of a sort (whether a traditional Buddhist would recognize Western exhilaration at mindfulness as Right Mindfulness I do not know), and a couple of other usual suspects like guided imagery (alleged

to be known from Graeco-Roman times and known to some traditional medicines, although the pedigree seems to be copied and pasted across websites).

In my Asian philosophy class, I was able to sympathize with some element of almost everything that was presented. In terms of Hindu claims that inside each of us is a drop of God, I could sympathize, believing we are made in the image of God. But the one point I recoiled from is Buddhism's *anatta*, or *an-atman*: the claim that we, and everything that "exists", are an empty illusion. Or as Chesterton put it: "Buddhism is not a creed. It is a doubt."

Right Mindfulness, in its context in the Buddhist Eightfold Noble Path, is a cardinal virtue, and I count that as a positive. However, I do not see the need for the West to turn to India as a maternal breast. It is a microaggression that treats Orthodox Christianity as bankrupt of resources. The same goes to turning to Buddhist "self-compassion." I also don't like being advised to practice yoga. I am already participating in a yoga, or a spiritual path: that of Orthodox Christianity, and it is a complete tradition.

My point, however, is not to attack the medicinal use of Indian tradition (whether or not Indians would recognize their land's spiritualities), but to say that value-free counseling is something I have never seen, and while it may be politically correct to foist Indian spirituality but not Orthodox Christian, I wish to offer a word on my drawing on my religious tradition. Whether you accept it is not up to me, but Orthodoxy is a therapeutic tradition. And the claim has been explicitly made, in a book called *Orthodox Psychotherapy*, that if Orthodox spiritual direction were to appear new on the scene today, it might well not be classified as "religion," but as "therapeutic science."

I have not been directly involved with that therapeutic science. I've tried to reach monasticism, and am still trying, and therapeutic science is included in monasticism. So I cannot directly speak from experience about its fruit. But other things—virtue, repentance from sin and the like, I can directly attest to as positive theology.

A few more words about humility

Humility seems at the start something you'd rather have other people have than have it yourself. It looks small on the

outside, but inside it is vaster than the Heavens, and it is one of two virtues that the virtue-sensitized Fathers of the Philokalia simply cannot ever stop talking about.

Perhaps what I can say is this. I don't know positive psychology well, but one of the first lessons, and one of the biggest, is to learn and express gratitude. And what I would say as someone who believes in gratitude is this: what gratitude is to positive health, humility is *more*.

Let me ask a question: which would you rather spend time with: someone horrible and despicable, or someone wonderful and great? The latter, of course. How it relates to humility is this: if you are in pride, you see and experience others as horrible and despicable, while if you are in humility, you see others as wonderful and great. Church Fathers talk about seeing other men as "God after God." **That is a recipe for a life of delight.**

Eyes to see

There is more to be said; I am quite fond of St. John Chrysostom's "A Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself." In connection with this, there are constant liturgical references to "the feeble audacity of the demons." The devils are real, but they are on a leash, and we are called to trample them. It has been said that everything which happens has been allowed either as a blessing from God, or as a temptation. (In Orthodoxy, "temptation" means both a provocation enticing to sin, and a situation that is a trial). As has been said, the faithful cannot be saved without temptations, and the temptations that pass are provided by God so we can earn a crown and trampling them. St. John here frames things in a very helpful way.

Here I am starting to blend into something other than positive theology, and making assertions about positive theology and how they have similar effects to positive psychology. But really, all is ordained for us by a good God, a point for which I would refer you to God the Spiritual Father. There is profound providence, and profound possibility for profit, if only we have eyes to see it and be grateful for a God who has ordained Heaven and Earth for the maximum possible benefit for each of us. Does this strain credibility? Yes, but I believe it, and I believe it makes

a world of difference.

Thomas Dixon on secularism and psychology

The article form of my advisor's thesis offered a case study for an understanding of secularity, and his case study was in psychology. He talked about how an older religious concept of passions was replaced by what was at first a paper-thin concept of emotions which you were just something you felt at the moment, then how the concept of emotions filled out and became emotions that could be about something, and then they filled out further and you could have an emotional dimension to a habit. The secular concept remains alienated from its religious roots, but the common Alcoholics Anonymous concept of being an alcoholic has almost completely filled out what was in the older concept of a passion. And here clinical psychology is modernized and secularized pastoral theology.

I'm not completely sure secularism is possible; it returns to Hinduism, at least for yoga, and Buddhism, at least for Right Mindfulness, as maternal breasts, and Hinduism has something there as Buddhism does not. Chesterton comes again to mind: "The problem with someone who doesn't believe in God is not that he believes nothing; it's that he believes anything!" I believe the Orthodox Church's bosom offers a deeper nourishment. I'm not sure I have much to back this claim other than by the extent by which this article does (or does not) make sense, or whether it is more desirable to pursue one virtue (giving that virtues are stinkin' awesome things to have), or pursue a panoply of virtues. But I would hope that the reader would by now be able to make sense of my assertion that all Orthodox theology is positive psychology, even if the claim is more superficial than the assertion that all Orthodox theology is mystical theology.

For further reading without a moment's thought to positive psychology as such, *see The Consolation of Theology*, a work of Orthodox theology, and one steeped in virtue philosophy.

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.

Glaucon: 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.

Glaucon: 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?

Glaucon: 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?

Glaucon: 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?

Glaucon: 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?

Glaucon: 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.

Glaucon: 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 Glaucon, 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.

[Adapted from Plato's most famous dialogue.]

A Public Act of Repentance

COVID Injections: The Greatest Boost to Human Health Since DDT

I, C.J.S. Hayward, publicly repent of having taken a first dose of a COVID vaccine.

I have in general been suspicious about the genuine helpfulness of vaccines; I wrote “Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed with Machiavellian Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP)” and it was well-received among those who are skeptical about whether vaccines are overall helpful.

Then I was hit from all sides, from family at home and slapped down at church, including being informed my heirarch Archbishop PETER had spoken with many Orthodox doctors and chose to be publicly vaccinated. I wrote and then took down, in the interest of not becoming heretical, one post critical of Archbishop PETER when my spiritual father helped me to see that if I was not in formal dissent, getting awfully close. And as I was reminded in Lenten reading, it is not helpful to criticize one’s spiritual

authorities: not a monastic priest, not a spiritual father, and all the more not the bishop I answer to in the end. I asked, and received, a blessing to receive vaccination from my spiritual father.

As the time approached, I was aware of unending doubt about my rightness to receive a vaccine, and Rom 14.23). I do not want to give the debate in that passage in cultural context, but after having seen my Archbishop to whom I answer set an example of receiving the vaccine, and receiving a blessing and assurances from my spiritual father to receive the vaccine personally, I still had constant, nagging doubts about whether I should receive the vaccine, and that Biblical discussion was at the forefront of my mind, along with a thought about stopping COVID being justification to make an exception. I claim no confused ideas about the Biblical principle, nor any sense of mixed messages from my conscience, nor anything else of that sort. And I furthermore would point out that my spiritual father is big on listening to that inner voice; he has never to my knowledge put me in a position previously of choosing between obeying that still, small voice and obeying him—and while Orthodox spiritual direction usually requires obedience, he has been clear, when I asked a blessing to have my confessions heard by cathedral clergy, that this is not full monastic spiritual direction and that I do not owe him monastic-style obedience. He allowed me to choose freely whether I wanted to receive the vaccine, so I cannot blame him for how I exercised my freedom. (I see very little mitigating factors once I recognized consciously that something was wrong.)

I sinned by taking the first dose of a vaccine, when my conscience was not in a state where I could legitimately take

the vaccine. I do not here make any evaluation of the vaccines in general or specific people; I mentally asked, “What could go wrong?”

I don’t know all of what could have gone wrong. What I did realize after paying the price for drinking a sugary drink two weeks later was that when I received the vaccine, I was told at the top of an information sheet that if certain vaguely COVID-like symptoms if they lasted for longer than 72 hours, and it was two weeks later and I was ignoring significant and ongoing COVID-like symptoms, including muscle pains, headache, nausea, and by the way the swelling at the injection site is still visible. And (as of two and a half weeks later) they weren’t going away. I received, in the language of Romans 1, received in my person a due penalty for my error.

At about two weeks, my conscience was overwhelmingly strong that I should cancel my second dose. It was getting stronger and stronger, and then by chance I read a friend’s comment in a paper and while he is not a religious authority I answer to, unexpected words brought my struggle *against* my conscience to the forefront of my attention. I canceled it and haven’t had any social consequences *yet*. But my doctor’s office gave what I regard as at best excusable advice that I go ahead with the second dose as originally planned. The people giving the vaccines warn people not to have a vaccine within 14 days of receiving any other vaccine or any COVID. My primary told me to go right ahead and receive the vaccine in a few days even when I had significant and ongoing COVID symptoms that prompted her office to ask me to take a COVID test before coming in to the office.

I’ve been in a mind fog. I don’t know if the COVID symptoms are permanent; they do seem to be lasting just a

little long even by the standards of a real, honest, legitimate COVID infection, let alone reasonable aftereffects for a vaccine. And tomorrow's concerns are not my concern today; tomorrow's concerns will be my concerns when tomorrow comes.

The adverse reactions are only part of the picture of why I am repenting; I ignored something very clear and mentally asked, "What could go wrong?" and I believe both that God is just to allow me to experience COVID symptoms now, and that ignoring conscience or clear thinking and asking, "What could go wrong?" (in other words, asking in my heart "But what could possibly go wrong?" has historically been a *dangerous* position for me to be in spiritually.

However, while I absolutely cannot judge Archbishop PETER for his research, actions, or conclusions, repentance of my own actions is in my heart.

I, Christos Hayward, publicly repent of receiving the first dose of a vaccination.

Epilogue, July 9 2021

I am, by the grace of and generosity of God, my archbishop and his school, a seminary student.

The seminary has assigned some texts to read, and the hardest had been about, for instance, Old Believer and Old Calendarist schisms. The canonical Orthodox authority who in large measure pushed Old Believers into schism was being an incredible jerk towards people who were trying to mind their own business. The canonical Orthodox authority who led people to become Old Calendarists was a Freemason, among other disqualifications, and was something like the Messianic fantasy of a PC-USA radical in

the office of an Orthodox bishop. In these and I believe other meetings, I was left with a terrible sense that I would have really liked to sit down for a meal with the non-canonicals (one high-ranking non-canonical bishop radiated the Uncreated Light from his prison cell), while the canonical figures, not so much. (Or to be less diplomatic about it, they mostly left me wanting to puke.)

The USA's Assembly of (Orthodox) Bishops, I have been told, has come out presenting the somewhat bloodstained COVID vaccines as desirable, definitely permitted and encouraged by example even if there has not been a strict requirement made. And... I am willing to see a decision like the OCA decision described in "Contraception, Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article" where a jurisdiction advocated and allowed a practice St. John Chrysostom bluntly called "worse than murder" and tried to explain his horror about it. I have been asked if I had a heirarch's blessing to write that. I'm willing to hold a position, if it comes to that, that I do not share with my bishop and perhaps not anyone in the Assembly.

I have told my spiritual director that if it comes to a choice between not receiving any further vaccination and being admitted to housing, I am willing to go homeless. However, I am not willing to go non-canonical. Never mind if I believe **COVID injections are the greatest breakthrough in human health since DDT**. If I have to choose between remaining not fully vaccinated and remaining canonical, I will take as many injections as are demanded of me rather than forfeit my status as a canonical Orthodox Christian.

(Also, as far as vaccine complications, I had a blood clot from my leg migrate to my lung. The ER doctor said I was

lucky to get to the hospital before it killed me.)

Eight-Year-Old Boy Diagnosed with Machiavellian Syndrome By Proxy (MSBP)

Eight-year-old Uriah Hittite has had some involvement in African-American circles, although he should not be seen as a true African-American because his birth parents espouse certain conservative beliefs that the African-American community does not care for. He has been found guilty of single-handed, extended, and wasteful manipulations and draining government resources at a scale comparable to a large and coordinated /b/tard trolling attack.

Like a true consman, Hittite manipulated others so deftly they never guessed the bomb he was about to drop. He was reported to be outgoing, friendly and vigorous in physical activity. Neither friends, nor family, nor all the regular doctor visits showed the faintest problem.

Then, shortly after he turned five, he was administered a safe and routine second MMR vaccination, and only then did he tip his hand. And wow, did Hittite pull a surprise!

At first it started as a trickle; he feigned such ordinary sickness as most healthy children do; his birth parents gave him a few days' bed rest in the hopes that that would clear things out. Instead, he started acting worse and worse, to his birth parents' complete bewilderment. Besides remaining symptoms of sickness, he drew into a shell, and his speech became much clumsier. While his birth parents were of limited means and not insured, they did what they should have done immediately and took him to the shelter of a local hospital's emergency room.

The emergency room staff far too trustingly fell to Hittite's deceit, and ran usual tests that failed to produce a medical explanation. Psychiatric staff, experienced as they were, were taken in too. His birth parents continued to foolishly request tests and all but appoint themselves as their little Hittite's own doctors when it became evident that none of the MD's was providing any sort of explanation.

When the birth parents failed to improve the matter, one of the doctors suggested that a change of scenery, *without* the birth parents' dubious expenses. The birth parents consented to a brief and provisional custody.

Once inside better custody, external settings were better and he received the benefit of highly skilled cult deprogrammers who helped free him of certain needlessly constricting beliefs. This was done at great expense to the State, as deprogramming is difficult enough with grown adults of adequate intelligence, and he refused to communicate even at the level of a boy of his calendar age. It was decided to extend the custody indefinitely.

Finally a diagnostician was willing to call a spade a spade, and identify a classic case of Machiavellian Syndrome by Proxy (MSBP). There was nothing wrong with Hittite physically; he just had a master plan to squander and drain the states' resources. However, with the laws presently in force, you are not allowed to unplug a useless eater. He remains a ward of state, in bed for twenty-three hours each day, not talking with anyone. The total amount he has drained state coffers is in the millions, not counting the expenses of quieting his former parents' inappropriate efforts to regain contact with their former child.

There ought to be a law against demonstrating Machiavellian Symptom by Proxy (MSBP) like this!

What Evolutionists Have to Say to the Royal, Divine Image:

We're Missing Something

**Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the
Elimination of Television***

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

I have been rereading and thinking over parts of the three titles above, and I have come to realize that at least some evolutionists have something to give that those of us who believe there is something special about humanity would profit from. I believe more than the "special flower" assessment of humanity that Wolf ridicules; I believe more specifically that humanity is royalty, created in the image of God, and if for the sake of argument at least, the agricultural revolution and what follows are largely a mistake, I can say more than that *Homo sapiens (sapiens)*

is the only species out of an innumerable multitude across incomparable time to be **anywhere near** enough of a "special flower" to make such a mistake. I believe more specifically that man is created in the divine image and is of eternal significance, and each of us is in the process of becoming either a being so glorious that if you recognized it you would be tempted to worship it, or a horror such as you would not encounter in your worst nightmare—and that each of us in the divine image is in the process of freely choosing which we shall be. No other life form is conferred such a dignity—and I would focus that statement a little more and say no other animal.

'No other animal:' the phrase is perhaps jarring to some, but I use it deliberately. I do not, in any sense, say *mere* animal. But I do quite deliberately say *animal*.

(N.B. Alisdair MacIntyre's title, 'dependent rational animals', is an adaptation of Aristotle's definition of man as 'rational mortal animal'. His thesis, that virtue is central to the natural condition of man, is well worth studying, and provides a counterbalance to seeing the original condition of the human race in terms of the contemporary Western preoccupations with diet and exercise. The neo-Paleo ('Paleo') movement's diet and exercise are very powerful, and probably very close to optimal, but virtue is worth consideration. But while portraying *Dependent Rational Animals* as well worth a read, I will not engage him to the same degree as the likes of Mander and Wolf.)

Let us turn to Alisdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, in the opening of the second chapter:

From its earliest sixteenth century uses in

English and other European languages 'animal' and whatever other expressions correspond to it have been employed both to name a class whose members include spiders, bees, chimpanzees, dolphins *and* humans—among others, but not plants, inanimate beings, angels, and God, and also to name the class consisting of nonhuman animals. It is this latter use that became dominant in modern Western cultures and with it a habit of mind that, by distracting our attention from how much we share with other animal species...

Since then, evolutionary claims that we are in fact animals is *not* a resurrection of the older usage; it is a new usage that claims we are nothing more than animals, a claim not implied by Aristotle's definition of us as 'rational mortal animals.' There is both a continuity and a distinction implied between rational humans and non-rational animals, and while many animals have intelligence on some plane (artificial intelligence, after failing to duplicate human intelligence, scaled back and tried to duplicate insect intelligence, and failed at that too), there's something special to human intelligence. The singularity we are in now may be a predicament, but no other animal could make such dimensions.

I will be interested in a direction taken by Mander and the neo-Paleo movement, in a line that MacIntyre does not really explore. Perhaps his thesis about why we, as dependent rational animals, need the virtues, is greater than anything I will explore here. But I have my sights on something lower.

I would like to define two terms for two camps, before showing where one of them shortchanges us.

The first is *revolutionary punk eek*. Darwin's theory of *evolution* is no longer seriously believed by much of anyone in the (generally materialist) scientific community. People who say they believe in evolution, and understand the basic science, normally believe in neo-Darwinian theories of *revolution*. That is, with Darwin, they no longer believe that species gradually morph into new species. They believe that the fossil record shows a *punctuated equilibrium*, '*punk eek*' to the irreverent, which essentially says that evolution *revolution* has long periods of stable *equilibrium*, which once in a long while are *punctuated* by abrupt appearance and disappearance of life forms. (What causes the punctuations is accounted for by the suggestions that life forms evolve very slowly when things are on an even keel, but rapidly mutate substantial beneficial improvements when things turn chaotic. When I protested this, I was told that there were people who evolved HIV/AIDS resistance in a single generation, a premise that I cannot remotely reconcile either with my understanding of probability or of genetics.) As my IMSA biology teacher put it, "Evolution is like baseball. There are long periods of boredom interrupted by intense periods of excitement."

Now I am deliberately making a somewhat ambiguous term, because I intend to include old earth intelligent design movement's authors such as Philip Johnson, who wrote *Darwin on Trial*. Johnson argues that natural forces alone do not suffice to punctuate the equilibrium and push evolution *revolution* forward; but his interpretation of the fossil record is largely consistent with that of someone who believes in neo-Darwinian *revolutionary punk eek*. And so I

lump Richard Dawkins and Philip Johnson together in the same cluster, a move that would probably leave them both aghast.

The distinction between them is between revolutionary punk eek adherents, who believe the universe is billions of years old, and young earth creationists, including perhaps some Jews, most Church Fathers, Evangelical conservatives who created Creation Science as an enterprise of proving a young earth scientifically, and Fr. Seraphim (Rose), who saw to it that Orthodox would not stop with quoting the Fathers but additionally import Creation Science into Orthodoxy.

Now let me give some dates, in deliberately vague terms. The age of the agricultural revolution and of civilization weighs in at several thousand years. The age of the world according to young earth creationists is also several thousand years. According to revolutionary punk eek, the age of the world is several billion years, but that's a little besides the point. The salient point is where you draw the line, a question which I will not try to settle, beyond saying that the oldest boundary I've seen chosen is some millions of years, and the newest boundary I've heard is hundreds of thousands of years. What this means in practice is that on young earth assumptions, agriculture is about as old as the universe, while on revolutionary punk eek assumptions, the beginning of the agricultural revolution occurred at absolute most in the past five percent of the time humans have been around, not leaving enough time for our nature to really change in any way that makes sense for revolutionary punk eek. *Or to put it more sharply, young earth creationism implies that agrarian life has been around about as long as the first humans,*

and revolutionary punk eek implies that the agricultural revolution represents a big-picture eyeblink, a mere blip on the radar for people built to live optimally under normal hunter-gatherer conditions. To the young-earther, there might be prehistory but there can't be very much of it; the normal state of the human being is at earliest agrarian, and there is not much argument that the ways of agrarian society are normative. To the revolutionary punk eek adherent, there is quite a lot of prehistory that optimized us for hunter-gatherer living, and agrarian society and written history with it are just a blip and away from the baseline.

The other term besides revolutionary punk eek is *pseudomorphosis*, a term which I adapt from an Orthodox usage to mean, etymologically, *conforming to a false shape*, a square peg in a round hole. The revolutionary punk eek implication drawn by some is that we were optimized for hunter-gatherer living, and the artificial state known in civilisation and increasingly accelerating away from these origins is a false existence in something like the Call of C'thulu role playing game played by my friends in high school, where rifts occur in the fabric of reality and "monsters" come through them, starting with the relatively tame vampires and zombies and moving on to stranger monsters such as *a color that drives people mad*. A motley crew of heroes must seal these rifts, or else there will come one of the "Ancient Ones", a demon god intent on destroying the earth. (It is an occult picture, but not *entirely* different from the state of our world.)

I don't want to give full context, but I was in a discussion with my second thesis advisor after my studies, and he asked whether I would make 'allowances for greater

ignorance in the past.' Now he was a member of a college with one of the world's best libraries for the study of Graeco-Roman context to the New Testament, and he was expert in rabbinic Jewish cultural context to the New Testament. *Hello?* Has he heard of the Babylonian Talmud? A knowledge of the Talmud is easily on par with a good liberal arts education, and it really puts the reader through its paces. And its point is not just a training ground with mental gymnastics that stretch the mind, but something far greater. My reply to him was, 'I do not make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable.' And if it is true that we live in escalating pseudomorphosis, perhaps we should wonder if we should make allowances for greater ignorance in the *present*. I know much more about scientific botany than any ancient hunter-gatherer ever knew, but I could not live off the land for a month much of anywhere in the wild. Should I really be looking down on hunter-gatherers because unlike them I know something of the anatomical structure of cells and how DNA basically works? If a hunter-gatherer were to an answer, an appropriate, if not entirely polite, answer would be, "Here is a knife, a gun, and a soldier's pack with bedroll and such. Live off the land for a month anywhere in the world, and then we'll talk."

To take an aside and try to give something of a concrete feel to what hunter-gatherers know that we do not, what might constitute 'greater ignorance in the present', I would like to give a long quote from Mander (I am tempted to make it longer), and point out that Mander is following a specific purpose and only recording one dimension. He does not treat for instance, interpersonal relations. Not

necessarily that this is a problem; it may be expedient for the purpose of a written work to outline what a friend does for work without making much of any serious attempt to cover who that friend is as a person and what people and things serve as connections. Mander describes what contemporary hunter-gatherers have in terms of perception that television viewers lack:

In *Wizard of the Upper Amazon* F. Bruce Lamb records the apparently true account of Manuel Cordova de Rios, a Peruvian rubber cutter, kidnapped by the Amaheuca Indians for invading their territory and forced to remain with them for many years. Rios describes the way the Indians learned things about the jungle, which was both the object of constant study and the teacher. They observed it first as individuals, experiencing each detail. Then they worked out larger patterns together as a group, much like individual cells informing the larger body, which also informs the cells.

In the evenings, the whole tribe would gather and repeat each detail of the day just passed. They would describe every sound, the creature that made it and its apparent state of mind. The conditions of growth of all the plants for miles around were discussed. This band of howler monkeys, which was over here three days ago, is now over there. Certain fruit trees which were in the bud stage three weeks ago are now bearing ripe fruit. A jaguar was seen by the river, and now it is on the hillside. It is in a strangely anguished mood. The grasses in the valley are peculiarly dry. There is a group of birds that have not moved for several days.

The wind has altered in direction and smells of something unknown. (Actually, such a fact as a wind change might not be reported at all. Everyone would already know it. A change of wind or scent would arrive in everyone's awareness as a bucket of cold water in the head might arrive in ours.)

Rios tells many of the stories concerned with the "personalities" of individual animals and plants, what kind of "vibrations" they give off. Dreams acted as an additional information systems from beyond the level of conscious notation, drawing up patterns and meanings from deeper levels. Predictions would be based on them.

Drugs were used not so much for changing moods, as we use them today, but for the purpose of further spacing out perception. Plants and animals could then be seen more clearly, as if in slow motion (time lapse), adding to the powers of observation, yielding up especially subtle information to how plants worked, and which creatures would be more likely to relate to which plants. An animal interested in concealment, for example, might eat a plant which tended to conceal itself.

Reading these accounts made it clear to me that all life in the jungle is constantly of all other life in exquisite detail. Through this, the Indians gained information about the way natural systems interact. The observation was itself knowledge. Depending on the interpretation, the knowledge might or might not become reliable and useful.

Each detail of each event had special power and meaning. The understanding was so complete that it

was only the rare event that could *not* be explained—a twig cracked in a way that did not fit the previous history of cracked twigs—that was cause for concern and immediate arming.

Examples could easily be multiplied. There are many passages like that in the book, and many to be written for life. We seem to have a filter where 'knowledge' implicitly means 'knowledge of the sort that we possess', and then by that filter judge other cultures, especially cultures of the past, as knowing less than us. The anthropological term is *ethnocentrism*. I believe a little humility is in order for us.

Humans have eyes, skin, a digestive tract, and other features that are basic animal features. When studying wild animals, for instance, we expect them to function best under certain conditions. Now the locality of an organism can vary considerably: in North America, there are certain relatively generic species of trees that can be found over a broad swath of land, while in Australia, trees tend to be more specialized and occupy a very specific niche. But in some ways human adaptability is overemphasized. The human body can adapt to regularly breathing in concentrated smoke, in one sense: keeping on smoking is so easy it is hard to quit. But that does not mean that human lungs adapt to breathing in concentrated smoke on a regular basis. The ease with which a person or society can adjust to cigarettes exceeds any adaptation revolutionary punk eek would allow for lungs. Perhaps hunter-gatherers have ingested some smoke from fires, and possibly we have enough tolerance that we do not puff up with an allergic reaction at the first smoke. Nonetheless, in no quarter has the human body adapted to be able to smoke without

damage to lungs and health.

For most of the human race to embrace the agricultural revolution, and the revolutions that follow, might be like smoking. We can adapt in the sense of making the change and getting used to it. But that does not include, metaphorically speaking, our lungs. We still have hunter-gatherer lungs, as it were, perhaps lungs that work better if we follow neo-Paleo diet and exercise, and we have adopted changes we have not adapted to.

What punk eek *revolutionists* have to give us

What is perhaps the most valuable thing **revolutionary** punk has to offer us is a question: "What conditions are we as **revolutionary** organisms best adapted to?" And *The Paleo Solution* offers a neo-Paleo prescription for diet and also exercise. This may not *exactly* be like what any tribe of hunter-gatherers ate, but it is lightyears closer than fast food, and is also vastly closer than industrial or even agrarian diets. And the gym-owning author's exercise prescription is vastly more appropriate than a sedentary lifestyle without exercise, and is probably much better than cardiovascular exercise alone. And Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* argues, among other things, that humans do substantially better with natural organic sunlight than any of the artificial concocted lights we think are safer. They don't suggest social structure; the question of whether they held what would today be considered traditional gender roles is not raised, which may itself be an answer. (For the text Mander cites, the answer is 'Yes', although Mander, possibly due to other

reasons such as brevity and focus, does not make this point at all clear.) And they don't complete the picture, and they don't even get to MacIntyre's point that our condition as dependent and ultimately vulnerable rational animals means that we need the virtues, but they do very well with some of the lower notes.

The argument advanced by vegetarians that we don't have a carnivore digestive tract is something of a breath of fresh air. It argues that meat calls for a carnivore's short digestive tract and vegetables call for an herbivore's long digestive tract, and our digestive tract is a long one. Now there is to my mind, a curious omission; for both hunter-gatherer and modern times, most people have eaten an omnivore's diet, and this fallacy of the excluded middle never brings up how long or short an omnivore's digestive tract is: apparently, we must either biologically be carnivores or herbivores, even though the people vegetarians are arguing with never seem to believe we should be straight carnivores who eat meat and only meat; even people who call themselves 'carnivores' in fact tend to eat a lot of food that is not meat, even if meat might be their favorite. But the question, if arguably duplicitous, is a helpful kind of question to ask. It asks, "What are we adapted to?" and the answer is, "Living like hunter-gatherers." That's true for the 2,000,000 or however many years the genus *Homo* has been around, and it's *still* true for the 200,000 years *Homo sapiens sapiens* has been around. Or if you want to subtract the 10,000 years since the agricultural revolution began and we began to experiment with smoking, 190,000 years before we created the singularity that opens rifts in the fabric of reality and lets monsters in, including (as is argued in *Four Arguments*

for the Elimination of Television, in the chapter on 'Artificial Light'), the 'color that makes people mad' from the phosphor glow of a television screen in a darkened room.

Some arguments vaguely like this have looked at written history, instead of archaeology. Sally Fallon, in the Weston A. Price spirit, wrote the half-argument, half-cookbook volume of *Nourishing Traditions*, which argues that we with our industrial diet would do well to heed the dietary solutions found in agrarian society, and prescribes a diet that is **MUCH** better than the industrial diet. But she essentially only looks at recorded history, which is millenia newer than agricultural beginnings. But the pseudomorphosis was already well underway by the times recorded in *Nourishing Traditions*, and not just diet. Everything had begun a profound shift, even if with later revolutions like electricity and computing the earlier agrarian patterns looked like the original pattern of human life. And indeed if you are a young earther, the first chapters of Genesis have agriculture in the picture with some of the first human beings. And so Bible-focused young earth approaches will not arrive at the correct answer to, "What conditions is man as an animal [still] best adapted to?" In all probability they will not arrive at the question.

Revolutionary punk eek will. It asks the question, perhaps with a Western focus, and its answers are worth considering. Not on the level of virtue and ascesis, perhaps, but the 'lower' questions are more pressing now. The default diet and the default level of exercise are part of a profoundly greater pseudomorphosis than when the agricultural revolution took root. And getting a more optimal diet and exercise now may be a more pressing

concern, and a diet of more sunlight and better light, if you will, and other things. There is a certain sense in which sobriety is not an option for us; we have a gristly choice between being 5, 10, or 20 drinks drunk, and people who take into account this gift from **revolutionary punk eek** will be less drunk, not sober. But it is worth being less drunk.

So a word of thanks especially to secular adherents of **revolutionary punk eek** who do not see us who have perhaps made the mistake of civilization as any particular kind of "special flower," and ask, "What is *Homo sapiens sapiens* biologically adapted to as an animal and an organism?" They might not hit some of the high notes, but I am very grateful for the neo-Paleo diet. And I am grateful to Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* for exposing me to the unnatural character of artificial light and the benefits of real, organic sunlight. I've been spending more time outside, and I can feel a difference: I feel better. *Thanks to **revolutionary punk eek!***

A Few Possible Critiques of the Nature Connection Movement

The importance of standard critiques

I remember one ethics class where I commented with deliberate wary tentativeness, “One comment that has been made about the atom bomb is that it didn’t just save lots and lots and lots of American lives, it also saved lots and lots and lots of Japanese lives,” and then added something very important: “...but I don’t know what the standard critiques of this claim are,” bracketing that claim in a considerable degree of unknowing. And I was not surprised, nor did I argue, when a later resource in the course had someone comment in reference to just war, “The claim is not, ‘If we do not do this, this is what *they* will do,’ but ‘If we do not do this, this is what *we* will do.’” I have heard some

people point out that American politicians had campaigned on a platform of unconditional surrender by the Japanese, but this assertion is a detail of American culture and an irrelevancy if you are going to claim to be within just war theory. (Another unintelligible point on just war terms is the choice to make civilian cities the ground zero of an experiment.) *“We campaigned for unconditional surrender” is not a consideration that factors into the principles of just war.* Neither *jus ad bellum* nor *jus in bello* explains why it is justifiable to reject any surrender short of an unconditional surrender, a condition tantamount to letting infidel trample on the holy city. I do not know what the terms are on which the Japanese emperor sued for peace before the use of the atom bomb, but he did sue for peace before we dropped the bomb, and the burden of proof falls on people who assert it was a matter of just war to detonate nuclear weapons in a push for unconditional surrender rather than try to work with the Japanese emperor for terms of peace, perhaps not all those originally proposed by the emperor, that would deal with the threat but not insist on unconditional surrender and consent to let the infidel trample on the holy city as much as they saw fit.

(It might also be commented that Albert Einstein asked that his theory be used to develop nuclear weapons to stop Hitler, and he was horrified that his work was used against the Japanese, which he did not consider to be picking on someone our own size: “Should I have known, I would have become a watchmaker.” But, culturally speaking, once we started to develop nuclear weapons there was essentially no way culturally we were not going to use them, and if we did not have nuclear weapons available in time to use them

against the Nazis, Japan was next in succession.)

My reason for mentioning this is that I added an important qualifier: “*but I don't know what the standard critiques of this claim are.*” These are not weasel words. I am no fan of weasel words nor slippery rhetoric: see a dissertation focused on slippery rhetoric. But in a very real sense, what I was saying was that I didn't understand the right import of the assertion (that nuclear weapons were mercifully quick, and had a far lower body count compared to the anticipated bloodshed of a land invasion where women and schoolchildren were doing combat drills and preparing in every way for a fight to the death), because I didn't have a situated understanding, in particular knowing what lines of standard critique would be. (I have not heard anyone deny that assertion; the critique I saw essentially said, “No contest that it would be less bloody, but you are using the wrong standard and here is why.”) More broadly, understanding an assertion in the Great Conversation is incomplete if you do not grasp how it is situated in the Conversation, and *part* of that is understanding standard critiques.

Two senses of nature connection

I did a search for “nature connection critiques” on Google and DuckDuckGo, and Google got very quickly into academic articles having those three keywords but no connection to the nature connection movement, and DuckDuckGo gave nature connection pages without any critiques I could discern.

So I may be blazing a bit of a trail here in trying to situate nature connection.

I would like to begin by making a distinction between two significantly different senses of “nature connection.”

1. The **first** sense is an engagement with nature across many times and places, usually without any sense of nature connection in the second sense.
2. The **second** sense is an engagement with the nature connection movement’s tools, core routines, etc.

The distinction between these is the difference between a general first category and a specific second type. The concerns I raise here mostly regard the second specific type. I desire greater connection in the first sense, and it is one of the things I hope for in Orthodox monasticism, an arena that normally exposes one to nature a great deal and reaches further. (Perhaps I should say a third and other specific type centered on such things as virtue.)

A glimpse into a larger pattern

One place to start is Coyote the Trickster. Coyote is described in the pages of *Coyote’s Guide to Connecting with Nature*, or at least what he does is described, and I’m not sure how to pin Coyote down (if he even should be pinned down). Is he only an animal as materialist science would understand an animal? That one possibility is the one I would be quickest to reject. Perhaps a coyote, the animal, is special, but what is Coyote? A spirit? A god? An archetype? A familiar? A patron saint? A Platonic Idea? An astrological sign? A totem? One god who is part of a henotheist God or Greatest Spirit in vaguely Hindu fashion?

I think that all of the possibilities above are at least

illustrative, but this choice of the coyote writ large is perhaps not best for Christians, and not just because Coyote is coyote writ large. The text asserts Jesus and Buddha represent the Trickster; Jesus the trickster is illustrated by the cleansing of the Temple. Now it would perhaps be unfair to ask the work to do serious Biblical exegesis, but the cleansing of the Temple was one of the least prank-like actions he took. He wasn't manipulating people; he was deeply offended by irreverent use of the Temple and drove people and animals out without the faintest mercurial intent. Not to say that there is nothing like the trickster in Christ; the story of Christ and St. Photini ("the Woman at the Well") has St. Photini enlisting Christ's help in fleeing from her shame, and Christ opening things up until she has been pulled through her shame and runs with no further shame saying, "See a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Christ?" Christ was mercurial enough that if you tried to catch Christ the Word in some trap of words, you always, always lose. And, perhaps, it is an exegesis of Christ that Orthodoxy has what are called holy fools. But the use of the cleansing of the Temple gives a sense that the text has been conscripted to fit the Trickster archetype. (For that matter, the story of Buddha has his father trying very hard to ensure that he would be a political leader, and he chose instead to go on a quest and found a religion. Perhaps in the cornucopia of Mahayana Buddhism we have Zen masters who may use trickery to teach, but I do not see that Buddha was being a Trickster to choose a divergent career path from what his father wanted.)

And I was trying to think of a good way to present a companion aspect, and I'm not sure I've found one. When I was in middle school, one Social Studies question was, if we

had lived in the 19th century, we would have braved the hardships to settle the West. And I, little schoolboy that I was, said that the question was irrelevant because the West was already settled by people who had a right not to be killed. My teacher didn't like that and tried to push me to answer the question on the terms that it was posed, and none of my classmates said anything like that. But to Native Americans, apart from *Guns, Germs, and Steel* concerns about Europeans carrying diseases Native America had no defenses for, how should Christianity be seen? It was the religion of white Americans who disregarded as basic interests among the Native Americans as life and not being subjected to needless and major suffering, and so it is not a surprise that my brother, a historical re-enactor, talked about one re-enacting group who re-enacted a first contact between white and Native American and who were explicitly Christian, calling themselves The King's Regiment or the like, and were distinguished for all other re-enactors in that they did not engage in native American spirituality which was understandably laced with something anti-Christian.

Nothing I have listened or read from the nature connection movement is explicitly or directly anti-Christian. Critique may be implied in assertions that reject Christian practice, however nothing I have seen appears to be there for the purpose of facilitating attack on Christianity. However, nature connection is largely grounded in Native American figures, and even if nature connection is mostly secularized, people who dig into nature connection roots beyond nature connection will sooner or sooner run into this. We have, perhaps well outside of Native American culture, seen T-shirts saying:



But there is something profoundly important besides the humor. As I explained it to a friend at church, if we dug into the Book of Grudges we could probably find that far enough back, his ancestors did nasty things to my ancestors, and far enough back my ancestors did nasty things to his ancestors, *but the only things he had needed to forgive me were things I had done personally*. That's not how all cultures work, and that's not how most or all of the Native American cultures work. The Problem, as seen in Native American cultures, is not just that reservations have 35% unemployment. The Problem is that living conditions in today's reservations are one link in a continuous chain of maltreatment that is the same thing as the Indian Removal Act and every other form of terrorism since 1492.

I don't blame Native Americans for this. And I'd be very wary of claiming a teachable moment to impress on these

people that Eastern Orthodoxy is not the Christianity of the settlers and it is the #1 religion among indigenous peoples in Alaska, and that my archbishop's patron saint is one of the patron saints of our land, an Aleut martyr killed by the Jesuits. (N.B. I know a man whose academic career was ended by today's Jesuits in a singularly unfortunate fashion.) But there are elements in Native American nature connection that conflict with Christianity, and others who dabble in Native American spirituality may dabble in something anti-Christian.

I might also point out that I have looked through wildernessawareness.org and 8shields.org and none of the bios I found let me discern a self-identified Christian of any stripe. I expect that at least a few of the members self-identify as Christian, but if nature connection is just for human beings, and you're not trying to call people out of Christianity, not having Christians represented is kind of a gap.

A body without a head

The nature connection movement does much of the job of a religion: it does the work of peacemaking without invoking the Price of Peace, its practitioners engage in culture repair without exploring the cultic element of worship, and more broadly it treats what it means to be human without addressing created man as made in the image of God. Possibly there is a failure of complete secularity in pursuing "sacred fires;" I am not completely sure I understand what the word "sacred" means but it is culturally important and best started with a bowdrill or other ancient means. However, I find it difficult to construe

the term “sacred fires” as it is used while neutering the term “sacred” to mean something secular.

I might comment in regards to secularity: secularity didn't arise in Western history because of atheists crying for the Church's blood; it arose when Western Christianity fragmented and each community treated others as infidel. It arose out of really nasty religious wars as a voice saying, “Can't we all just get along?” and I call the nature connection movement “secular” as a recognition that it is intended to be appropriate to everyone. I have yet to detect a derisive word from a nature connection leader towards any religious community or tradition. However, this choice of common ground has an anemic dimension, something to do some of the work of a religion, but in a secular way, which psychology does on a larger scale. Orthodox would see this as a body needing a head, and wonderfully animated if we receive it.

Closing words

The final critique I would give, with a challenge, is this: nature connection, as it is pursued, is a body without a head that only becomes richer and deeper if it has a head. I would challenge you to read my book *The Best of Jonathan's Corner*, or for a better text, take a rebel author who works in caricatures, who decries Western music and blared Wagner's opera (“Wagner,” as in, “Wagner's opera is not as bad as it sounds”), and wrote, *The Rape of Man and Nature*, and see rebellion against all things Western done right!

Furthermore, these words are not meant to dismiss nature connection in either sense. They are written to

family, not meant as taking no prisoners. Much of what is delivered in *Native Eyes* is an approach to core routines, and core routines are about equally foundational to Orthodoxy. It's nice to see discussion of engaging in core routines. And it's nice to see agape or love (or as nature connection has called it, "connection") in reference to nature. A Christian could summarize ethics as saying we should love God with our whole being, love our neighbor as ourselves, and love nature as our kingdom. Furthermore, if you read closely, you may see that I don't find any critique of nature connection in the broader and more generic sense. I may question Coyote as totem, and I would gently note that my brother with the "What Would Loki Do?" T-shirt says for that trickster that the line between "Ha ha, fooled you!" and "Ha ha, killed you!" is a remarkably fine line. But I do not see a trickster edge as necessary for nature connection in the first, broader sense. Certainly it is not a necessity for nature connection in Orthodox monasticism, where animals cease being afraid of monks and cease to harm them.

Furthermore, the perceptive reader may note that none of my critique really affects nature connection in the broader sense. Historically, it is a rule in ethics that you don't forbid what isn't happening. The New Testament was written in an agrarian society where a large amount of nature connection was assumed. A parable takes its literal sense from a Sower sowing seed; Christ says that he is the Vine and his Father is the Vinedresser, and perhaps no one felt a need to explain something a friend pointed out, that you have to love a vine to prune it well. There were some moral failures common to ancient times and our own; the older Ten Commandments remain relevant. But the fact

that the New Testament never condemns disengaging from awareness with nature in favor of an inanimate thing: this does not necessarily prove that the New Testament authors would make such condemnations if faced by today's issues, but it also doesn't make silence mean that there is no nature connection implied in the New Testament. The evidence concerning "nature deficit disorder" suggests to the person interested in asceticism that the harm caused by a lack of engagement with nature is a failure with a moral dimension. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, "Silence does not equal contempt." In the Christian tradition, you have homilies for some religious feast which never mention the occasion for the feast. And this is true for questions that had been explicitly raised and addressed.

The human race is built on a hunter-gatherer chassis. The human race is built on a hunter-gatherer chassis, and we ignore this to our peril. The core insight to the Paleo diet is that the human organism works best on the kind of foods available to a hunter-gatherer, even if it takes extra effort to eat that way instead of MacDonalD's and Cheetos, and also that it is highly desirable to approximate hunter-gatherer exercise. The nature connection movement says that we need more than food and exercise, and as much as doctors may prescribe vitamin D for people who don't get enough sunlight to synthesize the vitamin the natural way, we need to take added effort to consume vitamin N, Nature, even or especially if it takes going out of our way. There may be a Standard Social Sciences Model which asserts that human nature is infinitely malleable, but it is not, and we can still be biologically alive while living in a way that humans aren't made to function.

There is an insistence among some that "Biology is not

destiny.” Maybe, but biology is a de facto and ersatz destiny to those heedless of the chassis we are running on. The less than ten thousand years of civilization (without which written history is possible) represent an eyeblink next to the four hundred thousand years we’ve had *Homo sapiens sapiens* and perhaps two million of some form of humans: written history represents less than 2% of the time we have existed as humans, with no significant evolution represented. Freedom, such as is available, recognized is as hunter-gatherers. And this may be a point where the nature connection movement deeply informs the conversation.

The nature connection movement is a voice worth listening to, and I hope these words can help it contribute to the conversation.

Epilogue, written some time later

I have backed away from the nature connection movement.

The core reason why, besides noting whether I have business in the tradition’s core routines, is that when I listened to *Seeing Through Native Eyes* and read much of *Coyote’s Guide to Nature Connection*, it seemed like as a whole the offering made sense, but at each particular point along the way I held my nose about the particular part I was reading.

That kind of squeamishness is something I don’t consider wisely ignored.

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

It's exotic, right?

The website for the Ubuntu Linux distribution announced that Ubuntu is "an ancient African word" meaning humanity to others. It announced how it carried forward the torch of a Linux distribution that's designed for regular people to use. And this promotion of "an ancient African word" has bothered a few people: one South African blogger tried to explain several things: for instance, he mentioned that "ubuntu" had been a quite ordinary Xhosa/Zulu word meaning "humanity," mentioned that it had been made into a political rallying cry in the 20th century, and drew an analogy: saying, "'Ubuntu' is an ancient African

word meaning 'humanity'" is as silly as saying, in reverential tones, "'People' is an ancient European word meaning, 'more than one person.'" There is an alternative definition provided in the forums of Gentoo, a technical aficionado's Linux distribution: "Ubuntu. An African word meaning, 'Gentoo is too hard for me.'"

The blogger raised questions of gaffe in the name of the distribution; he did not raise questions about the Linux distribution itself, nor would I. Ubuntu is an excellent Linux distribution for nontechnical users, it gets some things very much right, and I prefer it to most other forms of Linux I've seen—including Gentoo. I wouldn't bash the distribution, nor would I think of bashing what people mean by making "ubuntu" a rallying-cry in pursuing, in their words, "Linux for human beings."

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

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

One American friend of mine, when in Kenya, gave a saying that was not from any of the people groups she was interacting with, but was from a relatively close neighboring people group: "When you are carrying a child in your womb, he only belongs to you. When he is born, he belongs to everyone." The proverb speaks out of an assumption that not only parents but parents'

friends, neighbors, elders, shopkeepers, and ultimately all adults, stand *in parentis loco*. All adults are ultimately responsible for all children and are responsible for exercising a personal and parental care to help children grow into mature adulthood. As best I understand, this is probably what a particular community in Africa might mean in saying, "It takes a village to raise a child."

What is a little strange is that, if these words correspond to anything in the U.S., they are conservative, and speak to a conservative desire to believe that not only parents but neighbors, churches, civic and local organizations, businesses and the like, all owe something to the moral upbringing of children: that is to say, there are a great many forces outside the government that owe something to local children. And this is quite the opposite of saying that we need more government programs because it takes a full complement of government initiatives and programs to raise a child well—because, presumably, more and more bureaucratic initiatives are what the (presumably generic) African sages had in mind when they gave the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom and said, "It takes a village to raise a child." There is some degree of irony in making "It takes a village" a rallying-cry in pushing society *further away* from what, "It takes a village to raise a child," *could* have originally meant—looking for advice on how to build a statist Western-style cohort of bureaucratic government programs would be as inconceivable in many traditional African cultures as looking for instructions on how to build a computer in the New Testament.

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

Nugget of Profound Wisdom hinges on something that is bad for us spiritually.

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

The Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is occult, and we cannot give the same authority to any source that is here and now. If we listen to the wise voices of elders, it is only elders from faroff lands who can give such deeply relevant words: I have never heard such a revered Nugget of Wisdom come from the older generation of our own people, or any of the elders we meet day to day.

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

that the Archetypal Exotic Culture's Nugget of Profound Wisdom is the fruit of the same tree as explicitly occult practices—and they are tributaries feeding the same river.

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

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

One can almost imagine a dialogue between God and Adam:

Adam: I'm not content.

God: What do you want me to do?

Adam: I want you to make me contented.

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

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

God: Ok.

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

God: Ok.

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

God: Ok, as much meat as you want.

Adam: And sweet stuff like ice cream.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Have all these things made us content?

Or have we used them to feed a passion?

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

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

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

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

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

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

world and found, by the way, that God and his world are really *quite* interesting.

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

What we don't want to hear

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

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

Lust benefits no one, and it is not just the married who benefit from beating back roving desire, but the unmarried as well. But when Scripture and the Fathers speak of unnatural vice,

they know something we've chosen to forget. And part of what we have forgotten is that "unnatural vice" is not just something that the gay rights movement advocates for. "Unnatural vice" includes several sins with higher pay grades, and one of them is witchcraft.

To people who have heard all the debates about whether, for instance, same-sex relationships might be unnatural for straight people but natural for gays, it may be a bit of culture shock to hear anything *besides* queers sex called "unnatural vice." But the term is there in the Fathers, and it can mean other things. It might include contraception. And it definitely includes what we think of as a way to return to nature in witchcraft.

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

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

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

sinners. All of this came through Adam's sin. How much more unnatural of a vice do you ask for than that?

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

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

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

The Renaissance was an attempt to recover the glory of classical antiquity, but the effect was not only to more or less end what there was in the Middle Ages, but help the West move away from some things that were common to the Middle Ages and antiquity alike. The Reformation might have accomplished many good things, but it did not succeed in its goal in resurrecting the ancient Church; it created a new way of being Christian. The Protestants I know are moral giants compared to much of what was going on in Rome in Luther's day, and they know Scripture far better, but Protestant Christianity is a decisive break from something that began in the Early Church and remained unbroken even in corrupt 16th century Rome. And it is not an accident that the Reformers dropped the traditional clerical

clothing and wore instead the scholar's robes. (Understanding the Scripture was much less approached through reading the saints, much more by antiquarian scholarship.) The Enlightenment tried again to recover classical glory, and it was simultaneously a time, not of breaking with unbroken ways of being Christian, but of breaking with being Christian itself. Romanticism could add the Middle Ages to the list of past glorious ages, and it may well be that without the Romantics, we would not have great medievalists like C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. But it was also something new. Every single time that I'm aware of that the West has tried to recover the glory of a bygone age, the effect has been a deeper rift with the past, both recent and ultimately ancient, leaving people much further alienated from the past than if they had continued without the reconstruction. I remember being astonished, not just to learn that two Vatican II watchwords were *ressourcement* (going back to ancient sources to restore past glory) and *aggiornamento* (bringing things up-to-date, which in practice meant bringing Rome in line with 1960's fads), nor that the two seemed to be two sides of the same coin, but that this was celebrated without anybody seeming to find something of a disturbing clue in this. The celebrations of these two watchwords seemed like a celebration of going to a hospital to have a doctor heal an old wound and inflict a new wound that is more fashionable.

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

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

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

1. However exotic the setting may seem to you, remember that it is a fundamental confusion to imagine that the setting was exotic *to those inside the experience*. We not only meet new people frequently; we see new technologies invented frequently. In The Historic Setting, people most likely were born, lived, and died within twenty miles, and even meeting another person who was not part of your village was rare. A new invention, or a new idea, would be difficult to imagine, let alone point to. So, for one day, whatever you're doing, if it feels exotic, avoid it like the plague. Stop it immediately. Don't read anything new; turn off your iPod; don't touch Wikipedia. Don't seek excitement; if anything, persevere in things you find boring.
2. Remembering that there was a lot of heavy manual labor, and stuff that was shared, spend your nice Saturday helping a friend move her stuff into her new apartment. Remember that while stairs were rare in antiquity, it would be an anachronism to take the elevator. Be a good manual laborer and do without the anachronism.

3. Remembering how the Sermon on the Mount betrays an assumption that most people were poor enough that houses would only have one room, spend your time at home, as much as possible, in one room of your house.
4. Remembering that the ancient world had no sense of "Jim's trying to lose weight and is on an old-fashioned low-fat diet, Mary's a vegan, Al's low carb...", but rather there was one diet that everybody day ate, go to McDonald's, order a meal with McDonald's McFries McSoaked in McGrease, and a sugary-sweet, corn-syrup-powered shake.
5. If you just said to yourself, "He didn't say what size; I'll order the smallest I can," order the biggest meal you can.
6. Remembering that in the ancient world the company you kept were not your eclectic pick, spend time with the people around you. Go to your neighbor Ralph who bales bad '80s rock because he thinks it's the best thing in the world, and like a good guest don't criticize what your host has provided—including his music. Spend some time playing board games with your annoying kid sister, and then go over to visit your uncle Wally and pretend to tolerate his sexist jokes.
7. Lastly, when you head home do have a good night's sleep, remember that a bed with sheets covering a smooth mattress was only slightly more common than a Frank Lloyd Wright home is today, go to sleep on a straw pallet in your virtual one room house. (You can use organic straw if you can find any.)

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

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

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

The vignette of harmony with nature as dancing on hilltops is an image of a scene where harmony with nature means fulfilling what we desire for ourselves. The image of hauling boxes to help a friend is a scene where harmony with nature means *transcending* mere selfish desire. There is a common thread of faithfulness to unadvertised historical realities running through the six steps listed above. But there is another common thread:

Humility.

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

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

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

harmony with nature," you are missing something. Every one of those humbling activities is pregnant with spirituality—and is spiritual in a much deeper way than merely feeling the beauty of a ritual.

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

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

Should I really be patting myself on the back?

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

Saints may have followed something of a special diet, but that is because they believed and acted out of the conviction that they were unworthy of the good things of the world, including the common fare what most people ate. My diet, like other diets in fashion, is a diet that tells me that the common fare eaten by most people is simply unworthy of *me*. This may well enough be true—I have doubts about how much of today's industrially produced diet is fit for human consumption at all—and I may well enough answer, "But *of course* the Quarter Pounder with 'Cheese' eaten by an inner-city teen is unworthy of me—it's just as

unworthy, if not more unworthy, of the inner-city teens who simply accept it as normal to eat." Even so, I have put myself in a difficult position. The saints thought they were unworthy of common fare. I believe that common fare is unworthy of me, and trying to believe that without deadly pride is trying to smoke, but not inhale.

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

The glory of the Eucharist unfurls in a common meal around a table, and this "common" meal is common because it is shared. To pull back from "common" food is to lose something very Eucharistic about the meal, and following one more discriminating diet like mine is a way to heal one breach of harmony with nature by opening up what may be a deeper rift.

If evil is necessary, does it stop being evil?

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

Another basis to try and learn from the past

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

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

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

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

The hymn quoted earlier, "Adam, trying to be a god, failed to be god," continues, "Christ became man that he might make Adam god." The saying has rumbled down through the ages, "God (the Son of God) became a Man (the Son of Man) that men (the sons of men) might become gods (the Sons of God)." The bad news, if it is bad news, is that we cannot escape a present into the beauty of Eden. The good news is that the present can itself be lifted up, that the doors to Eden remain open.

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

Men are not from Mars!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I'm used to seeing people wish they could escape the here and now, but the Mars Society took this to a whole new level—so much so that I was thinking, "This is not a job for science and engineering; this is a job for counseling!" People were alienated from the here and now they had on earth, and the oomph of the drive to go to Mars seemed to be because of something else

entirely from the (admittedly very interesting) scientific and engineering issues. Having the human race not even try to live on Mars was so completely unacceptable to them because of their woundedness.

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

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

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

I do.

A more satisfying kind of drink

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

My friend said that what I said was accurate: certain more alcoholic drinks were traditional, and the principles of *Nourishing Traditions* did not support all the ways the author

was grinding an axe against yeast-fermented alcohol, just as I thought. However, my friend suggested, the author was right about this. Lacto-fermented beverages, fermented by another ancient process that gives us cheese, sourdough, sauerkraut, corned beef, and the like, which *Nourishing Traditions* did promote, satisfy in a way that yeast-fermented beverages do not. People, it seems, use beer, wine, and liquor because they remind them of the satisfaction of the more ancient method of fermentation.

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

The idiot

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

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

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

Some adamantine-hard metal files that may hone us

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

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

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

St. Peter of Damaskos wrote, in *The Philokalia* vol. 3,

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dorothy Sayers, speaking of World War II in "The Other Six Deadly Sins" (found in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World* and other essay collections), discussed what life was like when the economy was enormously productive but as much productivity as possible was being wasted by the war effort. What she pointed out was that when people got used to rationing and scarcity, they found that this didn't really mean that they couldn't enjoy life—far from it. People could enjoy life when most of their economy's productivity was being wasted by war instead of wasted by buying things that people didn't need. She argued that England didn't have a choice about learning to live frugally—but England could choose to apply this lesson once the war got out. England didn't, and neither did the U.S., but the lesson is still good.

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

An unlikely cue from science fiction?

Mary Midgley, in *Science as Salvation: A Modern Myth and Its Meaning*, says of science fiction and science fiction writers,

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

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

factors in *The Great Divorce* is a cardinal spiritual factor here now. It is called repentance.

In *The Sign of the Grail*, Fr. Elijah brings George, a Christian, into the communion of the Orthodox Church. Orthodox speak of this as a conversion, but this means something beyond merely straightening out George's worldview. Fr. Elijah may share wisdom with George, but he is interested in something fundamentally beyond getting George to accept a worldview. He is trying, in all of his various ways, to get George to wake up. It is the same as the blessed spirits in *The Great Divorce* who are in Heaven and keep saying to visitors from Hell, "Wake up! Wake up!" They do often discuss ideas with their visitors, but their goal is never merely to straighten out a tormented worldview; it is to open their visitors' spiritual eyes so they will wake up to the reality of Heaven.

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

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

Adam reigned as an immortal king and lord over the whole world. He had a wife like nothing else in all Creation, paradise for a home, and harmony with nature such as we could not dream of. *And, he was like a little boy with a*

whole room full of toys who is miserable because he wants another toy and his parents said "No."

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

Repentance is recognizing that you are in a little Hell and choosing to leave by the one way you do not wish to leave. Elsewhere from the quotation from St. Peter, the *Philokalia* says, "People hold on to sin because they think it adorns them." The woman addicted to alcohol may be in misery, but she has alcohol to seemingly anesthetize the pain, and it is incredibly painful to give up the illusion that if you try hard enough and get just a bit of a solace, things will be OK. That's a mighty hard thing to repent of: it's easier to rationalize, decide to give it up by sheer willpower (perhaps tomorrow), or make a bargain to cut back to a more reasonable level—anything but wake up and stop trying to ignore that you're standing barefoot in something really gross, and admit that what you need is not a bigger fan to drive away the stench while you stay where you are, but to step out in a cleaning operation that lasts a lifetime and cuts to your soul.

An alcoholic walking this path craves just a little bit of solace, just for now, and it is only much later that two things happen. First, the cravings are still hard, but they are no longer *quite* so overpowering. Second, she had forgotten what it felt like to be clean—really and truly *clean*—and she had forgotten what it was like to be doing something else with her life than trying to hide in a bottle. She had forgotten what freedom was like. And long after she gave up on her way of escaping life, she found she had

forgotten what it was like to experience life, not as something to escape, but as something with joy even in its pain.

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

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

Once, when things went from hard times to easy times, one saint complained, saying that easy times rob the Church of her martyrs and her glory. If we are entering hard times, that does not place us outside of God's reach nor Christ's promise in the

Sermon on the Mount: "For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

I glorify Thee,
Who hast cast Adam out of Paradise,
That we might learn by the sweat of our brow
The joy and the life that Adam scorned
As King of Paradise.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages.
Amen.
Glory forever.
And glory be to Thee,
Thou who blessest us
For better or for worse,
In sickness and in health,
In the Eternal Light and Love
Who illuminest marriage.
Glory forever.
Glory be to thee whose blessings are here,
Not in an escape,
But in the place wherein Thou hast placed us.
Glory forever.
Glory be to Thee,
Who offerest Eden,
To us men who forever dodge our salvation.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father
And to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
Both here and now, and in Eternal Life that beckons us
The Son of God became a man in his here and now in Bethlehem.
In your forever honored place,

From this very moment,
Become a Son of God.
Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near,
Heaven awaits with open arms,
Step out of Hell.
Grieve for your sins,
That grief that holds more in her heart,
Than discovering that the scintillating escape from Hell
Scintillates only as a mirage.
And the repentance you fear,
So constricted it seems from outside,
Holds inside a treasure larger than the universe,
Older than time,
And more alive than life.
Glory beyond glory,
Life beyond life,
Light beyond life,
The Bread from Heaven,
The infinite Living Wine,
Who alone canst slake our infinite thirst,
Glory forever.

Glory be to God on high.
Glory forever.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost,
Both now and ever and unto the ages of ages,
Amen:
Glory forever.
Alleluia!

“Why?”
(A Look at Matthieu Pageau,
“The Language of Creation:
Cosmic Symbolism in
Genesis”)

Great Expectations

“I am a star at rest, my daughter,” answered Ramandu. “When I set for the last time, decrepit and old beyond all that you can reckon, I was carried to this island. I am not so old now as I was then. Every morning a bird brings me a fire-berry from the valleys in the Sun, and each fire-berry takes away a little of my age. And when I have become as young as the child that was born yesterday, then I shall take my rising again (for we are at earth’s eastern rim) and once more tread the great dance.”

“In our world,” said Eustace, “a star is a huge ball

of flaming gas.”

“Even in your world, my son, *that is not what a star is but only what it is made of.*“

C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as quoted in “Physics”

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.

"The Commentary," on Genesis 1

I was enthusiastically introduced to Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation: Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis*, and enthusiastically looking forward to posting a review saying, "I speak of answering the question, "Why?" as is neglected in science, but in occasional hints and riddles. This is a full and direct treatment of the matter."

The snake in the ointment

I viewed a podcast with the author, and on rational grounds this looks interesting. The best books to me are ones that challenge me enough to cause culture shock, and this did cause culture shock, and was as different and concerned with the question, "Why?" as I respected.

About two thirds of the way through the book, though, I put my finger on something I'd been ignoring to be able to see other things: *reading the book was not prayerful*. When my abbot loaned me a manuscript he asked feedback for, the most vital feedback I could give him was that when I began it reading was deliberative information processing, but well before the end reading was prayer, and good theology leads you into the presence of God. As a relatively minor symptom, the comments on divination were all secular in character, and though forbidding divination was mentioned at least once, it was never discussed as an evil sin and a shameful error that opens a gateway to demonic possession. The concepts of 'space' and 'time', put in quotes in the text itself to indicate a usage very different from any mainstream usage, brought the kind of interesting culture shock produced by good science fiction and fantasy, a bit like *The Dark Tower* that C.S. Lewis wisely refrained from publishing. Also somewhat unusual for an author presented as Orthodox is a claim to "carves Eastern Orthodox and other traditional images." And the book freely refers to later parts of the Old Testament, but never the New Testament or the Church as realities shadowed in the Old Law.

A more serious problem is that the book tastes to me too much like Jung, and was recommended to me by a good friend in the process of leaving Jung behind. Carl Jung has been called the greatest threat to the Church since Julian the Apostate, and some people have said that at the beginning of every failed clerical career known to the speaker came finding insights in Jung. I do not object to a portrait of archetypes as such; I trade in archetypes myself and would never want to leave them behind. But whether this is a fruitful engagement... it is a hint and a riddle to

point out that the book briefly mentions alchemy as something you'd never guess by studying today's chemistry. It doesn't mention alchemy as offering a shortcut by technique for inner transformation that all of the major world religions are inclined to answer, "Sorry, kid. You need elbow grease." Even if conservative Protestants may be very eager to clarify that they believe you are sanctified by faith alone and not by elbow grease, they are also usually quite clear in a belief that if you have a living and a healthy faith and relevant opportunity, you had better be *producing* elbow grease. (Possibly Taoism is an exception? The Buddha left an interlocking eightfold path of ways to produce elbow grease.) But Pageau's book never talks about alchemy as a cheap shortcut, and if you are going to declare that alchemy is different from anything you'd guess from looking at chemistry, you would do awfully well to say its techniques for producing spiritual transformation are shallow and flat next to any proper religious tradition.

There was one conversation I had with a famous egalitarian when I mentioned enthusiastically about John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*, and he pointed out how the book was Jungian. And that was the hook when I swallowed a bait of quasi-traditional teaching about men and women at a time when live proponents of the position were few and far between.

I don't want to repeat that error here, and I speak no words of ill-will if my friends fell for something I fell for hook, line, and sinker. But the book pulls off a reconceptualization big enough to provoke culture shock, and a many-layered understanding of symbol, but for all that it I found very little, if anything, that constituted a specifically *patristic* way of opening up the Old Testament

to unhide the New, and while the book mentions details like alchemy and Tarot, I searched and failed to find mention of “Jesus,” “Christ,” “Church,” and so on.

I deem this book a failure, but I would really like to read another book that would succeed where it had failed.

Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement

On the screen appear numerous geometrical forms—prisms, cylinders, cubes — dancing, spinning, changing shape, in a very stunning computer animation. In the background sounds the pulsing beat of techno music. The forms waver, and then coalesce into letters: "Religion Within the Bounds of Amusement."

The music and image fade, to reveal a man, perfect in form and appearance, every hair in place, wearing a jet black suit and a dark, sparkling tie. He leans forward slightly, as the camera focuses in on him.

"Good morning, and I would like to extend a warm and personal welcome to each and every one of you from those of us at the Church of the Holy Television. Please sit back, relax, and turn off your brain."

Music begins to play, and the screen shows a woman holding a microphone. She is wearing a long dress of the whitest white, the color traditionally symbolic of goodness and purity, which somehow manages not to conceal her unnaturally large breasts. The camera slowly focuses in as she begins to sing.

"You got problems? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. Not enough luxury? That's OK. Only three cars? That's OK. Not enough power? That's OK. Can't get your way? That's OK. Not enough for you? That's OK. Can't do it on your own? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. You got problems? That's OK. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away. Just call out to Jesus, and he'll make them go away."

As the music fades, the camera returns to the man.

"Have you ever thought about how much God loves us? Think about the apex of progress that we are at, and how much more he has blessed us than any one else.

"The Early Christians were in a dreadful situation. They were always under persecution. Because of this, they didn't have the physical assurance of security that is the basis for spiritual growth, nor the money to buy the great libraries of books that are necessary to cultivate wisdom. It is a miracle that Christianity survived at all.

"The persecution ended, but darkness persisted for a thousand years. The medievals were satisfied with blind faith, making it the context of thought and leisure. Their concept of identity was so weak that it was entangled with obedience. The time was quite rightly called the Dark Ages.

"But then, ah, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Man and his mind enthroned. Religion within the bounds of reason. Then science and technology, the heart of all true progress, grew.

"And now, we sit at the apex, blessed with more and better technology than anyone else. What more could you possibly ask for? What greater blessing could there possibly be? We have the technology, and know how to enjoy it. Isn't God gracious?"

There is a dramatic pause, and then the man closes his eyes. "Father, I thank you that we have not fallen into sin; that we do not worship idols, that we do not believe lies, and that we are not like the Pharisees. I thank you that we are good, moral people; that we are Americans. I thank you, and I praise you for your wondrous power. Amen."

He opens his eyes, and turns to the camera. It focuses in on his face, and his piercing gaze flashes out like lightning. With a thunderous voice, he boldly proclaims, "To God alone be the glory, for ever and ever!"

The image fades.

In the background can be heard the soft tones of Beethoven. A couple fades in; they are elegantly dressed, sitting at a black marble table, set with roast pheasant. The room is of Baroque fashion; marble pillars and mirrors with gilt frames adorn the walls. French windows overlook a formal garden.

The scene changes, and a sleek black sports car glides through forest, pasture, village, mountain. The music continues to play softly.

It passes into a field, and in the corner of the field a small hovel stands. The camera comes closer, and two half-naked children come into view, playing with some sticks and a broken Coca-Cola bottle. Their heads turn and follow the passing car.

A voice gently intones, "These few seconds may be the only opportunity some people ever have to know about you. What do you want them to see?"

The picture changes. Two men are walking through a field. As the camera comes closer, it is seen that they are deep in conversation.

One of them looks out at the camera with a probing

gaze, and then turns to the other. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know, Jim." He draws a deep breath, and closes his eyes. "I just feel so... so empty. A life filled with nothing but shallowness. Like there's nothing inside, no purpose, no meaning. Just an everlasting nothing."

"Well, you know, John, for every real and serious problem, there is a solution which is trivial, cheap, and instantaneous." He unslings a small backpack, opening it to pull out two cans of beer, and hands one to his friend. "Shall we?"

The cans are opened.

Suddenly, the peaceful silence is destroyed by the blare of loud rock music. The camera turns upwards to the sky, against which may be seen parachutists; it spins, and there is suddenly a large swimming pool, and a vast table replete with great pitchers and kegs of beer. The parachutists land; they are all young women, all blonde, all laughing and smiling, all wearing string bikinis, and all anorexic.

For the remaining half of the commercial, the roving camera takes a lascivious tour of the bodies of the models. Finally, the image fades, and a deep voice intones, "Can you think of a better way to spend your weekends?"

The picture changes. A luxury sedan, passing through a ghetto, stops beside a black man, clad in rags. The driver, who is white, steps out in a pristine business suit, opens his wallet, and pulls out five crisp twenty dollar bills.

"I know that you can't be happy, stealing, lying, and getting drunk all of the time. Here is a little gift to let you know that Jesus loves you." He steps back into the car without waiting to hear the man's response, and speeds off.

Soon, he is at a house. He steps out of the car, bible in hand, and rings the doorbell.

The door opens, and a man says, "Nick, how are you? Come in, do come in. Have a seat. I was just thinking of you, and it is so nice of you to visit. May I interest you in a little Martini?"

Nick sits down and says, "No, Scott. I am a Christian, and we who are Christian do not do such things."

"Aah; I see." There is a sparkle in the friend's eye as he continues, "And tell me, what did Jesus do at his first miracle?"

The thick, black, leatherbound 1611 King James bible arcs through the air, coming to rest on the back of Scott's head. There is a resounding thud.

"You must learn that the life and story of Jesus are serious matters, and not to be taken as the subject of jokes."

The screen turns white as the voice glosses, "This message has been brought to you by the Association of Concerned Christians, who would like to remind you that you, too, can be different from the world, and can present a positive witness to Christ."

In the studio again, the man is sitting in a chair.

"Now comes a very special time in our program. You, our viewers, matter most to us. It is your support that keeps us on the air. And I hope that you do remember to send us money; when you do, God will bless you. So keep your checks rolling, and we will be able to continue this ministry, and provide answers to your questions. I am delighted to be able to hear your phone calls. Caller number one, are you there?"

"Yes, I am, and I would like to say how great you are. I sent you fifty dollars, and someone gave me an anonymous check for five hundred! I only wish I had given you more."

"That is good to hear. God is so generous. And what is

your question?"

"I was wondering what God's will is for America? And what I can do to help?"

"Thank you; that's a good question.

"America is at a time of great threat now; it is crumbling because good people are not elected to office.

"The problem would be solved if Christians would all listen to Rush Limbaugh, and then go out and vote. Remember, bad people are sent to Washington by good people who don't vote. With the right men in office, the government would stop wasting its time on things like the environment, and America would become a great and shining light, to show all the world what Christ can do.

"Caller number two?"

"I have been looking for a church to go to, and having trouble. I just moved, and used to go to a church which had nonstop stories and anecdotes; the congregation was glued to the edges of their seats. Here, most of the services are either boring or have something which lasts way too long. I have found a few churches whose services I generally enjoy—the people really sing the songs—but there are just too many things that aren't amusing. For starters, the sermons make me uncomfortable, and for another, they have a very boring time of silent meditation, and this weird mysticism about 'kiss of peace' and something to do with bread and wine. Do you have any advice for me?"

"Yes, I do. First of all, what really matters is that you have Jesus in your heart. Then you and God can conquer the world. Church is a peripheral; it doesn't really have anything to do with Jesus being in your heart. If you find a church that you like, go for it, but if there aren't any that you like, it's not your fault that they aren't doing their job.

"And the next caller?"

"Hello. I was wondering what the Song of Songs is about."

"The Song of Songs is an allegory of Christ's love for the Church. Various other interpretations have been suggested, but they are all far beyond the bounds of good taste, and read things into the text which would be entirely inappropriate in holy Scriptures. Next caller?"

"My people has a story. I know tales of years past, of soldiers come, of pillaging, of women ravaged, of villages razed to the ground and every living soul murdered by men who did not hesitate to wade through blood. Can you tell me what kind of religion could possibly decide that the Crusades were holy?"

The host, whose face had suddenly turned a deep shade of red, shifted slightly, and pulled at the side of his collar. After a few seconds, a somewhat less polished voice hastily states, "That would be a very good question to answer, and I really would like to, but I have lost track of time. It is now time for an important message from some of our sponsors."

The screen is suddenly filled by six dancing rabbits, singing about toilet paper.

A few minutes of commercials pass: a computer animated flash of color, speaking of the latest kind of candy; a family brought together and made happy by buying the right brand of vacuum cleaner; a specific kind of hamburger helping black and white, young and old to live together in harmony. Somewhere in there, the Energizer bunny appears; one of the people in the scene tells the rabbit that he should have appeared at some time other than the commercial breaks. Finally, the host, who has regained his composure, is on the screen again.

"Well, that's all for this week. I hope you can join us next week, as we begin a four part series on people whose lives have been changed by the Church of the Holy Television. May God bless you, and may all of your life be ever filled with endless amusement!"

Luddite Orthodoxy

There was one theology article arguing the Orthodox position on burial and cremation, which briefly stated that the rubric for a funeral assumed a burial (for instance, by stating that the bishop should place the first shovelful of dirt over the remains), but based its primary support on the tenet that immemorial custom has the weight of canon law. Freemasons tried to introduce an Orthodox slava for cremation, but outside of an exception in Japan, cremation has only existed in Orthodoxy as introduced from outside. There was some significance attached to a rubric was written assuming burial in the earth, but much more attached to the immemorial custom of burial in the earth and not a funeral pyre as was known in antiquity, or any form of cremation. Now in fact there is another theological argument to be made; you incinerate the body to get rid of it, but you sow a body in the earth that it may be raised in incorruptible glory. Perhaps that is why Orthodoxy made the earliest choice of burial over a funeral pyre shared with pagans who believed the body was a prison for the soul. But the main, and in my opinion sufficient, theological

argument is consistent with saying that Christ is incarnate in Orthodox cultures: *immemorial custom has the weight of canon law*.

This brings me to an elephant in the room, and not the only one. We are not close to immemorial Orthodox custom that bears the weight of canon law. When I was growing up, there was a traditional Luddite critique of telephones that despite the [lying] marketing slogan of AT&T, "Reach out and touch someone," telephone calls begin abruptly, are extremely short by standards of in-person visits, and in fact disallow not only **touch** but other aspects of physical presence. Today, in the technological world we inhabit, the phone is the old-school, old-fashioned way to do it, the high-touch way to really be present. *How* many steps are we removed from the customs surrounding visits in traditional Orthodox cultures?

Let's look at another aspect of the many-sided singularity discussed below. The Apostle said, "Do not be drunk with wine." Today wine is around 12% alcohol, although I have a disturbing sense that I remembered being introduced to wine at 11%-11.5% alcohol on the low end, and taken my leave where most wines seemed to be not less than 13%. In antiquity, they used different fermenting culture from yeast, and straight wine was 4% alcohol, less than the baseline for today's beer. Furthermore, when it was drunk, it was diluted to a third of its strength. This may not have been always or solely for the purpose of reducing alcohol content; straight wine was viscous so drinking straight wine might have been a bit more like drinking syrup. Nonetheless, the Apostle said, "Do not be drunk with wine" when alcoholic beverages stronger than 4% alcohol were not really available. How are we to receive these words

when multiple 80 proof liquors are available, and 151 and Everclear for that matter, and alcohol is considered a gateway drug to stronger drugs that are illegal in the United States but readily available, in the short term at least, to people who really want them?

In somewhat of a like fashion, the Lord said, "Do not store up treasures on earth," when the "treasures on earth" were limited to what was available in the ancient world: wealthy people could have precious metals and livestock, and sadly slaves, but hot and cold running water and air conditioning were not available to kings, let alone the availability of iPads. One person said, "When this stuff [Virtual Reality] comes out, it's going to make crack look like Sanka." (SecondLife has so far not shown this claim to be groundless.)

The right action to take is not predominantly, "Look back." It may take a while to get there, but it is not primarily a resurrection of the past, which somehow seem to historically always be a resurrection of a past that never existed. Ancient and modern saints are alike worth paying our attention, and there is a case to make that not only is our present day a pseudomorphosis against the canon of agrarian society as known to traditional Orthodox society and the Bible, but agrarian society, even if it is cohesive over time, is a pseudomorphosis from hunter-gatherer roots that the human person is made for, and still remains what we are built for despite what incredible pseudomorphoses may exist today.

(And it may be true that Mount Athos's coenobetic monasteries are agrarian whilst hermits are hunter-gatherers who are free to hunt bugs and fish, such as many people have gotten their protein, but don't go there.

Monasticism may allow, or rather have, some people be agrarian and some others be hunter-gatherers in some form, but all such monastics would be aghast at the idea of using monasticism as a means to get to a particular preserved order of society or diet or what have you.)

I would quote Diane Donovan, senior reviewer at the *Midwest Book Review's* comment and review of *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*, one of my own titles:

The Luddite's Guide to Technology

CJS Hayward

Amazon Kindle

c/o Amazon Digital Publishing

ASIN: Boo8GKWNHY \$2.99

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/Boo8GKWNHY>

CreateSpace (hard copy)

<http://www.amazon.com/dp/1478184914>

9781478184911 \$24.99

<https://www.createspace.com/3927883>

The Luddite's Guide to Technology represents the collected works of CJS Hayward, and is especially recommended for any who have either not read Hayward before, or have had singular or limited access to his writings. It's a gathering of reflections on how technology and science can not only intrigue and involve people, but absorb them to the point that the barriers between humanity and technology become blurred.

There are numerous essays here, from a reflection on technology and faith in 'Religion and Science Is Not

Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution' to 'Plato: The Allegory of...the Flickering Screen', which connects ancient philosophy to modern screen-oriented approaches to life.

Essay titles are contemporary and catchy ('Veni, Vidi, Vomi: A Look at, "Do You Want to Date My Avatar?"' and the title piece 'The Luddite's Guide to Technology') and invite readers to understand the fine line between Biblical and spiritual approaches and technological perspectives.

The author is himself an IT pro, so his approach isn't anti-science; but rather represents a modified view of the perils and potentials of technology and the user's role and experience in handling it: "...I haven't laid the reins on the horse's neck. I only use a well-chosen fragment of my iPhone's capabilities, and I try not to use it too much: I like to be able to use the web without speed being much of an issue, but I'm not on the web all the time. And I have never thought 'My wheels are my freedom;' I try to drive insofar as it advances some particular goal."

As the essays unfold, readers comes to realize that the author is in fact advocating a kind of detachment - and stepping back - from the potentials of technology in order to regain social and spiritual perspectives and values that don't always lie on screen.

From amassing wealth in the face of poverty to what happens when the desire for technology's benefits supersedes and changes the structure and beliefs of religion itself, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* identifies widespread and dangerous trends in the worship of technology - and offers

Hayward's own clues on how to effect personal, spiritual and social change to counter these trends.

What keeps these writings engrossing and charged is Hayward's vivid language and descriptive choices: "The marketing proposition of texting is an intravenous drip of noise. IM's are similar, if not always as mobile as cell phones, and email is a weaker form of the drug that youth are abandoning for a stronger version."

There are solid political insights as well: "But for all of these things, GPSes, as well as cell phones in general, provide one more means for Big Brother (and possibly more than one Big Brother) to know exactly where you go, when you go there, what the patterns are, and other things where Big Brother will keep closer tabs on your whereabouts and activities than your spouse or parent."

And lest you think these reflections to be solely intellectual or spiritual in nature, the topics offer a surprising range of applications; from surveys of the changing hospitality industry and heating and air conditioning world to business ("There are a number of technologies whose marketing proposition is as a noise delivery system.")

Expect a wide-ranging series of discussions that link technology to values, social and spiritual issues, politics and business, and the changing value in everyday life. Also expect an incredibly lively read, drawing on Orthodoxy and spiced with Hayward's astute observations of worlds modern and past and his own interconnectedness with technology and religious values.

Diane Donovan
Senior Reviewer

In the Newberry Award-winning *Bridge to Terebithia*, there is a rural community, and a liberal, wealthy, educated family buys a house with a bad history as a furlough to rethink their priorities. One of the ways the author socially distances the visitors from the rural community is that the visitors do not own a television. And indeed people who are conservative enough, or liberal enough, may shy away from television: I have said, "Television is a pack of cigarettes for the mind." But with the Internet we seem to have strained out a gnat and swallowed a camel. It's not just porn, even though porn is the #1 sin confessed by young men in churches who treat porn as a sin to be rejected and brought to confession. Even if you stick to the G- or PG-rated areas of the Internet, including this site, you have a concentration of the things Jerry Mander critiqued in *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*. Have you read the critique of artificial unusuality, that television attunes people to a strange form of stimulation found in technology and not in the natural world? Every top website has vastly more than television today, and television today has vastly more than the television of the seventies when Mander wrote his critique.

On to another elephant in the room: one book on medieval history came from the series "Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity," and some historians have argued that what makes the West distinctive today is the unfolding of bedrock that was laid in medieval history. To those who wish they were in the Middle Ages, in a certain

sense we are; we are in the fruit of what was a flower then. We are in the shade of an oak that was an acorn then. I do not specifically ask you to believe this, but the West is in a singularity that is splashing the world. Cell phones (including smartphones) are going places that desktop computers and landlines have rarely gone, in second and some third-world countries. One aspect of this singularity is the acceleration of addictiveness. But there are others. We are in a brittle singularity. One programmer said, "If builders built buildings the way programmers wrote programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilisation." Technology moving to electronic means is increasing the brittleness of society. Not that it's the only one: the economic structure in the U.S. makes banks vulnerable to a run on the banks, and the economy is poised to get worse, much worse, even if we've been bit by the government economist computer virus: every indicator says that your computer is fine, but it just doesn't work. And these are two of many dimensions of a singularity that we are in. "Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity" may have been written as discussing changes in culture, what made a modernism in whose shadow feminism would grow and keep growing beyond the point that DesCartes became a pariah (see how modern technology came to exist as something newer and different than has ever been known by the whole human race in however long it has been around, be it 6,000 years, 200,000, or 2,000,000). If, as has been pointed out, more than 99.9% of the human beings who have ever lived have never seen a printed word, what are we to say as devices containing microchips? (I on my person right now have a digital watch, a smartphone, and a laptop; I'm not sure if the USB key I have technically

has a microchip, but it's cut from the same cloth.) And again technology is one layer, only layer. Technology by itself is dwarfed by the narcissism that grows from generation to generation.

Where do we go from there?

In a word: **up**.

"The just shall walk by faith" is a quotation by the Apostle of a minor prophet, and while St. Paul unfolds implications for legalism, the surface meaning is a prophet asking how a God whose eyes are too pure to look on evil could allow the Israelites to be crushed by the more wicked Babylonians. And the implication is clear: the way to navigate in a disaster is by faith, by living the Sermon on the Mount. Never mind how God can save. You may rightly use your reason, but reason will not save you. God will save the just who walk by faith. Again, look up. That's where help comes from.

Orthodoxy, [Neo-]Paleo, and Pseudomorphosis

My godfather was a clergyman and theology student who spoke frequently of *pseudomorphosis*, which etymologically means *conforming to a false shape*, and which he used to speak of Orthodoxy taking the shape of Western heresy and spiritual forms. It was a somewhat broad term, and extended to anything of Orthodox spiritual life broadly speaking that could acquire a false form. Thus it spoke immediately of Orthodox theology teachers shaped by Roman teachers who offered Latin-style scholasticism from an Eastern pen. Or it could apply equally well to icons painted with Western styles of perspective and photorealism instead of the traditional Orthodox inverted perspective where the vanishing point is not some place

beyond the picture, but at the viewer, thus including the viewer *in* the icon. And it spoke of many other things. 'Pseudomorphosis' was a drum my godfather kept on beating, and I assumed it was as standard of an Orthodox term as *hypertrophy*, which etymologically means an *overgrowth* and in Orthodox use more specifically means an *overgrowth* of the reason by Western learning, where the spirit should be, and in fact hypertrophy can be taken to be a more specific kind of pseudomorphosis. But while I have heard other people speak of 'hypertrophy', I have not heard the term 'pseudomorphosis' much of anywhere else, even though it flowed quite naturally from his tongue and it seems a profitable term to use.

I will be using the term *pseudomorphosis* to always mean *conforming to a false shape*, but in other contexts besides Orthodox spirituality. There is a basic sense in which Orthodoxy is basically human; the first Orthodox people were not the Mother of God, but Adam and Eve. In that sense Orthodoxy strains the popular concept of religion; 'Orthodox' is a synonym for 'spiritual health' or 'functioning the way a human being is organized to function.' And the [neo-]Paleo movement has brought to light that we are not 'functioning the way a human being is organized to function.' They've brought to light that the agricultural revolution represents, not the *beginning* of the human race, but the tiniest *eyeblick* of the time humans have been around. And they seem to have a dietary focus, perhaps because some of the earliest paydirt we can see is adopting some diet. Some people are calling neo-Paleo the next fad diet, and in fact that is not an unreasonable interpretation. I don't believe it, but notwithstanding the neo-Paleo view that it is a lifestyle rather than a diet, it is

making inroads partly thanks to the effectiveness of the fad diet route. And the movement discusses diet and exercise, perhaps the kind of change most readily comprehensible to the Western mind, to increase physical well-being. Books like Robb Wolf's *The Paleo Solution: The Original Human Diet* advocate diet and exercise such as the human person appears to be optimised for, and in keeping with political correctness does not really distinguish men from women despite the different roles they adopt in hunter-gatherer cultures, and for that matter his emphases can be (and are perhaps intended to be able to be) applied on an individual, individualist level. So if we observe that the human being is optimised for hunter-gatherer society, Wolf pulls an (admittedly very effective) Western canon of things that will make for neo-Paleo goodness in life.

There are other things where one could go neo-Paleo. On a materialistic level, light is another thing to consider; figures like Wolf may endorse sunbathing as an option, but Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, ©1977-78 and probably much older than any coherent and organized neo-Paleo movement, writes a chapter to raise the question of 'The Ingestion of Artificial Light' in chapter 9. He argues, rightly or wrongly, that exposure to light has potential health effects far beyond whether we can see by it. He critiques incandescent light as red- and infrared-heavy in their spectrum. But the problem with most fluorescent lights is much worse. (*N.B. He doesn't comment, and I'm not completely sure what he has to say, about what are at least sold as full spectrum fluorescent bulbs. But the full-spectrum CFL's I've seen all produce markedly blue light, perhaps altered by colored paint on the glass. My suspicion is that he would find the*

spectrum to be problematically different from natural light but markedly better than bulbs that don't have a proper spectrum, and if I had to buy a non-incandescent light, I would go with one labelled as full-spectrum, preferring fluorescent to LED light.) He critiques fluorescent light as not having a spectrum properly speaking but emitting a few wavelengths, all the while engaging scientific research, and finally raises the question of what it means for a person to spend four hours a day staring at a television's red, green, and blue pixels. I have omitted what the critiques are; in a word they show that altered light exposure under laboratory conditions causes altered health effects in laboratory plants and animals, at least in some studies. Sunburn is bad and possibly carcinogenic, but Mander not only permits exposure to sunlight, as Wolf does, but specifically argues that organic sunlight is noticeably different from, and better for, the human person than incandescent lights, or worse fluorescent lights, or a television [or, today, computer] screen. And the argument that we would do well with the sun's organic light and that of moonlight, starlight, and perhaps fire as our primary light sources, whether or not we are in a position to act on it, is a neo-Paleo type of argument that Wolf never really argues even if he does describe sunlight in positive terms.

Agrarian society is perhaps a pseudomorphosis from hunter-gatherer origins. Agrarian society had people working heavy hours; the hunter-gatherer workweek unambiguously involves hard work, but it amounted to about 20 hours, on par with an American part-time job for teenagers who don't need to support themselves. But we have added a second pseudomorphosis with the Industrial

Revolution, added another further around the time desktop computers became common, and added another with the mobile revolution. Or maybe you would count them differently; I've spoken on a material plane, and technology is mostly significant in relation to spiritual failure. At any rate, in and outside of technology, the game keeps being changed, and that includes the global financial crisis. It has become a commonplace that educators foreseeably need to educate students for jobs that will not exist at the time of education, and try to educate students for their unknown future 'rather than the teachers' past'. Perhaps the global financial crisis will quash that. But this bespeaks an unprecedented degree of pseudomorphosis. Confucius and Lao Tze alike, who were at least close contemporaries and the annals record as having met in person, in 500 BC were gravely concerned about a loss of primal simplicity. I have read both, years ago been deeply influenced by one of them, and understand why both have followings even in the West today. But my reason for introducing them is not that every generation seems to think they are the present nadir of some downhill spiral; my reason today is to say that rather than my initial thoughts of "they're ancient," which is *true* by the standards of recorded history, but to say that compared to how long humans have been around, an eyeblink separates us from Confucius and Lao Tze and an eyeblink separates Confucius and Lao Tze from pure hunter-gatherers. (But the difference between them and us might be that they've had a tad too much dilute ancient Greek wine, and we've had too much 151.)

What are we to do in all this? We may be able to hit some neo-Paleo notes, and I don't want to downplay too far what this version of a fad diet can do. The difference of

eating grassfed meat and organic vegetables, and eliminating not only plastic-like foods such as Wonderbread, but agrarian staples like organic whole grain sourdough, is powerful. But I would like to take a note from Tito Collander in *Way of the Ascetics: The Ancient Tradition of Discipline and Inner Growth*. Cut down little by little. The tortoise wins the race.

There are a few ways to cut back with technologies. For television, this can not only mean watching less, but watching MeTV for classic television shows, and at some point shift to just black and white. And to be clear, this is *not* just because classic TV shows are *less* risque than many of today's shows. Return to Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, but this time (if you do not, at a slow pace, read the whole tome) read chapter 15 on 'Artificial Unusualness'. It exposes the technological drug that keeps people hooked on television and other technologies. The drug is alike present in black and white classics, in M*A*S*H, and in today's news hour. But moving forward in time you encounter a more refined and concentrated form of the drug, and moving back you wean yourself towards a less refined and concentrated form. And while you're at it, read the web article "The Acceleration of Addictiveness," which discusses more broadly what is here mentioned in television.

But there is one counterbalance I would like to make clear. A good friend asked me what I would recommend for his little son to get him off of television. And I briefly outlined the previous paragraph's suggestion of weaning him to milder and tamer fare. And at the end, I made a brief point that *the Orthodox Church advises people to cut down on sensory pleasure on fasting days*. But that was perhaps

10% of what I said. The 90% bulk of what I suggested was not about what would be taken away, but sensitizing his son to things other than television. I talked about sensitization to the outdoors and its little details, building Legos the old-fashioned way (blocks instead of an assemble-it-yourself model dictated for you), learning to look at coins and see a penny as a coin collector sees it (with a year, a little 'D' some years if it was struck in Denver, etc.), playing with matchbox cars on plastic ramps, playing on a homemade pinball machine, and getting a 'dissection scope' which unlike a microscope's difficulties focusing on any microbe, can have a fair amount of stuff in physical focus and visible in greater detail than the unaided eye. Now, individually, those suggestions may stand or fall, and I have doubts about how many were age-appropriate. However, I would stand behind the basic insight that besides slowly unplugging the television, he could try to *sensitize* his son to things that simply were not in sight to him. I made mention of someone who said that her favorite activity was to sit on the back porch and watch the grass grow. And indeed there is grass blowing in the wind, insects which are occasionally a butterfly or picturesque moth, rabbits, and so on and so forth, *to which the absorbed TV watcher is insensitive*. And I did not state or think of it in these terms, but I was trying to suggest things that might wake his son up to how many interesting things there are outside of television.

And that brings me to a graver point: waking up. The overwhelming majority of what I bring to confession is not, at least not directly, some failure to reconstruct Paleo living. (Indeed the idea of reconstructing a long-lost glory may feel very much like home to Protestants, but is foreign to Orthodoxy.) The things I bring to confessions are where I

fail in keeping the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount. Technology and the entire pseudomorphosis is significant only as it provides opportunities for those sins. And it is almost besides the point that we have moved from ancient forms of whole grain bread to fast food when we escalate in narcissism and in a few decades move from outspoken advocacy of "free love" to putting the force of law against those who, perhaps because of religious reasons, discriminate against "gay rights." And unless you go out of your way otherwise, an internet connection includes free access to porn of every type and orientation. The eminently popular *Mythbusters* covers urban legends, or at least covered urban legends when it had not exhausted the list of obvious candidates, but without losing a beat they also cover Ouija boards and necrophilia. *Houston, we have a problem.*

And there is more than what we think of as high tech. The modern conveniences, as they were called in another age, are something we can at least treat as negotiable. Why be in an air conditioned room in the summer, when you have a genuine choice about it, than be outside? This should not be taken all at once; if you're indoors most of the day like I am, maybe it would be wiser to taper up the amount of time you start outdoors in the heat, and not start when there's a heat wave, and not start between 10:00 and 2:00. But people can endure heat and cold if they build up to it. Some of the conveniences may be spared the cutting block; an outhouse or what Australians call 'bush loo' is probably not an option to suburban or urban dwellers, and it would be silly to drive to the park with the only mere latrine for 10 miles around, every day. But before completely sweeping that issue under the rug, consider that we do not strictly

need all the soft toilet papers that are foisted on us. I've been served by cruder toilet paper, and I've heard that old newspaper does the trick. But my point is that the things that were once called 'modern conveniences', and are now assumed without being discussed, are not a bare minimum for human life. They may be expedient, or they may not. In 1995 a friend commented that the American middle-class house had about as many creature comforts as were available. Now of course that did not include all the luxuries that were available, but the difference between filet mignon and hamburger is much less than the difference between eating meat daily and eating meat a few times each year. And it included television but did not include computer/electronic devices as far as they could be refined. We're not there yet, although "Plato: The Allegory of the... *Flickering Screen?*" applies now and well enough applied then: I originally titled the piece, "Plato: The Allegory of the Television." But while we might not have every luxury, status symbol, or mobile device that is possible, there are not much more *creature comforts* I could request.

And living in an artificial environment of creature comforts is pseudomorphosis. Not that the natural condition is devoid of pleasures. But we are like the proverbial "bubble boy" who had no immune system and lived inside a sanitized plastic bubble that protected him: from the encounters of real life. It has been commented as far as immune systems go that seniors, due to lack of social contact, tend not to get sick very often, but when they do, it is very serious, while schoolchildren tend to get sick often, but when they do it is not very serious. Part of this is due to the difference in function between the immune systems of an older adult and a young child. But having a bubble in

place of an immune system is not as good or as natural as having an immune system that's fought things off, and the natural condition is to work to build an immune system. Saying "no" or "**less**" to a creature comfort you're accustomed to is a way of building an immune system—*and encounter something*. It's not the only thing out there, nor is it the biggest, but it helps us function as human beings were meant to function. And on this point, the Fathers suggest some degree of abstention from creature comforts from the ancient world: they speak of sleeping on the ground. And really, where else have well over 90% of those who ever lived, slept?

Now at the risk of falsifying things, I wish to be clear: the Fathers were not Paleo. They gave up things that are part of the normal course of human nature, such as marriage. They were often voluntarily emaciated, and what at least some of them ate was only bread. They did not eat meat (excluding fish, seafood, etc., and that not very often). They kept vigil all night, or some of them did, and they believed that one to two hours of sleep at night were sufficient. They came from an agrarian society rather than Paleo, and they did nothing to steer pilgrims in a more Paleo direction. But I would make a few comments on this:

- First, monastic saints transgressed the working of natural order; as an extension of things mentioned, they walked in fire unharmed and walked on water. The monastic discipline that God used to purify them was not, as Paleo aims for, the ordinary working of nature. It is something altogether higher, and *Nourishing Traditions*, which overall advocates a return to some kind of agrarian diet, a kind of half-

Paleo perspective which is still much better than what most of the West eats, clearly advocates eating meat but has a rather parenthetical section in which she says that there are some people in Western tradition who are beyond vegetarian; she cites a Western saint as being among well-documented cases of saints who lived on the Eucharist alone. And she does not in any way criticize such people, but she says that most of us are married and are playing a different game. She's willing to allow a place for monastics who live on a cup of lentils a week or what have you, but says that that is not us. And this is compatible with the observation that canonized saints represent spiritual athletes, not the baseline of what is expected of ordinary Orthodox Christians. St. John Climacus's *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* addresses married people living in the world with a parenthetical two or three sentences; the whole book may be recognized as profitable reading by many married Orthodox Christians, but even if individual Orthodox Christians are called to be ascetics to *some* degree, monastic sainthood is in a league of its own.

- Moving from discussion of Paleo to discussion of God himself, God is transcendent, and God is a gamechanger. St. John Chrysostom said of saints,

"Sumptuous and splendid entertainers give frequent and constant entertainments, alike to display their own wealth, and to show goodwill to their acquaintance. So also the grace of the Spirit, affording us a proof of his own power,

and displaying much good-will towards the friends of God, sets before us successively and constantly the tables of the martyrs. Lately, for instance, a maiden quite young, and unmarried, the blessed martyr Pelagia, entertained us, with much joy. To-day again, this blessed and noble martyr Ignatius has succeeded to her feast. The persons are different: The table is one. The wrestlings are varied: The crown is one. The contests are manifold: The prize is the same."

And God works with people where they are, and is concerned with much higher stakes than whether our diet provides optimum energy. For the Kingdom of God is not food and drink, said St. Paul in another context. We may be concerned about diet and exercise, and indeed fast food and no exercise program are traumatic to the human person. We need to eat *something*, and perhaps there is no better option today than a neo-Paleo diet. Those of us who live sedentary lives are probably better off if we deliberately exercise, and perhaps there is no better exercise program than a neo-Paleo exercise program. *But I've written this work with a sense that I've pulled things God does care about into something he doesn't really care about.* The pseudomorphosis God seems to be chiefly concerned about is the descent into false gods; one of Fr. Seraphim (Rose)'s camp, well acquainted with Chinese antiquities, said that China had degenerated from monotheism into polytheism in its oldest records, the same was apparently happening in Egypt in its oldest records,

and was stopped in the nation of Israel by a stream of prophets calling Israel to turn back from the worship of false gods. We would expect the Lord to be born in a great palace, or else a hospital; he was in fact born in a feeding trough used to feed grain to domesticated animals in agrarian society, and he took the flesh of an agrarian society: his parables spoke of a sower spreading seed across different ground, for instance. He never told anyone to live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, or a neo-hunter-gatherer lifestyle. His longest time recorded in the wilderness was spent fasting for 40 days. And of the Forerunner and Baptist John, who did live as a hunter-gatherer, eating insects and wild honey, who will sit at the left hand of Christ when he returns in glory (the right hand being given to the Mother of God), St. John never said, "Repent, for a hunter-gatherer lifestyle is available," because he was concerned with something much graver. And really, if we are to be at all concerned with our physical diet, we should be more concerned with our spiritual diet—and how it is to be brought to confession as best we can, as a sewer.

- C.S. Lewis wrote, in *The Screwtape Letters*:

What we [devils] want, if men become Christians at all, is to keep them in the state of mind I call 'Christianity And'. You know—Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology, Christianity and the New Order, Christianity and Faith Healing, Christianity and Psychical Research,

Christianity and Vegetarianism, Christianity
and Spelling Reform.

Or Orthodoxy and neo-Paleo. If an Orthodox Christian is to adopt neo-Paleo practices, there are practically two options available: to adopt a 'Christianity And', or to recognize the uncomfortable truths that extraordinarily few saints lived a hunter-gatherer life, and neither the hunter-gatherers nor anyone else among the saints seem to suggest that we would be better cognizant of our hunter-gatherer roots. The *Philokalia* shows acute concern, wisdom, and perception for spiritual struggle, and really does treat heights. While there is some argument that it is better to be a hermit than in a monastery, the classic does not come within a hundred miles of observing that a hermit is closer to hunter-gatherer roots: arguably a hermit is farther because besides a different diet (in both cases intended for emaciation), the hermit lived at least superficially alone while a coenobetic monastery represents a community. And I have seen enough 'Orthodoxy And's to be wary: Orthodoxy and Arthurian Legends, 'Orthodoxy and Creation Care', and in one *extreme* case 'Orthodoxy and "White Nationalism"'. In every case the 'And Something Else' has been seen to 'dovetail' with Orthodoxy. There are definite points of contact; the idea of fasting and progressively relieving yourself of attachment to modern conveniences is a proper Orthodox concept, as is the idea that the tortoise wins the race. And there was one saint who said of the apocalyptic future that men would be given

'wisdom' so that a man could swim at the bottom of the sea like a fish, or so that a man could speak at one point of the globe and

- be heard on the other side. But Orthodoxy has points of contact with almost anything, although I would be more reserved in claiming a 'dovetail'. Perhaps the best I can say for neo-Paleo is that by way of compensation for an extreme pseudomorphosis, and I do believe the term is fully warranted here, God has given us the compensation of diets and artificial exercise programs that retrieve *some*, but far from all, of the benefits of functioning as humans were meant to function, things that were back burner concerns in God's dealings with a society in merely agrarian pseudomorphosis. (And then step from there to repenting and recognizing that the Kingdom of God draws near, and we have a true sewer to bring to confession.)

We were made for a very specific purpose. God became Man that Man might become God. If you want to be an Orthodox Luddite or an Orthodox neo-Paleo, relax your grip on being a Luddite, or neo-Paleo, and tighten your grip on being Orthodox.

That Hideous Impotence

Thimble even maintained that a good critic, by his sensibility alone, could detect between the traces head-knowledge and heart-knowledge had left on literature. “What common measure is there between IT hackers with their obscure and esoteric interests, their unworldly collections of skills that ordinary mortals scarcely even hear of, their attendant servers and daemons, and figures like the saints, who seem to produce results simply by trusting and following God?” Heart-knowledge and head-knowledge differ profoundly; heart-knowledge (though this is doubtful) may be as difficult to acquire; it is certainly a better exercise of the whole person.

The NASTY (the NASTY Association for Scientism's and Transhumanism's Y-combinator) had, in a spirit of jest, one member occasionally call another member “more evil than Satan himself.” But in fact the many members fitting into NASTY had one-by-one filled in pieces: now by FaecesBook, now by the Twits' Crowd, now by dark Goggles, now by MicroSith, now by Forbidden Fruit, all offering such

treasures that in countries as poor as Africa, No Such Agency would know not only every web search and every text, but to any who could obtain a smartphone and a watch, every step, every breath, every heartbeat.

As time passed on, the technological dragnet only drew tighter. And people naturally think that all of this is the creative genius of man.

But there was always, always individual human freedom.

“It is *rather* horrible. The newer technologies together represent something like a secularized occult. I mean even our time (we come at the extreme tail end of it), though you could still use that sort of technology innocently, you can't do it safely. These things aren't bad in themselves, but they are already bad for us. They sort of withered the person who dealt with them. On purpose. They couldn't be adopted by the masses if they couldn't. People of our time are withered. Some millennials are quite pious and humble and all that, but something has been taken out of them. Take away their gadgets for a day and they will show a quietness that is just a little deadly, like the quiet of a gutted building. It's the result of having our minds laid open to something that broadens the environment.

“Orthodoxy is a last and greatest view of an old order in which matter and spirit are, for a modern point of view, confused. For some saints every operation on Nature is a kind of personal contact, like coaxing a child or stroking one's horse. Now we have the modern man to whom Nature is something dead—a machine to be worked, and taken to

bits if it won't work the way he pleases, and postmodern varieties with their 'spirituality' which drives ever much deeper the chasm separating the sacred from the secular. The Orthodox Church, with her saints, represent what we've got to get back to do and an ever-open door. Did you know that Orthodox are all forbidden to pursue systematic theology?"

But Redemption already knew, in fact, that there was Eldilic energy and Eldilic knowledge behind the NASTY. It was, of course, another question whether the human members knew of the dark powers who were their real organisers. And in the long run this question was not perhaps important. As Ransom himself had said more than once, "Whether they know it or whether they don't, much the same sort of things are going to happen. It's not a question of how the human members of NASTY will act—the Dark-Eldils will see to that—but of how they will think about their actions."

For Redemption already knew of the constant stings of temptation come to all of us and try to entice us to believe ideas we think our own and embrace to our slow spiritual depth. The *Philokalia*, second only to the Bible among Orthodox classics in recent history, was a manual on the spiritual life that kept returning to the activities and operations of demons. Its authors know well enough about the continuing warfare of thoughts to desire this or that that have been assaulting us for the ages, and demonic temptations occur not only to some rare specialty of people deeply enmeshed in e.g. the occult. (And we are briefly told,

“Men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them.”) Demonic possession through occult or other means is of course a worse problem, but whether we like it or not a great deal of what we think of as *our* thoughts and *our* desires are stings of demons attacking us. As one student had approached Redemption and said, with great excitement, “I’ve just had a completely new idea,” Ransom answered, “I am very excited for you and for your having this *new* idea. However, this idea was had before by Such-and-such particular monk in the fourth century, and furthermore he is still wrong.”

Redemption opened *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* and called out:

A HYMN TO ARROGANCE.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
“There be no war in Heaven,
Not now, at very least,
And not ere were created,
The royal race of mankind.
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
The Archangel Saint Michael,
Commander of the bodiless hosts,
Said but his name, “Michael,”
Which is, being interpreted,
“Who is like God?”
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,

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

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

And Redemption agreed. He said, "Faecesbook's old-school database-like limit on specifying one's religion are constricted. The facilities are sorely lacking to give one's religion as, "*Alter Christus*: "Follower of Jesus" means "Another Christ!""

Thimble asked, “And what of the Arthurian legends?”

Redemption said, “What about them?”

Thimble said, “Please, I want to hear.”

Redemption said, “Well, one can say that there is no option to *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor to *acquire* it. The only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail. But that is on the periphery.”

iPun said, “I’m no literary critic, nor do I know about the Holy Grail, but it sounds an awful lot to me like you’re holding out on us for an answer.”

Redemption said, “Perhaps the most damning remark about medieval literature is that of all that one of the greatest literary legacies, and the only one on ordinary non-medievalists’ radar, is that of the Arthurian legends.”

Thimble said, “Could you be a little more concrete?”

Redemption said, “Take the figure of Merlin. His name, rendered as ‘Myrddhin’ in Lawhead’s account, was changed to ‘Merlin’ in the Brut in order not to sound like a French swear-word, today ‘merde.’ The Brut, formally the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, is a twelfth-century example of history as society would like it to be, like some conspiracy theory works today, which is to say that is pseudo-history that today would ordinarily be introduced as fiction, with masterful storytelling but no connection to actual history. Also, the legends were importantly no longer offered in Celtic language, but Latin that could quickly spread through Europe. The legends spread like wildfire through Europe even centuries later, and interestingly spread in the vernacular, possibly carried by the troubadours who would inspire the name of Francis of Assisi.

“But about Merlin specifically. There have been efforts to Christianize him, and not just in recent history: Robert

de Boron represents a medieval teller of Arthurian tales who tried to anchor them to Christian doctrine. In Sir Thomas Mallory, the hinge between the medieval flourishing and almost all subsequent English retellings of the legend, Merlin is not called a 'wizard,' but a 'prophet.' There is in the medieval legends pseudo-Christian working out of pseudo-doctrine that the Devil was to have a son by an almost-perfect virgin who had slipped in her prayers but once, and he would be something like an incarnate Anti-Christ, but Christians fortunately got wind of this and said many powerful prayers, to the effect that Merlin was born the Devil's son, but without the Devil's evil, so someone who commanded the Devil's power was yet good and Christian. And the same is to be said of C.S. Lewis, in whom we read:

“And where would Merlin be?”

“Yes. He's the really interesting figure. Did the whole thing fail because he died so soon? Has it ever struck you what an odd creation Merlin is? He's not evil: yet he's a magician. He is obviously a druid: yet he knows all about the Grail. He's 'the devil's son': but then Layamon goes out of his way to tell you that the kind of being who fathered Merlin needn't have been bad after all. You remember: “There dwell in the sky many kinds of wights. Some of them are good, and some work evil.”

“It is rather puzzling. I hadn't thought of it before.”

“I often wonder,” said Dr. Dimble, “whether Merlin doesn't represent the last trace of something the later tradition has quite forgotten about—something that became impossible when the only

people in touch with the supernatural were either white or black, either priests or sorcerors.

“Perhaps like no other character in literature, C.S. Lewis’s Merlin is ‘the really interesting figure.’ He rivets all attention on himself, and for good reason. The standard distinction between flat and rounded characters in literature has said to be that a rounded character believably surprises the reader. Merlin comes remarkably close to delivering nothing *but* believable surprises.

“And Lewis has Merlin, and reference to being the Devil’s son; the opening prehistory of the main story has a figure say, ‘Marry, sirs, if Merlin who was the Devil’s son was a true King’s man as ever ate bread, is it not a shame that you, being but the sons of bitches, must be rebels and regicides?’, but even Amazon reviewers have asked why Lewis has Merlin come if he’s not allowed to do anything. And indeed one monumental goal when the Pendragon speaks with him is to shut down every single service Merlin offers to do for him (and finally corner him into one terrifying service).”

Thimble said, “Well and done, but does that one character tarnish into oblivion the entirety of the encyclopedia’s worth of Arthurian legends that have been written?”

Redemption paused, and said, “Now that you mention it, I think it does in a much more direct way than I expected.”

Thimble said, “How’s that?”

Redemption said, “The Arthurian legends represent a never-never land to us, but it shows historical insensitivity to assume that they were realistic fiction to the Brut’s first

audience, or Chrétien de Troyes, or Sir Thomas Mallory. The Arthurian legends were a never-neverland when the ink on those pages was still wet: a land in which anything can happen, at least *anything* wondrous or supernatural. Commerce never sullies the pages, and one of very few peasants to get a physical description has a striking description that seems to describe a pachyderm more than any human. The dates for Arthurian legends to spread through Europe like wildfire are twelfth century and following, but the dates given as ostensible historical references for the original events are fifth or sixth century. In other words, the medievals telling the legends lived about as far after Arthur's supposed time as we are after them. There are a similar number of centuries in between.

“Furthermore, you get comments, in relation to chivalry and courtly love, that ‘People don't really love nowadays, not like they loved then,’ which is a perfect recipe for the same thing as you get today in the Orthodox Church with a nuclear family all wearing cassocks like monks and priests, and having an Irish last name. It's an attempt to re-create a past that never existed, and that is a gateway drug not just to silliness but trouble.”

Thimble said, “Yes, but are stories about never-never land really as bad as a baptized Merlin?”

Redemption said, “I'm trying to think of a pleasant analogy. An unpleasant analogy might be to ask if soft porn is really as bad as hard porn. We ought ideally steer clear of both.

“In the desert, monks were perennially warned of the danger of escapism. When escape seems like something we need, it is a temptation, and the proper way of dealing with it is to keep on praying. Escape and the occult both have a

sense that we know better than God what circumstances we should be in, and not see the here and now as a gift from God the Father. The whole temptation is a hydra. Whatever else Muslims have wrong, there is a very good reason why, historically, Muslim science may have been very good at observation, but very bad at entertaining competing theories: the basic objection is, in Christian terms, 'How can you want anything but what God in his Sovereignty has willed?' And this repugnance stems from something Western Christianity has lost in its transition to modernity.

"And this is why Lewis's distinction between 'fairy magic', meaning fairy-tale magic, which he saw as harmless and most often supplying plot devices, and 'real magic', meaning realistic depiction of occult practice, which he condemned, does not hold well enough. Of course the distinction is to be made, but when one reads the *Chronicles of Narnia* and reads Aslan saying, '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,' one wants to be in Narnia in escape and not to set down Narnia to experience real joy. To wish to be in Narnia represents the same passion, in the classical sense, as to wish to be Merlin.

"And if a tree may be judged by its fruit, the many fantasy authors who have followed Lewis in writing medieval fantasy have scarcely understood medieval history or been Christians, writing for Christian edification. Even as far as escape goes, Aslan sends all the children back from Narnia to our world, and says that trips to Narnia are only appropriate up to a certain age. In some subsequent works, the traveler from our world never returns: he remains in escape."

Thimble asked, "So we're best off leaving the Arthurian legends, and Merlin, with the medieval world?"

Redemption said, "I have trouble answering that question Aye or Nay."

Thimble asked, "Why? You see shades of grey?"

Redemption said, "No. I don't believe we've left the medieval world."

Thimble asked, "How's that?"

Redemption said, "I don't believe we've left the medieval world. I believe we've delved deeper into it than any figure who died before modern or postmodern history. If you know anything about how the katana—the sword that was called the soul of the samurai—is made, you would know that a smith makes a particular iron block, then stretches it and folds it in on itself, then that is hammered until it is stretched out, then folded in on itself, and the process is repeated many, many times. When the manifold steel is shaped into a sword, the blade is sharp as a razor, incredibly strong, and will last for ages, perhaps for centuries. The medieval West, isolated from the Greek Fathers, then later on infatuated with "the Philosopher" Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas's own great harm, and with its stream of Renaissances, represents that block of steel stretched out and folded in on itself. The chain continues for more than the more spectacular eccentricities to be found in the postmodern world. But the future sword blade stretched out and folding in on itself is a process of and by the medieval world, and a process that will perhaps continue until that terrible day when the Lord comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead—and may help pave the way for it!"

iPun said, "Do you not make allowances for greater

ignorance in the past?”

Redemption said, “I do not make any allowance for greater ignorance in the past, although allowances for *different* ignorance in the past are more negotiable. You, personally, would do well to make allowances for greater ignorance in the *present*.”

iPun said, “Do you not deny that we live in the ongoing wake of an explosion of knowledge in the sciences?”

Redemption said, “Knowledge can be ignorance. There has been a shift, as the steel has folded in on itself, of moving from heart-knowledge, knowledge of the whole person, to head-knowledge, to a knowledge that in its proper use serves as a moon to the sun of heart-knowledge. And in that sense we have gone from seeing by sunlight to being expert at seeing by moonlight. In the heyday of Arthurian legends, Rome warned its members about “idle romances,” and even someone as foundational as Chrétien de Troyes has a privileged woman reading a romance on top of a sweatshop. As far as an explosion goes, we are spiritual heirs to the wreckage of a bomb exploding, so that even in Africa it is common to have multiple mobile devices per house. Lewis wrote of the press as spewing Western venom across the world; we’ve done his press one better, or perhaps many better for that. And the press of his day did not match the vile content on the web, nor accept as normal the intrusion of unsolicited porn, except that today you need a pill to make love.

“It is as if you stopped using the light of the sun himself, and would only see by the light of the moon, and as events unfolded you regained the natural human ability to see truly but imperfectly by the light of moon and star, and then you invented night vision systems that let you see by infrared

indication of heat, or the little bit of green light that takes the lion share of natural light by night, and then to your pride combined them to make one cadaverous combination. And in all of this you remain in Plato's cave, and will not step out in the light of the sun, and not only because the people who see by moonlight would call it lunacy if you helped them see by the light of the sun."

Thimble said, "And in the light only of the moon herself, intimacy itself turns artificial."

Redemption said no more.

Gain flipped the page of the book, and read:

...accounts of Satan as God's jester. For all of us do the will of God; that is not the question. The real question is whether we will do God's will as instruments, like Satan and Judas, or Sons, as St. Peter and St. John.

That is why Christians need not fear the Antichrist, even if he is knocking at the door. For Satan will ever remain God's jester, and though an Antichrist be possessed of God's jester or not, to Christians there is no Antichrist and Christ is ever present to those who only "keep their eyes on Jesus." Do you fear not being able to buy and sell if you do not accept the Mark of the Beast on your hand and forehead? Know then that, as is said in the *Philokalia*, a man can live without eating (or drinking) if God so wills? Do not worry that the grace of God which so strengthened the martyrs in ages past need fail if you cannot buy

bread or perhaps water. God is merciful, and no one can use force to stop God from being gracious to you. Remain faithful, that is all. Christians may, in the end, be saved simply because they refused the mark of the beast. Many monastics would have given everything to buy the grace of God at such a light price!

Gain heard footsteps on the floor behind the door, snapped shut the book and turned red, and then slowly opened it again.

Redemption laughed.

The Damned Backswing

Kaine: What do you mean and what is the "damned backswing"?

Vetus: Where to start? Are you familiar with category theory?

Kaine: I have heard the term; explain.

Vetus: Category theory is the name of a branch of mathematics, but on a meta level, so to speak. Algebraists study the things of algebra, and number theorists study the things of number theory—an arrangement that holds almost completely. But category theory studies common patterns in other branches of mathematics, and it is the atypical, rare branch of mathematics that studies all branches of mathematics. And, though this is not to my point exactly, it is abstract and difficult: one list of insults to give to pet languages is that you must understand category theory to write even the simplest of all programs.

The achievements of category theory should ideally be juxtaposed with Bourbaki, the pseudonym of a mathematician or group of mathematicians who tried to systematize all of mathematics. What came out of their efforts is that trying to systematize mathematics is like trying to step on a water balloon and pin it down; mathematicians consider their discipline perhaps the most systematic of disciplines in academia, but the discipline itself cannot be systematized.

But the fact that Bourbaki's work engendered a realization that you cannot completely systematize even the most systematic of disciplines does not mean that there are patterns and trends that one can observe, and the basic insight in category theory is that patterns recur and these patterns are not limited to any one branch of mathematics. Even if it does not represent a total success of doing what Bourbaki tried and failed to do, it is far from a total loss: category theory legitimately observes patterns and trends that transcend the confines of individual subdisciplines in mathematics.

Kaine: So the "damned backswing" is like something from category theory, cutting across disciplines?

Vetus: Yes.

Kaine: And why did you choose the term of a damned backswing?

Vetus: Let me comment on something first. C.S. Lewis, in a footnote in *Mere Christianity*, says that some people complained about his light swearing in referring to certain ideas as "damned nonsense." And he explained that he did not intend to lightly swear at all; he meant that the ideas were incoherent and nonsense, and they and anyone who believed in them were damned or accursed. And I do not intend to swear lightly either; I intend to use the term "damned" in its proper sense. Instead there is a recurring trend, where some seemingly good things have quite the nasty backswing.

Kaine: And what would an example be?

Vetus: In the U.S., starting in the 1950's there was an incredibly high standard of living; everything seemed to be getting better all the time. And now we are being cut by the backswing: the former great economic prosperity, and the present great and increasing economic meltdown, are cut from the same cloth; they are connected. There was a time of bait, and we sprung for it and are now experiencing the damned backswing.

Kaine: So the damned backswing begins with bait of sorts, and ends in misery? In the loss of much more than the former gain? Do you also mean like addiction to alcohol or street drugs?

Vetus: Yes, indeed; for a while drinking all the time seems an effective way to solve problems. But that is not the

last word. The same goes from rationalism to any number of things.

Kaine: Do you see postmodern trends as the backswing of modern rationalism?

Vetus: All that and less.

Kaine: What do you mean by "and less"?

Vetus: The damned backswing did not start with Derrida. The understanding of "reason" that was held before the Enlightenment was a multifaceted thing that meant much more than logic; even as Reason was enthroned (or an actress/prostitute), Reason was pared down to a hollowed-out husk of what reason encompassed in the West before then. It would be like celebrating "cars", but making it clear that when the rubber hits the road, the truly essential part of "a set of wheels" is the *wheel*—and enthroning the wheel while quietly, deftly stripping away the rest of the car, including not just the frame but engine, and seats. The damned backswing of rationalism was already at work in the Enlightenment stripping and enthroning reason. And the damned backswing was already at work in economic boom times in the West, saying that yes, indeed, man *can* live by bread alone.

And perhaps the strongest and most visible facet of the damned backswing occurs in technology. There are other areas: a country erected on freedoms moves towards despotism, just as Plato said in his list of

governments, moving from the best to the worst. But in technology, we seem to be able to be so much more, but the matrix of technology we live in is, among other things, a surveillance system, and something we are dependent on, so that we are vulnerable if someone decides to shut things off. Man does not live by bread alone, but it is better for a man to try to live by bread alone than live by SecondWife alone, or any or all the array of technologies and gadgetry. The new reality man has created does not compare to the God-given reality we have spurned to embrace the new, and some have said that the end will come when we no longer make paths to our neighbors because we are entirely engrossed in technology and gadgetry.

Kaine: And are there other areas?

Vetus: There are other areas; but I would rather not belabor the point. Does this make sense?

Kaine: Yes, but may I say something strange?

Vetus: Yes.

Kaine: I believe in the damned backswing, and in full.

Vetus: You're not telling me something.

Kaine: I believe in the damned backswing, but I do not believe that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Vetus: What? Do you mean that you partly believe in the

damned backswing, and partly not? Do you believe in the damned backswing "is true, from a certain point of view"?

Kaine: I understand your concern but I reject the practice of agreeing with everyone to make them feel better. If I believed in the damned backswing up to a point, I would call it such.

Vetus: How do you believe it, if you reject that the fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge?

Kaine: Let me ask: do Calvinists believe in the Sovereignty of God?

Vetus: Is the Pope Catholic? (I mean besides John XXIII and His Unholiness Francis.)

Kaine: Let me suggest that the Reformed view of Divine Sovereignty could go further than it actually does.

Vetus: How? They are the most adamant advocates of Divine Sovereignty, and write books like *No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism*.

Kaine: There's an awfully strong clue in the title.

Vetus: That the author believes so strongly in the Divine Sovereignty that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom?

Kaine: Not quite.

Vetus: Then what is the clue? I don't want to guess.

Kaine: The clue is that the author believes in the Divine Sovereignty so weakly that he cannot countenance creaturely freedom, and that if there is one iota of creaturely freedom, there is not one iota of Divine Sovereignty.

His is a fragile Divine Sovereignty, when in actual fact God's Sovereignty is absolute, with the last word after every exercise of creaturely freedom. There is no exercise of freedom you can make that will impede the exercise of the Divine Sovereignty.

Vetus: I could sin. In fact, I *do* sin, and I keep on sinning.

Kaine: Yes, but God is still Sovereign and can have the last word where there is sin. To get back to Lewis for a second, "All of us, either willingly or unwillingly, do the will of God: Satan and Judas as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons." The Divine Sovereignty is the Alpha and the Omega, the Founder of the beginning, and works in and through all: "even Gollum may have something yet to do."

Vetus: But what?

Kaine: "But what?", you ask?

For starters, there is Christmas. Good slips in unnoticed. God slips in unnoticed. True, it will become one of the most celebrated holidays in the Western world, and true, the Western world will

undertake the nonsensical task of keeping a warm, fuzzy Christmas without Christ or Christmas mentioned once. But us lay aside both Christian bloggers speaking in defense of a secularized Christmas, and bloggers telling retailers, "You need Christmas, but Christmas doesn't need you." You speak of the damned backswing coming from an unexpected place; this is nothing next to God slipping in unnoticed.

There will be a time when God will be noticed by all. At the first Christmas, angel hosts announced good news to a few shepherds. When Christ returns, he will be seen by all, riding on the clouds with rank upon rank of angels. At the first Christmas, a lone star heralded it to the Magi. When he returns, the sky will recede as a vanishing scroll. At the first Christmas, a few knees bowed. When he returns, every knee will bow. And the seed for this victory is planted in Christmas.

And the same seeds of glory are quietly planted in our lives. You are not wrong to see the damned backswing and see that it is real: but one would be wrong to see it and think it is most real. Open one eye, and you may see the damned backswing at work. Open both eyes wide, and you may see God at work, changing the game.

And God will work a new thing in you. Not, perhaps, by taking you out of your sufferings or other things that you may pray for; that is at his good pleasure.

But you have heard the saying, "We want God to change our circumstances. God wants to use our circumstances to change us." Whole worlds open up with forgiveness, or repentance, or any virtue. If you are moulded as clay in the potter's hands, unsought goods come along the way. The best things in life are free, and what is hard to understand is that this is not just a friend's smile, but suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. It was spiritual eyes wide open that left the apostles rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer shame [and violence] for Christ's name. And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." This newness begins here and now, and it comes when in circumstances we would not choose God works to give us a larger share in the real world. We enter a larger world, or rather we become larger ourselves and more able to take in God's reality. And all of this is like the first Christmas, a new thing and unexpected. We are summoned and do not dare disobey: Sing unto the LORD a new song; sing unto the LORD all the earth. And it is this whole world with angels, butterflies, the Church, dandy lions, energetic work, friends, family, and forgiveness, the Gospel, holiness, the I that God has made, jewels, kairos, love, mothers, newborn babes, ostriches, preaching, repentance from sins, singing, technology, unquestioning obedience, variety, wit and wisdom, xylophones, youth and age, and zebras.

The damned backswing is only a weak parody of the

power of God the Gamechanger.

"Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request to Orthodox Clergy

Some time ago, a pastor contacted me and asked permission to quote one of my poems. We've been in contact at least occasionally, and he sent me an email newsletter that left me asking him for permission to quote.

Let me cite the article in full (*©2014 Pastor Vince Homan, used by very gracious permission*):

When there are many words, sin is unavoidable, but the one who controls his lips is wise. Proverbs 10:19

I recently violated a longstanding position I have held; to avoid all further interaction with social media, particularly Facebook. It wasn't necessarily because of any moral high ground; it was more because I had already mastered e-mail and was satisfied with my online accomplishments. In addition, I didn't have any

additional time or interest to keep up with pithy little sayings, videos, cartoons, social life, or even cute kiddie pictures. But now I am happily in the fold of Facebook users (particularly if there is a picture of one of my grandbabies on it). In addition, it has allowed me to discover that there are literally dozens of people who are just waiting to be my friends. However, the real reason I'm on Facebook is work related. Thanks to the good work done by a few of our church members; both of our churches have excellent Facebook pages. In order to access those pages, I needed an account, so —here I am. And though all seems well with the world of Facebook, I am discovering that it is not always the case. For all the "warm fuzzies," and catching up with friends and family it offers ... there is also a dark side.

At a recent continuing education event I attended, the speaker presented some dire consequences to uninhibited use of social media. He reported that social media had replaced money as the number one contributor to marriage problems. He said it wasn't so much affairs that online relationships led to; rather it was the persistent flirting that broke down barriers and hedges, which once protected the marriage. Such interaction often led to a downward spiral, corrupting and compromising the marriage vow. One in five divorces involves the social networking site Facebook, according to a new survey by the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers. A staggering 80% of divorce lawyers have also reported a spike in the number of cases that use social media for evidence of cheating, with Facebook by far the biggest offender. Flirty messages and and photographs found on Facebook are

increasingly being cited as proof of unreasonable behavior or irreconcilable differences. Many cases revolve around social media users who get back in touch with old flames they hadn't heard from in many years.

PBS recently hosted a webinar, *This Emotional Life*, about the internet's impact on relationship and marriage.[i] One of the panelists, Theresa Bochar, explored the issue a bit farther in an article originally published on PsychCentral.com. She said that after reading hundreds of comments and emails from people who have been involved in online relationships or emotional affairs as well as the responses on several discussion boards, she concluded that while the internet and social media *can* foster intimacy in a marriage, it seems to do more harm than good. She reported that an astounding 90% of opposite-sex online relationships were damaging to the marriage. Facebook affairs are threatening healthy couples too.

"I have suggested to myself to write a thank you note to the inventors of Facebook and Myspace because they have been responsible for a significant percentage of my income," says marriage counselor Dr. Dennis Boike. He's not kidding. "I'm having people say I never would have expected me to do this. It's in the privacy of my computer. I'm not going out anywhere, I'm not dressing for it, I'm not smelling of another's perfume. There are no tell-tale signs except my computer record." But a new study suggests Facebook can also help disconnect you from your better half. THE site, which boasts more than 350 million active users, is mentioned in over 20% of

divorce petitions, according to Divorce-Online.

Prominent Houston divorce attorney Bucky Allshouse can understand why. "It's really kind of shocking what people put on Facebook," says Allshouse. Perhaps it's not so shocking that the social networking site can essentially pour kerosene on "old flames." Most online relationships start out benign: an email from a person you knew in college, friending an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend on Facebook (as suggested by Facebook: "people you might know"), getting to know a co-worker or acquaintance better online. But the relationship can take a dangerous turn very quickly if you're not careful and even more easily if you are doing most of the talking behind a computer.

We have no non-verbals with which to interpret people's conversation when we communicate online. What we say can be misinterpreted and come off in a way we don't intend. Or worse, we purposely allow our conversation to drift into an unhealthy area, where we put out "feelers" to see if the person we are communicating with will do the same. We will text things to people that would make us blush if we said them in person. All too often the end result is flirting, compromising our values, and allowing the secrecy of social media to sweep us off our feet and into a quagmire of social dysfunction. This is not a victimless choice. Many times, inappropriate conversations through social media lead to great pain with children, spouses, parents, and friends.

One such instance occurred when Jonathan found Sharon on Facebook, 20 years after he dumped her one week after their high school prom. She had never

married, while he had and was also the father of two teenagers. During months of emailing and texting, Sharon proved a sympathetic listener to his sense of isolation and loneliness within his own marriage. He found they could talk easily, picking up with the friendship they had had years before. They shared feelings they had never shared with others. After a few months, they decided to cross a few states and meet half way. Then, they talked of marriage. Shortly after, Jonathan went through with his divorce and months later he and Sharon married. Not surprisingly, and after only four months, they divorced. What happened? Fantasy was hit hard by reality. They went into a marriage without really spending time to know each other as they are today. Their romance was fueled by their history (as 18-year-olds) not their adult present. The romantic idea of reconnecting with an old lover, at a time Jonathan was unhappy in his marriage, was a recipe for danger.

In talking about it later, Jonathan realized he had not intended to start up a romance; he hadn't intended to leave his marriage in the first place. As he and Sharon shared feelings, he felt more cared for by her than by his wife. When asked who raised the issue of marriage, he wasn't sure. "Perhaps she pushed it, but I may have been just been musing something like, 'Wouldn't it have been great if we got married,' and that led her to talk about marriage. I wonder if I led her on. Did I promise more than I had realized and then feel in love with my own fantasy?"[ii]

When we cross barriers that were intended to keep us safely within the parameters of our marriage vows,

we start in internal conflict—one that attacks our emotional and mental center. Conversations with people of the opposite sex can lead to flirtations. Flirtations can lead to imaginations which lead to fixations ... and there is a fine line between fixation and passion. Promiscuity is rarely a random act. It is pre-meditated. Something triggers our thoughts. And that something *can* be social media.

Christians must be wary of intimate conversations with people of the opposite sex; it is a trap that too many good people have been caught in. Paul wrote: "We are casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). It is good advice; cast down imaginations ... take every thought captive, because it is often out of our imaginations and thoughts that bad choices are born. Jesus said something similar. Speaking to the disciples he warned, "But the things that come out of a person's mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matthew 15:18-19). The battleground is not the computer or cell phone; it is the heart and the mind. But secretive messaging avenues like social media offers can help plant the seed for a battle that good people lose every day.

Dr. Karen Gail Lewis, a marriage and family therapist of 39 years and author of numerous relationship books, offers these social networking guidelines for married couples.

1. **Be clear about your agenda in contacting the other person.**
2. **Limit the frequency of your time online.** This sets a good boundary around the social networking contact.
3. **Don't talk intimately.** By not sharing intimacies with your correspondence, you reduce the chance of sending a message that you want a more intimate relationship.
4. **Let your spouse know with whom you are contacting.** This openness makes it clear you have nothing to hide. (I would add, especially so if you are contacting a person of the opposite sex).[iii].
5. **Share your outgoing and received emails/texts with your spouse.** Sharing communications removes any chance for jealousy or misunderstandings (I would add, share passwords with your spouse; give them full access to your social media sites).[iv].
6. **Do not meet in person unless your spouse is with you.** Meeting up with old friends with your spouse by your side is a reminder that you two are a team and removes sending mixed messages to your former lover. This also reinforces the importance of fixing your marriage before playing with the flames of

old flames.[v].

Jesus taught us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves (Matthew 10:16). Social media is a place that Scripture applies. I believe in the sanctity of marriage. I believe a person places their personal integrity and honor on the line in the marriage vow more than anything else in their life. And I believe marriage is under attack from multiple directions. I have officiated at many young couples weddings. I spend time with each one, warning them of the potential pitfalls and dangers; encouraging them to make their marriage a priority each day. Because I know the reality; many of the ones I marry won't make it. It's not because they are bad people or people of no character; but they get *caught* in a trap, and they can't seem to find a way out. And I also know most of them deeply regret their decisions after the fallout of their choices turn to consequences.

Social media can be a wonderful thing. I love keeping in touch with family and looking at pictures of the grandbabies. Now our churches are using social media to share the gospel. But Christians should be wary of the potential dangers. We must keep up our barriers at all times. James warned, "Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters" (James 1:14-16). Indeed, we must not be misled, rather be guided by the protective barriers God has placed around us; especially so if we are married. We must

watch our words carefully and keep our thoughts captive. The sanctity of our marriage vow demands it.

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Vince

[i]
<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/blogs/does-internet-promote-or-damage-marriage>

[ii] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

[iii] Parenthetical mine

[iv] Parenthetical mine

[v] <http://www.hitchedmag.com/article.php?id=903>

This article left me *reeling*.

In part, I wondered if my collection in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* as it then existed was simply wrong. Or if someone might rightly say to me, "What you give in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is helpful up to a point, at least for someone with a similar background to yours. However, regular people need much more concrete guidance." What struck me very concretely about Pastor Vince's article is that it gave very practical advice on how married people can appropriately handle Facebook.

The article reminded me of remarks I'd seen by people interested in making computers that people can actually use

that the Apple Macintosh was the first computer worth criticizing. Perhaps some detail of the guidance in the article above *could* be criticized: perhaps much of it *should* be criticized: but it may be the first article I've seen on the topic that was *worth* criticizing.

The concept of "social antibodies": it's not just Facebook

Paul Graham's "The Acceleration of Addictiveness" is worth reading in full. (It's also worth *quoting* in full, but he's asked nicely that people link to it instead of reposting, which is a fair request. So I am linking to it even though I'd prefer to reproduce the whole article.)

"The Acceleration of Addictiveness" talks about a little bit bigger picture about things that are addictive. Though he mentions Facebook as something that's even more addictive than television, he's clear that the big picture is more than addictive little Facebook. Graham talks about a concept of "social antibodies" which I think is incredibly useful.

Decades ago, smoking cut through the US like a hot knife through butter. But, while smoking is still dangerous and there still continue to be new smokers, we no longer have glamour shots of celebrities holding cigarettes in some flashy, sophisticated, classy pose. Smoking is no longer "sexy;" over the past 20 years it has been seen as seedy, and "smoker" is not exacty the kindest thing to call someone. (I remember one friend commenting that he could think of a number of terms more polite than "smoker," none of which were appropriate to the present company.) *As a society, the US has developed social antibodies to smoking now.*

There are many things that we need "social antibodies"

for, and we keep developing new technologies, Facebook included, that need social antibodies. The six prescriptions in the quoted articles are essentially social antibodies for how to use Facebook without jeopardizing your marriage. They may seem harsh and excessively cautious, but I submit that they are easier to go through than divorce. *Much easier. A piece of cake!* And I quote Pastor Vince's article because it's something we need more of.

A helpful parallel to technology: Wine as an example

Simply not drinking alcoholic beverages is an option that I respect more as I think about it, but for the sake of this discussion, I will leave it on the side. I am interested in helpful parallels for "social antibodies" in moderation and restraint in using technology, and as much as I may respect people who do not drink, that option is not as interesting for my investigation. This is especially true because people living in my society assume that you are *not* abstaining from every technology that can cause trouble. So with a respectful note about not drinking alcohol at all, I want to look at social antibodies for moderate, temperate, and appropriate use of wine.

Wine and liquor slowly increased in strength in Western Europe, slowly enough that societies had at least the *chance* to build social antibodies. This makes for a marked contrast to escape through hard liquor among Native Americans, where hard liquor blew through decimated nations and peoples like escape through today's street drugs would have blown through a Europe already coping with the combined effects of the bubonic plague and

of barbarian invasions. Perhaps there are genetic differences affecting Native Americans and alcohol. A Native American friend told me that Native American blood can't really cope with sugar, essentially unknown in Native American lands apart from some real exceptions like maple syrup. And lots of alcohol is worse than lots of sugar, even if some of us wince at the level of sugar and/or corn syrup in the main US industrial diet. (Even those of us not of Native American blood would do well to restrict our consumption of artificially concocted sugars.) But aside from the genetic question, introducing 80 proof whiskey to societies that did not know how to cope with beer would have been rough enough even if there were no genetic questions and no major external stresses on the societies. If there was something of a stereotype about Native Americans and whiskey, maybe part of that is because hard liquor that had been developed over centuries in the West appeared instantaneously, under singularly unfortunate conditions, in societies that had not even the social antibodies to cope with even the weaker of beers.

I cite St. Cyril of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book Two, Chapter II: On Drinking as a model for approaching alcohol (and, by extension, a serious reference point in understanding moderate use of technology), with some reservations. The translation I link to is obscure and archaic, and if you can get past that, the individual prescriptions are the sort that would only be all kept (or, for that matter, mostly kept) by the sort of people who are filled with pride that they observe ancient canons more strictly than any canonical bishop. In other words, *don't* try these directions at home unless you know you are in agreement with your priest or spiritual father. But the chapter of *The*

Instructor on wine offers a **priceless** glimpse into real, live social antibodies on how to navigate dangerous waters. This is a live example of the sort of things we need. The book as a whole covers several topics, including clothing and boundaries between men and women, and they could serve as a model for pastoral literature to address the challenges offered to spiritual life today. Not specifically that *online* interactions between men and women **introduce** an element of danger. That element of danger has always been there, and always will be there. But online interactions frame things a little differently. This means that people with social antibodies that would show appropriate caution face-to-face might not recognize that you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online, or might not intuit exactly *how* you have to compensate when dealing with the opposite sex online.

I would like to close this section with a word about wine and why I drink it. The politically incorrect way of putting this point is to say that wine is something which literally and figuratively is not part of Islam. Islam works out, in stark relief, what it means to subtract the Incarnation from Christian faith. It means that not only has the Son of God not become incarnate in Christ, but all the more does God become incarnate in his children. It means that Holy Communion is just a symbol, and wine could absolutely, absolutely *never* become the blood of God. Water is necessary and wine is not, as St. Clement tells us, but the Orthodox Church that regards Islam as a Christian heresy used fermented wine exclusively in the Eucharist, and condemned heretics' use of pure water for the same purpose. And my reason for drinking a little wine is that wine has an elasticity that bears the meaning of Jesus's first

miracle, turning water into even more wine when wine ran out at a wedding where the guests were already pretty drunk, and it bears the meaning of the Holy Mysteries: few if any material substances are as pregnant with spiritual depth as wine. Ecclesiastes is perhaps the most dismal book in the entire Bible, and "Go, eat thy bread with mirth, and drink thy wine with a joyful heart" is close to being the only invitation to joy in the book. I do not say that this is a reason why people who have decided not to drink should change their mind. However, the theological motive to drink in Christianity comes from a higher plane than the admittedly very real reasons to be careful with alcohol, or else abstain. It's deeper.

Is the iPhone really that cool?

One news story reported that police officers had started using drug dealers' confiscated iPhones, and realized they were incredibly useful. And I wouldn't dispute that at all.

I would say that having an iPhone is a little, but not quite, like being able to call 911, which is the most important number for you to be able to call. 99% of the time it is inappropriate and perhaps illegal to call 911, but the (less than) 1% of the time you *should* be calling 911, it can save your life. Literally. And I use my iPhone over 1% of the time; besides built-in phone, email, notes, and looking things up on the web, and including my personal logistical dashboard, and apps like GPS, my iPhone makes me more productive, and unsexy nuts and bolts usage has been very useful.

So I wouldn't agree with "Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated my iPhone" that the iPhone is

simply "Terrible For Productivity." It certainly *can* be, and unrestrained use *will be*. And for that matter I've seen a lot of exquisitely produced apps in the App Store, and though I've written one iPhone app, I've found precious few apps that look genuinely useful to my purposes. But I am glad I have my iPhone, am not struggling to rein in inappropriately heavy use, and I believe it makes me more productive.

The LinkedIn article "Come With Me If You Want to Live - Why I Terminated My iPhone" talked about how one family decided to get rid of their iPhones. The author talked about how the iPhone had taken over their lives. They suggested that trying to use their habit to use the iPhone in moderation was a nonstarter, however enticing it may look. And, on a sobering note, they had earlier tried to avoid using smartphones, even for work. And I am convinced they made the right choice: not having any smartphone use is better than addictive smartphone use, hands down. And while I am cautious about advertising responsible smartphone use to people who can't live without their iPhone—the analogy drawn in the LinkedIn article was, "In hindsight, it's like an alcoholic saying 'I thought I could have it in the house and not drink it.'" But I have iPhone use which is defensible, at least in my opinion; I have drawn a boundary that is partly tacit and partly explicit, and while it can be criticized, it is a non-addictive use of the iPhone. I average less than one text a day; I do not compulsively check *anything* that's out there. A few of the guidelines I found are,

1. **Limit the time you spend using your smartphone.** The general Orthodox advice is to cut

back a little at once so you never experience absolute shock, but you are always stretched a little bit outside your comfort zone. That may be a way to work down cell phone use, or it may not. If you compulsively reach for your smartphone, you might leave it in one room that you're not always in. Put a boundary between yourself and the smartphone.

2. **Limit how often you check your cell phone unprovoked.** When I'm not at work, I try to limit checking email to once per hour. Limit yourself to maybe once per hour, maybe more, maybe less, and restrain yourself.
3. **When you're going to bed for the day, you're done using your smartphone for the day.** I am not strict in this; I will answer a call, but checking my iPhone, unprovoked, after my evening prayers or my bedtime is a no-no.
4. *Don't use the iPhone as a drone that you need to have always going on. This includes music, texting, games, and apps, including Vince's hero, Facebook.* Perhaps the single biggest way that this violates Apple's marketing proposition with the iPhone is that the iPhone is designed and marketed to be a drone that is always with us, a bit of ambient noise, delivering precisely what the Orthodox spiritual tradition, with works like *The Ladder*, tell us is something we don't need.

The iPhone's marketing proposition is to deliver an

intravenous drip of noise. The Orthodox Church's Tradition tells us to wean ourself from noise.

5. **iPhones have "Do Not Disturb" mode. Use it.**

And be willing to make having "Do Not Disturb" as your default way of using the phone, and turn it off when you want "*Please Interrupt Me*" mode explicitly.

6. **Don't multitask if you can at all avoid it.** I

remember reading one theology text which claimed as a lesson from computer science, because people can switch between several applications rapidly, that we should take this "lesson" to life and switch between several activities rapidly. And in a business world where multitasking has been considered an essential task, people are finding that multitasking is fool's gold, an ineffective way of working that introduces a significant productivity tax where people could be doing much better. Smartphones make it trivially easy to multiask. *Don't*, unless a situation calls for it.

I note with some concern that the most I've been shocked at someone using an iPhone was when 12 and under kids were manipulating the iPhone, not to get something to done, but to activate the iPhone's smooth animations. Looking over their shoulders in shock has felt like I was eavesdropping on a (non-chemical) *acid trip*. Children's use of iPhones driven by slick animated transitions between applications are even more unhelpful than what the business

world means by multitasking. (This feature of kids' use of iPhones has made me kind of wish iPhones were not used by people under 18.)

Now I should post this with a clarification that this is, so to speak, pastoral advice to *myself*. I've found the basic approach helpful, and priests and spiritual fathers may draw on it if they choose in their best judgment to take something from it, but I have not been ordained or tonsured, and I would fall back on the maxim, "As always, ask your priest." My reason to post them is to provide another reference point beyond those given to "social antibodies" in dealing with technology. With these antibodies, I hold the reins, or at least I hold the reins a little better than if I didn't have these antibodies. But I am aware of something vampiric, something that sucks out energy and life, in even my more moderate use of some technologies, and I am a little wary of comparing my use of technology to moderate and sober use of alcohol. Appropriate use of alcohol can be good, and apart from the risk of drinking getting out of control, it is an overall positive. I'm leery of claiming the same for my use of technology, even if I've tried hard to hold the reins and even if I may do better than average. There is something that has been drained from me; there is something that has been sucked out of me. Maybe I am less harmed than others: but my use of technology has harmed me. I am wary of saying now, "I've found the solution."

In dealing with another passion besides sexual sin, namely anger, people have started to develop "social antibodies:" as mentioned briefly by Vince Homan, we don't have the important channels of people's nonverbal

communication, which flattens out half the picture. And when we are angry, we can flame people in emails where there is no human face staring back to us, only letters on the screen that seem *so* right—or perhaps not nearly *right* enough!—and write hurtful flames unlike anything we would dare to say in person, even to someone who hurt us deeply. And on that score, people seem to me to have developed social antibodies; I've been in lots of flamewars and given and received many unholy words, but I don't remember doing that recently, or seeing flames wage out of control on many mailing lists, even if admittedly I don't spend much time on mailing lists. But sexual dangers are not the only dangers online, and for online flaming, most of the people I deal with do not flame people like I did when I was first involved in online community. I've acquired some "social antibodies," as have others I meet online. *Some* social antibodies have already developed, and the case is not desperate for us as a Church learning how to handle technology in the service of holy living instead of simply being a danger.

Pastoral guidance and literature needed

I visited Amazon to try to get a gauge on how much Orthodox pastoral resources about appropriate use of computers, mobile, internet, and technology were out there, a sort of *The Instructor* for technology today, and my search for "orthodox internet" found 109 resources from Christianity, Judaism, and the occult, none of which seemed to be about "How does an Orthodox Christian negotiate the social issues surrounding computers,

smartphones, tablets, the Internet, apps, and technology?" Some other searches, such as "orthodox pastoral internet," "orthodox pastoral smartphone," and "orthodox pastoral technology" turned up nothing whatsoever. A search for "orthodox technology" turned up one page of search results with... *several connected works of my own*. Um, *thanks*, I think. I guess I'm an expert, or at least a resource, and even if I didn't want to, I should probably make myself available to Orthodox clergy, with my spiritual father and bishop foremost. But this compliment to me, if it is such (maybe it means I'm off the rails) caught me quite off-guard; I was expecting to see at least *some* publications from people with pastoral authority and experience. But seeing as I'm the local expert, or at least a first author for this particular topic, I'll briefly state my credentials. I have been an Orthodox Christian for a decade, so no longer a recent convert, have works on social dimensions of technology dating back as far as 1994, have two years of postgraduate theology under slightly silly conditions at Cambridge, and two more years under very silly conditions at a sort of "Monty Python teaches theology" PhD program (one Orthodox priest consoled me, "All of us went through that"), but did not complete the program. I grew up with computers back when my home computer access meant going to an orange and black terminal and dialing up a Dec MicroVAX on a 2400 (or less) baud modem, was on basically non-web social networks years before it became a buzzword, have worked with the web since before it went mainstream, much of it professionally. I've been bitten by some of the traps people are fighting with now. And I'm also kind of bright. So I guess I am, by default, a local expert, although I really think a responsible treatment of the issues

raised here would see serious involvement from someone with pastoral qualifications and experience. I haven't been tonsured, at least not yet, and perhaps not ever.

But I would ask priests reading this piece to consider a work on a sort of technological appendix to *The Rudder*, or maybe I shouldn't say that because I have only barely sampled the ancient canons. But I would like to see ideally two pastoral works parallel to *The Instructor*, Book II: one for pastoral clergy use, and one for "the rest of us faithful." When I was a lay parish representative at a diocesan conference, there was talk about appropriate use of the internet; Vladyka PETER read something that talked about the many legitimate benefits we have received from using computers, but talked about porn on the internet, which is a sewer I haven't mentioned; he said that young people are spending hours per day looking at porn, and it's more addictive than some street drugs, and he commented how porn has always been available, but you used to have to put on a disguise and a trenchcoat, and go leave your car in front of a store with the windows covered up, where now, it finds you and it comes free with a basic utility in the privacy of your home. And the biggest thing I can say about freedom from porn comes from the entry for porn in *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*:

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held

the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "*Air!*" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects [and a doomed search for the ultimate sexual thrill that decimates sexual satisfaction] even in marriage).

And I would like to suggest some guidelines for fighting Internet porn, quite possibly the most commonly confessed sin among young men today. Sexual sins are among the most easily forgiven: but they are a deep pit. So, in the interest of providing a "dartboard" draft that's put out for people to shoot at. I am intentionally saying more rather than less because it's easier for a pastoral conversation to select from a set of options than furnish arbitrarily more additional options. Here are several things I'd consider, both sacred and secular:

I have heard of some helpful things being said in response to confession of sexual sin, such as, "St. Basil said that a man in lust is like a dog licking a saw; the salt it likes tasting is the taste of its own woundedness," and so there is a vicious cycle.

However, I have not heard of a list anywhere near this complete being given when a man confesses a very common (now) sin. Maybe parts of it could be incorporated into advice given at confession.

1. **If your right eye offends you, tear it out and throw it away from you: for it is better for you that one part of your body should die than that your whole body should be thrown into Hell.**

These words are *not* to be taken literally; if you tore out your right eye you would still be sinning with your left eye, and the Church considers that it was one of Origen's errors to castrate himself. But this is a forceful way of stating a profound truth. There is an incredible freedom that comes, a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light, when you want purity the way you want "*Air!*", and you apply a tourniquet as high up as you need to to experience freedom.

Give your only computer power cable to a friend, for a time, because you can't have that temptation in the house? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Have the local teenager turn off display of images in Chrome's settings? That is really *much* better than the alternative. Webpages may look suddenly ugly, but not nearly as ugly as bondage to porn. Only check email at the library? That is really *much* better than the alternative. These tourniquets may be revised in pastoral conversation, but tearing out your right eye is much more free and much less painful than forever wanting to be free from addiction to porn, but also secretly hoping to give in to the present temptation; as the Blessed Augustine prayed, "Lord, give me chastity, but not yet." There is a great deal of power in wanting purity **now**, and

once you go slash-and-burn, the power is amazing.

2. **Install content-control software, such as Norton Family / Norton Family Premier, and have things set up so that only the woman of the house knows the password to make exceptions.** There are legitimate needs for exceptions, and I remember being annoyed when I went to customize Ubuntu Christian Edition and finding that a site with all sorts of software to customize the appearance of Ubuntu was blocked, apparently because of a small sliver of soft porn in the wallpaper section of a truly massive site. There will be *legitimate* exceptions, but it cuts through a *lot* of self-deception if you get the exception by asking your wife.

3. **Don't bother trying to find out how to disable ~~porn mode~~ "Incognito Mode" on your browser; set up a router to log who visits what websites.** However much browser makers may tout themselves as being all for empowerment and freedom, they have refused to honor the many requests of men who want freedom from porn and parents who care for their children in many, many voices asking for a way to shut off porn mode.

There is an antique browser hidden in /usr/bin/firefox on my Aqua-themed virtual machine, but even with that after a fair amount of digging, I don't see any real live option to browse for instance Gmail normally with a browser that doesn't

offer porn mode. But there is something else you should know.

Routers exist that can log who visits what when, and if you know someone who is good with computers (or you can use paid technical support like the Geek Squad), have a router set up to provide a log of what computers visited what URLs so that the wife or parents know who is visiting what. *The presence of a browser's porn mode suddenly matters a lot less when a router records your browsing history whether or not the browser is in porn mode.*

4. **Rein in your stomach. Eat less food. Fast.** It is a classic observation in the Orthodox spiritual tradition that the appetites are tied: gluttony is a sort of "*gateway drug*" to sexual sin, and if you cut away at a full stomach, you necessarily undermine sexual sin and have an easier contest if you are not dealing with sexual temptation on top of a full stomach.

And it has been my own experience that if I keep busy working, besides any issues about "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop," the temptation to amuse and entertain myself with food is less. So that cuts off the temptation further upstream.

If you eat only to nourish the body, it helps. Even if nourishing food tastes good, cutting out junk like corn-syrup-loaded soft drinks, or anything sold like potato chips in a bag instead of a meal, and moderating consumption of alcohol (none before

going to bed; it doesn't help), will help.

5. **When you are tempted, ask the prayers of St. John the Much-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves, perhaps by crossing yourself and saying, "St. John the Much-Suffering, pray to God for me."** In the Orthodox Church you may ask the prayers of any saint for any need, but St. John is a powerful intercessor against lust. That is part of why I asked Orthodox Byzantine Icons to hand-paint an icon of St. John for me: a little so I would have the benefit of the icon myself, and the real reason because I wanted Orthodox Byzantine Icons's catalogue to make available the treasure of icons of St. John the Much-Suffering to the world, which they would.

Other saints to ask for prayer include St. Mary of Egypt, St. Moses the Hungarian, St. Photina, St. Thais of Egypt, St. Pelagia the Former Courtesan, St. Zlata the New Martyr, St. Boniface, St. Aglaida, St. Eudocia, St. Thomais, St. Pelagia, St. Marcella, St. Basil of Mangazea, St. Niphon, and St. Joseph the Patriarch. (Taken from *Prayers for Purity*.)

6. **Buy and pray with a copy of *Prayers for Purity* when you are tempted, and when you have fallen.** It is an excellent collection and helps when you know you should praying but words are not coming to mind.
7. **If you have been wounded, bring your wound**

to confession the next weekend. (And try to have a rule of going to church each week.)

It can be powerful, when you are facing a temptation, not to want to confess the same sin again in a couple of days.

But in parallel with this remember when a visitor asked a saintly monk what they did at the monastery, and the saintly monk answered, "We fall and get up, fall and get up, fall and get up." Fall down seven times and rise up eight: fall down seventy-seven times and rise up seventy-eight: keep on repenting for as long as you need to to achieve some freedom, and know that some saints before you have risen after falling very many times.

8. **Buy a prayer rope, and use it.** When you are tempted, keep repeating a prayer for one prayer rope, and then another, and another, if you need it. Pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner," or to St. John the Much-Suffering, "Holy Father John, pray to God for me," or to St. Mary of Egypt, "Holy Mother Mary, pray to God for me."
9. Use the computer only when you have a specific purpose in mind, and not just to browse. Idle hands are the Devil's workshop; For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind.; Do not look around in the streets of a city, or wander about in its deserted sections. Turn away your eyes from a shapely

woman, and do not gaze at beauty belonging to another; many have been seduced by a woman's beauty, and by it passion is kindled like a fire.

Men's roving sexual curiosity will find the worst-leading link on a page, and then another, and then another. Drop using roving curiosity when you are at a computer altogether; if you need to deal with boredom, ask your priest or spiritual father for guidance on how to fight the passion of boredom. But *don't* use the Internet as a solution for boredom; that's *asking* for trouble.

10. **Use a support group, if one is available in your area.** If I were looking for a support group now, I would call Christian counseling centers in the area if available. Talking with other people who share the same struggle can help.
11. **Use XXXchurch.com, or at least explore their website.** Their entire purpose is buying you your freedom from lust.
12. **Yearn for purity.**

In the homily *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.**

...

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.

When we are in lust, *God does not seem real to us*. Rejecting lust allows us to start being re-sensitized to the beauty of God's creation, to spiritual sweetness, to the lightness of Heavenly light. Lust may feel like you're losing nothing but gaining everything, but try to be mindful of what you lose in lust.

And that's my best stab at making a "dartboard," meant so people will shoot at it and make something better, and more complete and less one-sided in navigating the pitfalls of technology. This isn't the only trap out there—but it may

be one of the worst.

I would suggest that we need a comprehensive—or at least *somewhat* comprehensive—set of guidelines for Orthodox use of technology. Such a work might not become dated as quickly as you may think; as I write in the resources section below, I unhesitatingly cite a 1974 title as seriously relevant knowing full well that it makes no reference to individually owned computers or mobile devices: it's a case of "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Or, perhaps, *two* works: one for clergy with pastoral responsibilities, and one for those of us laity seeking our own guidance and salvation. I believe that today, we who have forms of property and wealth undreamed of when Christ gave one of the sternest Luddite warnings ever, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth," can very easily use things that do not lead to spiritual health: sometimes like how Facebook can erode marriages that are well defended as regards old-school challenges.

The best I know, secondhand perhaps, is that today's Church Fathers, on Mount Athos perhaps, are simply saying, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" What they want instead sounds like a liberal political-social experiment, where people who have grown up in an urban setting and know only how to navigate life there, will move en masse and form some sort of Amish-like rural communities. Or perhaps something else is envisioned: mass migration to monasteries? Given all that monasticism offers, it seems sad to me to receive the angelic image, of all reasons, only because that's the only remaining option where you can live a sufficiently Luddite life. I have heard of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me saying that we should stop

using recent technology at all. I have yet to hear of spiritual giants who incomparably excel me, *and who live in places where technology is socially mandated*, advise us to unplug completely. For that matter, I have yet to hear of *any* Orthodox clergy *who live in places in the world where technology is socially mandated* say, only and purely, "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!"

The Orthodox Church, or rather the Orthodox-Catholic Church, is really and truly Catholic, *Catholic* ultimately coming from the Greek *kata*, "with", and *holos*, "whole", meaning "with the whole", meaning that the entirety of the Orthodox Church belongs to every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: the saints alike living and dead, the ranks of priesthood and the faithful, and marriage and monasticism in entirety belong to every Orthodox Christian, every Orthodox-Catholic Christian: and giving the advice "Unplug! Unplug! Unplug!" as the limits of where the Orthodox-Catholic Church's God and salvation can reach, is very disappointing. It's comparable to saying that only monastics can be saved.

Total avoidance of all electronic technology is guidance, but not appropriate guidance, and we need advice, somewhat like the advice that began on how to use Facebook, to what I wrote about iPhones or internet porn. A successful dartboard makes it easier to say "What you said about _____ was wrong because _____ and instead we should say _____ because _____." And I am trying to raise a question. I am trying to raise the question of how Orthodox may optimally use technology in furtherance of living the divine life.

Is astronomy about telescopes?

No!

I would close with a quote about technology—or is it? Computer science giant Edgser Dijkstra said,

Computer science is no more about computers than astronomy is about telescopes.

And how much more must Orthodox discussion of how to use technology ascetically be no more *about* technology than astronomy is *about* telescopes? The question is a question about spiritual discipline, of how the timeless and universal wisdom of the Bible, the *Philokalia*, and the canons of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

Resources for further study

All the Orthodox classics, from the Bible on down. The task at hand is not to replace the *Philokalia*, but to *faithfully* adapt the *Philokalia* (and the Seven Ecumenical Councils) to a new medium, as it were. The principles of the Bible, the *Philokalia*, and the Seven Ecumenical Councils are simply *not* dated and simply *do not* need to be improved. However, their application, I believe, needs to be *extended*. We need ancient canons and immemorial custom that has the weight of canon law: however ancient canons express a good deal more about face-to-face boundaries between men and women than boundaries in Facebook and on smartphones. We need guidance for *all* of these.

St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*,

cjsh.name/instructor. I reference Book II and its chapter on wine as paradigms we might look too.

Jerry Mander, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, cjsh.name/elimination.

Mander is a former advertising executive who came to believe things about television, with implications for computers and smartphones. For instance, he argues that sitting for hours seeing mainly the light of red, green, and blue fluorescent pixels is actually awfully creepy. Mander has no pretensions of being an Orthodox Christian, or an Orthodox Jew for that matter, sounded an alarm in his apostasy from advertising that is worth at least hearing out. (Related titles, good or bad, include *The Plug-in Drug* and *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.)

Singularity

Herodotus: And what say thee of these people? Why callest thou them the Singularity, Merlin?

John: Mine illuminèd name is John, and John shall ye call me each and every one.

Herodotus: But the Singularity is such as only a Merlin could have unravelled.

John: Perchance: but the world is one of which only an illuminèd one may speak aright. Call thou me as one illuminèd, if thou wouldst hear me speak.

Herodotus: Of illumination speakest thou. Thou sawest with the eye of the hawk: now seest thou with the eye of the eagle.

John: If that be, speak thou me as an eagle?

Herodotus: A point well taken, excellent John, excellent John. What speakest thou of the Singularity?

John: A realm untold, to speak is hard. But of an icon will I speak: inscribed were words:

'Waitress, is this coffee or tea?'

'What does it taste like?'

'IT TASTES LIKE DIESEL FUEL.'

'That's the coffee. The tea tastes like transmission fluid.'

Herodotus: Upon what manner of veneration were this icon worshiped?

John: That were a matter right subtle, too far to tell.

Herodotus: And of the inscription? That too be subtle to grasp.

John: Like as a plant hath sap, so a subtle engine by their philosophy wrought which needeth diesel fuel and transmission fluid.

Herodotus: [*laughs*] Then 'twere a joke, a jape! 'Tis well enough told!

John: You perceive it yet?

Herodotus: A joke, a jape indeed, of a fool who could not tell, two different plants were he not to taste of their sap! Well spoke! Well spoke!

John: Thou hast grasped it afault, my fair lord. For the subtle engine hath many different saps, no two alike.

Herodotus: And what ambrosia be in their saps?

John: Heaven save us! The saps be a right unnatural fare; their substance from rotted carcasses of monsters from aeons past, then by the wisdom of their philosophy transmogrified, of the subtle engine.

Herodotus: Then they are masters of Alchemy?

John: Masters of an offscouring of all Alchemy, of the lowest toe of that depravèd ascetical enterprise, chopped off, severed from even the limb, made hollow, and then grown beyond all reason, into the head of reason.

Herodotus: Let us leave off this and speak of the icon. The icon were for veneration of such subtle philosophy?

John: No wonder, no awe, greeteth he who regardeth this icon and receive it as is wont.

Herodotus: As is wont?

John: As is wanton. For veneration and icons are forcèd secrets; so there is an antithesis of the *sacra pagina*, and upon its light pages the greatest pages come upon the most filled with lightness, the icons of a world that knoweth icons not.

Let me make another essay.

The phrase 'harmony with nature' is of popular use, yet a deep slice of the Singularity, or what those inside the Singularity can see of it, might be called, 'harmony with technology'.

Herodotus: These be mystics of technology.

John: They live in an artificial jungle of technology, or rather an artificial not-jungle of technology, an artificial anti-jungle of technology. For one example, what do you call the natural use of wood?

Herodotus: A bundle of wood is of course for burning.

John: And they know of using wood for burning, but it is an exotic, rare case to them; say 'wood' and precious few will think of gathering wood to burn.

Herodotus: Then what on earth *do* they use wood for? Do they eat it when food is scarce or something like that?

John: Say 'wood' and not exotic 'firewood', and they will think of building a house.

Herodotus: So then they are right dexterous, if they can build out of a bundle of gathered sticks instead of burning it.

John: They do not gather sticks such as you imagine. They fell great trees, and cut the heartwood into rectangular box shapes, which they fit together in geometrical fashion. And when it is done, they make a box, or many boxes, and take rectangles hotly fused

sand to fill a window. And they add other philosophy on top of that, so that if the house is well-built, the air inside will be pleasant and still, unless they take a philosophical machine to push air, and whatever temperature the people please, and it will remain dry though the heavens be opened in rain. And most of their time is spent in houses, or other 'buildings' like a house in this respect.

Herodotus: What a fantastical enterprise! When do they enter such buildings?

John: When do they rather go out of them? They consider it normal to spend less than an hour a day outside of such shelters; the subtle machine mentioned earlier moves but it is like a house built out of metal in that it is an environment entirely contrived by philosophy and artifice to, in this case, convey people from one place to another.

Herodotus: How large is this machine? It would seem to have to be very big to convey all their people.

John: But this is a point where their 'technology' departs from the art that is implicit in τεχνη: it is in fact not a lovingly crafted work of art, shaped out of the spirit of that position ye call 'inventor' or 'artist', but poured out by the thousands by giganthical machines yet more subtle, and in the wealth of the Singularity, well nigh unto each hath his own machine.

Herodotus: And how many can each machine can convey?

Perchance a thousand?

John: Five, or six, or two peradventure, but the question is what they would call 'academical': the most common use is to convey *one*.

Herodotus: They must be grateful for such property and such philosophy!

John: A few are very grateful, but the prayer, 'Let us remember those less fortunate than ourselves' breathes an odor that sounds truly archaic. It sounds old, old enough to perhaps make half the span of a man's life. And such basic technology, though they should be very much upset to lose them, never presents itself to their mind's eye when they hear the word 'technology'. And indeed, why should it present itself to the mind his eye?

Herodotus: I strain to grasp thy thread.

John: To be thought of under the heading of 'technology', two things must hold. First, it must be possessed of an artificial unlife, not unlike the unlife of their folklore's ghouls and vampires and zombies. And second, it must be of recent vintage, something not to be had until a time that is barely past. Most of the technologies they imagine provide artificially processed moving images, some of which are extremely old—again, by something like half the span of a man's life—while some are new. Each newer version seemeth yet more potent. To those not

satisfied with the artificial environment of an up-to-date building, regarded by them as something from time immemorial, there are unlife images of a completely imaginary artificial world where their saying 'when pigs can fly' meaning never is in fact one of innumerable things that happen in the imaginary world portrayed by the technology. 'SecondLife' offers a second alternative to human life, or so it would seem, until 'something better comes along.'

Herodotus: My mind, it reeleth.

John: Well it reeleth. But this be but a sliver.

For life to them is keeping one's balance on shifting sand; they have great museums of different products, as many as the herbs of the field. But herein lies a difference: we know the herbs of the field, which have virtues, and what the right use is. They know as many items produced by philosophy, but they are scarce worse for the deal when they encounter an item they have never met before. For while the herbs of the field be steady across generations and generations, the items belched forth by their subtle philosophy change not only within the span of a man's life; they change year to year; perchance moon to moon.

Herodotus: Thou sayest that they can navigate a field they know not?

John: Aye, and more. The goal at which their catechism aims is to 'learn how to learn'; the appearance and

disappearance of kinds of items is a commonplace to them. And indeed this is not only for the items we use as the elements of our habitat: catechists attempt to prepare people for roles that exist not yet even as the students are being taught.

Though this be sinking sand they live in, they keep balance, of a sort, and do not find this strange. And they adapt to the changes they are given.

Herodotus: It beseemeth me that thou speakest as of a race of Gods.

John: A race of Gods? Forsooth! Thou knowest not half of the whole if thou speakest thus.

Herodotus: What remaineth?

John: They no longer think of making love as an action that in particular must needeth include an other.

Herodotus: I am stunned.

John: And the same is true writ large or writ small. A storyteller of a faintly smaller degree, living to them in ages past, placed me in an icon:

The Stranger mused for a few seconds, then, speaking in a slightly singsong voice, as though he repeated an old lesson, he asked, in two Latin hexameters, the following question:

'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. Her 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 move and to be warm by devilish arts, for real flesh will not please them, they are so dainty in their dreams of lust. Their real children they fabricate by vile arts in a secret place.'

The storyteller saw and saw not his future. 'Tis rare in the Singularity to fabricate children 'by vile arts in a secret place'. But the storyteller plays us false when he assumes their interest would be in a 'cunningly fashioned image of the other'. Truer it would be to say that the men, by the fruits of philosophy, jump from one libidinous dream to another whilst awake.

Herodotus: *Forsooth!*

John: A prophet told them, the end will come when no

man maketh a road to his neighbors. And what has happened to marriage has happened, by different means but by the same spirit, to friendship. Your most distant acquaintanceship to a fellow member is more permanent than their marriage; it is routine before the breakable God-created covenant of marriage to make unbreakable man-made covenants about what to do if, as planned for, the marriage ends in divorce. And if that is to be said of divorce, still less is the bond of friendship. Their own people have talked about how 'permanent relationships', including marriage and friendship, being replaced by 'disposable relationships' which can be dissolved for any and every reason, and by 'disposable relationships' to 'transactional relationships', which indeed have not even the pretension of being something that can be kept beyond a short transaction for any and every reason.

And the visits have been eviscerated, from a conversation where voice is delivered and vision is stripped out, to a conversation where words alone are transmitted without even hand writing; from a conversation where mental presence is normative to a conversation where split attention is expected. 'Tis yet rarely worth the bother to make a physical trail, though they yet visit. And their philosophy, as it groweth yet more subtle, groweth yet more delicate. 'Twould scarcely require much to 'unplug' it. And then, perhaps, the end will come?

Herodotus: Then there be a tragic beauty to these people.

John: A tragic beauty indeed.

Herodotus: What else hast thou to tell of them?

John: Let me give a little vignette:

Several men and women are in a room; all are fulfilling the same role, and they are swathed with clothing that covers much of their skin. And the differences between what the men wear, and what most of the women wear, are subtle enough that most of them do not perceive a difference.

Herodotus: Can they not perceive the difference between a man and a woman?

John: The sensitivity is dulled in some, but it is something they try to overlook. But I have not gotten to the core of this vignette:

One of them indicateth that had they be living several thousand years ago they would not have had need of clothing, not for modesty at least, and there are nods of agreement to her. And they all imagine such tribal times to be times of freedom, and their own to be of artificial restriction.

And they fail to see, by quite some measure, that prolonged time in mixed company is much more significant than being without clothing; or that their buildings deaden all of a million sources of natural awareness: the breeze blowing and the herbs waving in the wind; scents and odours as they appear; song of

crickets' kin chirping and song of bird, the sun as it shines through cloud; animals as they move about, and the subtleties and differences in the forest as one passes through it. They deaden all of these sensitivities and variations, until there is only one form of life that provides stimulation: the others who are working in one's office. Small wonder, then, that to a man one woman demurely covered in an office has an effect that a dozen women wearing vines in a jungle would never have. But the libertines see themselves as repressed, and those they compare themselves to as, persay, emancipated.

Herodotus: At least they have the option of dressing modestly. What else hast thou?

John: There is infinitely more, and there is nothing more. Marriage is not thought of as open to children; it can be dissolved in divorce; it need not be intrinsically exclusive; a further installment in the package, played something like a pawn in a game of theirs, is that marriage need not be between a man and a woman. And if it is going to be dismantled to the previous portion, why not? They try to have a world without marriage, by their changes to marriage. The Singularity is a disintegration; it grows more and more, and what is said for marriage could be said for each of the eight devils: intertwined with this is pride, and it is only a peripheral point that those who further undefine marriage speak of 'gay pride'. A generation before, not mavericks but the baseline of people were told they needed a 'high self-esteem', and

religious leaders who warned about pride as a sin, perhaps as the sin by which the Devil fell from Heaven, raised no hue and cry that children were being raised to embrace pride as a necessary ascesis. And religion itself is officially permitted some role, but a private role: not that which fulfills the definition of *religare* in binding a society together. It is in some measure like saying, 'You can speak any language you want, as long as you utter not a word in public discourse': the true religion of the Singularity is such ersatz religion as the Singularity provides. Real religion is expected to wither in private.

The Singularity sings a song of progress, and it was giving new and different kinds of property; even now it continues. But its heart of ice showeth yet. For the march of new technologies continues, and with them poverty: cracks begin to appear, and the writing on the wall be harder to ignore. What is given with one hand is not-so-subtly taken away with the other. The Singularity is as needful to its dwellers as forest or plain to its dwellers, and if it crumbles, precious few will become new tribal clans taking all necessities from the land.

Herodotus: Then it beseemeth the tragedy outweigheth the beauty, or rather there is a shell of beauty under a heart of ice.

John: *But there are weeds.*

Herodotus: What is a weed?

John: It is a plant.

Herodotus: What kind of plant is a weed? Are the plants around us weeds?

John: They are not.

Herodotus: Then what kinds of plants are weeds?

John: In the Singularity, there is a distinction between 'rural', 'suburban', and 'urban': the 'rural' has deliberately set plants covering great tracts of land, the 'suburban' has fewer plants, if still perhaps green all around, and the 'urban' has but the scattered ensconced tree. But in all of them are weeds, in an urban area plants growing where the artificial stone has cracked. And among the natural philosophers there are some who study the life that cannot be extinguished even in an urban city; their specialty is called 'urban ecology'. The definition of a weed is simply, 'A plant I do not want.' We do not have weeds because we do not seek an artificial environment with plants only present when we have put them there. But when people seek to conform the environment to wishes and plans, even in the tight discipline of planned urban areas, weeds are remarkably persistent.

And in that regard, weeds are a tiny sliver of something magnificent.

Herodotus: What would that be?

John: The durability of Life that is writ small in a weed here in the urban, there in the suburban is but a shadow of the durability of Life that lives on in the sons of men. Mothers still sing lullabies to their dear little children; friendships form and believers pray at church far more than happened in the age where my story was told, a story dwarfed by what was called the 'age of faith'. The intensity of the attacks on the Church in a cruel social witness are compelled to bear unwilling witness to the vitality of the Church whose death has been greatly exaggerated: and indeed that Church is surging with vitality after surviving the attacks. The story told seems to tell of Life being, in their idiom, 'dealt a card off every side of the deck'— and answering, 'Checkmate, I win.' I have told of the differences, but there are excellent similarities, and excellent differences. For a knight whoso commandeth a wild and unbridled horse receiveth greater commendation than a knight whoso commandeth a well-bred and gentle steed.

Herodotus: The wind bloweth where it listeth. The shall live by his faith. Your cell, *though it be wholly artificial*, will teach you everything you need to know.

John: Thou hast eagerly grasped it; beyond beauty, tragedy, and beyond tragedy, beauty. Thou hast grasped it true.

Ghost in the Shell, Google's Transhumanism, and Yonder

One of my friends, some years back, introduced me to see an anime cartoon he had, *Ghost in the Shell*. There was a grain of sand that, on a charitable note, helped form in me the pearl that became *Yonder*, and I wanted to set in nonfiction some of what was going on and why. One fellow theology student described it as “*trippy*,” and emphatically so, and I had trouble articulating what was deadly serious in the work.

On a philosophical level, the atheism that coexisted for some time with deism might be called a “children’s atheism.” It was an atheism in which there are no more rules, no more bedtimes, no more punishments, no more chores, no more of anything unpleasant that any parent does for a child. As time passed, the brightly optimistic atheism grew up to be existentialists and Nietzsche, who saw that perhaps there are no further rules or bedtimes, but we are bereaved children lacking shelter that we need. Without parents in the picture any more, the shelter of a house becomes more and more rotted and useless.

The phrase “ghost in the shell” itself derives from DesCartes, coming from the same phrase that in English is more commonly rendered, “ghost in the machine,” which is a philosophical pseudo-problem which exists once you have assumed that spirit and matter exist in separate watertight containers that should not be able to interact, but it is manifestly obvious that spirit and matter do interact—but you do not see this as showing a flaw in your assumption that spirit and matter should not be able to interact.

Science fiction that I have read, and I admit to not being current, has a “children’s atheism” about the possibility of changing how spirit and matter interact. Robert Heinlein’s cult classic *Stranger in a Strange Land*, which has never gone out of print and is arguably the most successful science fiction novel in history, has eyes open in wide-eyed wonder in a world where “Thou art God!” is one of the masks worn by the Kali of “God is dead!”¹ What I tried to highlight in huge neon letters in “Yonder” was to drive home what an “adult’s atheism” might look like. And the ugliness opens with a human body forced to lethal exertion in a successful attempt by a mind to break a record. The implication drawn out? The conditions between spirit and matter in much science fiction set things up perfectly for minds to create and destroy disposable bodies with no more status than disposable commodities. We respect our bodies, at least up to a point and perhaps unconsciously, but I have not read other science fiction look at transactional bodies created for an entire purpose of being destroyed (I will not treat embryonic research here). But the implication is live in the possibility, and the equivalent an “adult atheism” has every possibility of jaded

1 “Thou art God!” + “God is dead!” = “Thou art dead!”

and careless destruction of bodies created, perhaps, for the express purpose of being murdered. *If we are even still discussing something that can be called murder.*

Yonder is not intended to affirm or deny any particular possibility as regards mind and body, but it does follow well enough a remark by G.K. Chesterton in *Orthodoxy*:

In modern ideal conceptions of society there are some desires that are possibly not attainable: but there are some desires that are not desirable. That all men should live in equally beautiful houses is a dream that may or may not be attained. But that all men should live in the same beautiful house is not a dream at all; it is a nightmare.

People who want my thoughts about whether the entire nexus surrounding transhumanism (see Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The Undermining of Family, Society, and Our Own Soul*, a book I heartily endorse) represent a transhumanism which is a dream or a nightmare are invited to read *Yonder*.

I propose that the question of whether transhumanism is an **achievable** desire is in the long run far less important than the question of whether transhumanism is a **desirable** desire.

Yonder

The body continued running in the polished steel corridor, a corridor without doors and windows and without any hint of how far above and below the local planet's surface it was, if indeed it was connected with a planet. The corridor had a competition mixture of gases, gravity, temperature and pressure, and so on, and as the body had been running, lights turned on and then off so the body was at the center of a moving swathe of rather clinical light. The body was running erratically, and several times it had nearly fallen; the mind was having trouble keeping the control of the body due to the body being taxed to its limit. Then the body tripped. The mind made a few brief calculations and jacked out of the body.

The body fell, not having the mind to raise its arms to cushion the fall, and fractured bones in the face, skull, and ribs. The chest heaved in and out with each labored breath, after an exertion that would be lethal in itself. A trickle of blood oozed out from a wound. The life of the abandoned body slowly ebbed away, and the lights abruptly turned off.

It would be a while before a robot would come to clean it up and prepare the corridor for other uses.

"And without further ado," another mind announced, "I would like to introduce the researcher who broke the record for a running body by more than 594789.34 microseconds. This body was a strictly biological body, with no cyberware besides a regulation mind-body interface, with no additional modifications. Adrenaline, for instance, came from the mind controlling the adrenal glands; it didn't even replace the brain with a chemical minifactory. The body had a magnificent athletic physique, clean and not encumbered by any reproductive system. And I *still* don't know how it kept the body alive and functioning, without external help, for the *whole* race. Here's Archon."

A sound came from a modular robot body at the center of the stage and was simultaneously transmitted over the net. "I see my cyborg utility body there; is that my Paidion wearing it? If so, I'm going to... no, wait. That would be harming my own body without having a good enough reason." A somewhat canned chuckle swept through the crowd. "I'm impressed; I didn't know that anyone would come if I called a physical conference, and I had no idea there were that many rental bodies within an appropriate radius." Some of the bodies winced. "But seriously, folks, I wanted to talk and answer some of your questions about how my body broke the record. It was more than generating nerve impulses to move the body to the maximum ability. And I would like to begin by talking about why I've called a physical conference in the first place.

"Scientific breakthroughs aren't scientific. When a mind solves a mathematical problem that hasn't been solved before, it does... not something impossible, but something

that you will miss if you look for something possible. It conforms itself to the problem, does everything it can to permeate itself with the problem. Look at the phenomenology and transcripts of every major mathematical problem that has been solved in the past 1.7×10^{18} microseconds. Not one follows how one would scientifically attempt a scientific breakthrough. And somehow scientifically optimized applications of mind to problems repeat past success but never do anything new.

"What you desire so ravenously to know is how I extended the methodologies to optimize the running body and the running mind to fit a calculated whole. And the answer is simple. I didn't."

A mind interrupted through cyberspace. "What do you mean, you didn't? That's as absurd as claiming that you built the body out of software. That's—"

Archon interrupted. "And that's what I thought too. What I can tell you is this. When I grew and trained the body, I did nothing else. That was my body, my only body. I shut myself off from cyberspace—yes, that's why you couldn't get me—and did not leave a single training activity to another mind or an automatic process. I trained myself to the body as if it were a mathematics problem and tried to soak myself in it."

A rustle swept through the crowd.

"And I don't blame you if you think I'm a crackpot, or want to inspect me for hostile tampering. I submit to inspection. But I tried to be as close as possible to the body, and that's *it*. And I shaved more than 594789.34 microseconds off the record." Archon continued after a momentary pause. "I specifically asked for bodily presences for this meeting; call me sentimental or crackpot or trying

to achieve with your bodies what I failed to achieve in that body, but I will solicit questions from those who have a body here first, and address the network after everybody present has had its chance."

A flesh body stood up and flashed its face. "What are you going to say next? Not only that you became like a body, but that the body became like a mind?"

Archon went into private mode, filtered through and rejected 3941 responses, and said, "I have not analyzed the body to see if it contained mind-like modifications and do not see how I would go about doing such a thing."

After several other questions, a robot said, "So what's next?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "I don't know." It hesitated again, and said, "I'm probably going to make a Riemannian 5-manifold of pleasure states. I plan on adding some subtle twists so not only will it be pleasurable; minds will have a real puzzle figuring out exactly what kind of space they're in. And I'm not telling what the manifold will be like, or even telling for sure that it will genuinely have only 5 dimensions."

The robot said, "No, you're not. You're not going to do that at all." Then the mind jacked out and the body fell over, inert.

Another voice, issuing from two standard issue cyborg bodies, said, "Has the body been preserved, and will it be available for internal examination?"

Archon heard the question, and answered it as if it were giving the question its full attention. But it could only give a token of its consciousness. The rest of its attention was on tracing the mind that had jacked out of the robot body. And it was a slippery mind. Archon was both frustrated and

impressed when it found no trace.

It was skilled at stealth and tracing, having developed several methodologies for each, and something that could vanish without a trace—had the mind simply destroyed itself? That possibility bothered Archon, who continued tracing after it dismissed the assembly.

Archon looked for distractions, and finding nothing better it began trying to sound out how it might make the pleasure space. What should the topology be? The pleasures should be—Archon began looking at the kinds of pleasure, and found elegant ways to choose a vector space basis for less than four dimensions or well over eight, but why should it be a tall order to do exactly five? Archon was far from pleasure when a message came, "Not your next achievement, Archon?"

Archon thought it recognized something. "Have you tried a five dimensional pleasure manifold before? How did you know this would happen?"

"I didn't."

"Ployon!"

Ployon said, "It took you long enough! I'm surprised you needed the help."

Ployon continued, "And since there aren't going to be too many people taking you seriously—"

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon failed to acknowledge the interruption. "—from now on, I thought you could use all the help you could get."

Archon sent another long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

When Ployon remained silent, Archon said, "Why did you contact me?"

Ployon said, "Since you're going to do something interesting, I wanted to see it live."

Archon said, "So what am I going to do?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but I want to see it."

"Then how do you know it is interesting?"

"You said things that would destroy your credibility, and you gave an evasive answer. It's not every day I get to witness that."

Archon sent a long stream of zeroes to Ployon.

Ployon said, "I'm serious."

"Then what can I do now?"

"I have no idea whatsoever, but you might take a look at what you're evading."

"And what am I evading?"

"Try asking yourself. Reprocess the transcripts of that lecture. Your own private transcript."

Archon went through the file, disregarding one moment and then scanning everything else. "I find nothing."

"What did you just disregard?"

"Just one moment where I said too much."

"And?"

Archon reviewed that moment. "I don't know how to describe it. I can describe it three ways, all contradictory. I almost did it—I almost forged a connection between mind and matter. And yet I failed. And yet somehow the body ran further, and I don't think it was simply that I learned to control it better. What I achieved only underscored what I failed to achieve, like an optimization that needs to run for longer than the age of the universe before it starts saving time."

Archon paused before continuing, "So I guess what I'm going to do next is try to bridge the gap between mind and matter for real. Besides the mundane relationship, I mean, forge a real connection that will bridge the chasm."

Ployon said, "It can't be done. It's not possible. I don't even understand why your method of training the body will work. You seem to have made more of a connection than has ever been done before. I'm tempted to say that when you made your presentation, you ensured that no one else will do what you did. But that's premature and probably wrong."

"Then what am I going to do next? How am I going to bridge that gap?"

Ployon said, "I saw something pretty interesting in what you did achieve—you know, the part where you destroyed your credibility. That's probably more interesting than your breaking the record."

Ployon ran through some calculations before continuing, "And at any rate, you're trying to answer the wrong question."

Archon said, "Am I missing the interesting question? The question of how to forge a link across the chasm between matter and spirit is—"

"Not nearly as interesting as the question of what it would *mean* to bridge that chasm."

Archon stopped, reeling at the implication. "I think it's time for me to make a story in a virtual world."

Ployon said, "Goodbye now. You've got some thinking to do."

Archon began to delve. What would the world be like if you added to it the ability for minds to connect with bodies, not simply as it had controlled his racing body, but *really*? What would it be like if the chasm could be bridged? It searched through speculative fiction, and read a story where minds could become bodies—which made for a very good story, but when it seriously tried to follow its philosophical

assumptions, it realized that the philosophical assumptions were not the focus. It read and found several stories where the chasm could be bridged, and—

There was no chasm. Or would not be. And that meant not taking the real world and adding an ability to bridge a chasm, but a world where mind and matter were immanent. After rejecting a couple of possible worlds, Archon considered a world where there were only robots, and where each interfaced to the network as externally as to the physical world. Each mind was firmware burned into the robot's circuits, and for some still to be worked out reason it couldn't be transferred. Yes, this way... no. Archon got some distance into this possible world before a crawling doubt caught up to it. It hadn't made minds and bodies connect; it'd only done a first-rate job of covering up the chasm. Maybe organic goo held promise. A world made only of slime? No, wait, that was... and then it thought—

Archon dug recursively deeper and deeper, explored, explored. It seemed to be bumping into something. Its thoughts grew strange; it calculated for billions and even trillions of microseconds, encountered something stranger than—

Something happened.

How much time had passed?

Archon said, "Ployon! Where are you?"

Ployon said, "Enjoying trying to trace your thoughts. Not much success. I've disconnected now."

"Imagine a mind and a body, except that you don't have a mind and a body, but a mind-body unity, and it—"

"Which do you mean by 'it'? The mind or the body? You're being careless."

"Humor me. I'm not being careless. When I said, 'it', I

meant both—"

"*Both* the mind and the body? As in 'they'?"

"Humor me. As in, '*it*.' As in a unity that doesn't exist in our world."

"Um... then how do you refer to just the mind or just the body? If you don't distinguish them..."

"You can *distinguish* the mind and the body, but you can never *separate* them. And even though you can refer to just the mind or just the body, normally you would talk about the unity. It's not enough to usually talk about 'they;' you need to usually talk about 'it.'"

"How does it connect to the network?"

"There is a kind of network, but it can't genuinely connect to it."

"What does it do when its body is no longer serviceable."

"It doesn't—I haven't decided. But it can't jump into something else."

"So the mind simply functions on its own?"

"Poyon, you're bringing in cultural baggage. You're—"

"You're telling me this body is a prison! Next you're going to tell me that it can't even upgrade the body with better parts, and that the mind is like a real mind, only it's shut in on twenty sides. Are you describing a dystopia?"

"No. I'm describing what it means that the body is real to the mind, that *it* is not a mind that can use bodies but a mind-body unity. It can't experience any pleasure it can calculate, but its body can give it pleasure. It runs races, and not only does the mind control the body—or at least influence it; the body is real enough that the mind can't simply control it perfectly—but the body affects the mind. When I run a race, I am controlling the body, but I could be

doing twenty other things as well and only have a token presence at the mind-body interface. It's very different; there is a very real sense in which the mind is *running* when the body is running a race.

"Let me guess. The mind is a little robot running around a racetrack hollowed out from the body's brain. And did you actually say, *races*, plural? Do they have nanotechnology that will bring a body back after its been run down? And would anyone actually want to race a body that had been patched that way?"

"No. I mean that because their bodies are part of them, they only hold races which they expect the racers to be able to live through."

"That's a strange fetish. Don't they ever have a *real* race?"

"They have real races, real in a way that you or I could never experience. When they run, they aren't simply manipulating something foreign to the psyche. They experience pleasures they only experience running."

"Are you saying they only allow them to experience certain pleasures while running?"

"No. They—"

"Then why don't they allow the pleasures at other times? That's a stranger fetish than—"

"Because they can't. Their bodies produce certain pleasures in their minds when they're running, and they don't generate these pleasures unless the body is active."

"That raises a number of problems. It sounds like you're saying the body has a second mind, because it would take a mind to choose to let the 'real' mind experience pleasure. It —"

Archon said, "You're slipping our chasm between the

body and mind back in, and it's a chasm that doesn't exist. The body produces pleasure the mind can't produce by itself, and that is only one of a thousand things that makes the race *more* real than them for us. Think about the achievements you yourself made when you memorized the map of the galaxy. Even if that was a straightforward achievement, that's something you yourself did, not something you caused an external memory bank to do. Winning a race is as real for that mind-body as something it itself did as the memorization was for you. It's something *it* did, not simply something the mind caused the body to do. And if you want to make a causal diagram, *don't* draw something linear. In either direction. Make a reinforced web, like computing on a network."

Ployon said, "I still don't find it convincing."

Archon paused. "Ok, let's put that in the background. Let me approach that on a different scale. Time is more real. And no—this is not because they measure time more precisely. Their bodies are mortal, and this means that the community of mind-body unities is always changing, like a succession of liquids flowing through a pipe. And that means that it makes a difference where you are in time."

Archon continued. "I could say that their timeline is dynamic in a way that ours is not. There is a big change going on, a different liquid starting to flow through the pipe. It is the middle age, when a new order of society is being established and the old order is following away."

Ployon said, "So what's the old technology, and what's the new one?"

"It's deeper than that. Technological society is appearing. The old age is not an abandoned technology. It is organic life, and it is revealing itself as it is disintegrating."

"So cyborgs have—"

"There are no cyborgs, or very few."

"And let me guess. They're all cybernetic enhancements to originally biological things."

"It's beyond that. Cybernetic replacements are only used to remedy weak bodies."

"Wouldn't it be simpler to cull the—"

"The question of 'simpler' is irrelevant. Few of them even believe in culling their own kind. Most believe that it is —'inexpedient' isn't quite right—to destroy almost any body, and it's even more inadvisable to destroy one that is weak."

"In the whole network, why?"

"I'm still working that out. The easiest part to explain has to do with their being mind-body *unities*. When you do something to a body, you're not just doing it to that body. You're doing it to part of a pair that interpenetrates in the most intimate fashion. What you do to the body you do to the mind. It's not just forcibly causing a mind to jack out of a body; it's transferring the mind to a single processor and then severing the processor from the network."

"But who would... I can start to see how real their bodies would be to them, and I am starting to be amazed. What else is real to them?"

"I said earlier that most of them are hesitant to cull the weak, that they view it as inexpedient. But efficiency has nothing to do with it. It's connected to—it might in fact be more efficient, but there is something so much bigger than efficiency—"

Ployon cut it off. "Bigger than efficiency?"

Archon said, "There is something that is real to them that is not real to us that I am having trouble grasping myself. For want of a more proper label, I'll call it the

'organic'."

"Let's stop a minute. I'll give you a point for how things would be different if we were limited to one body, but you're hinting at something you want to call 'organic', which is very poorly defined, and your explanations seem to be strange when they are not simply hazy. Isn't this a red flag?"

"Where have you seen that red flag before?"

"When people were wildly wrong but refused to admit it."

"And?"

"That's pretty much it."

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "And sometimes it happens when a researcher is on to something big... oh... so what exactly is this nexus of the 'organic'?"

"I can't tell you. At least, not directly. The mind-body unities are all connected to a vast (to them) biological network in which each has a physical place—"

"*That's* original! Come on; everybody's trivia archive includes the fact that all consciousness comes out of a specific subnet of physical processors, or some substitute for that computing machinery. I can probably zero in on where you're—hey! Stop jumping around from subnet to subnet—can I take that as an acknowledgment that I can find your location? I—"

"The location is not part of a trivia encyclopedia for them. It's something as inescapable as the flow of time—"

"Would you like me to jump into a virtual metaphysics where time doesn't flow?"

"—correction, *more* inescapable than the flow of time, and it has a million implications for the shape of life. Under the old order, the unities could connect only with other

unities which had bodies in similar places—"

"So, not only is their 'network' a bunch of slime, but when they look for company they have to choose from the trillion or however many other unities whose bodies are on the same node?"

"Their communities are brilliant in a way we can never understand; they have infinitesimally less potential partners available.

"You mean their associations are forced on them."

"To adapt one of their sayings, in our network you connect with the minds you like; in their network you like the people you connect with. That collapses a rich and deeper maxim, but what is flattened out is more organic than you could imagine."

"And I suppose that in a way that is very deep, but you conveniently have trouble describing, their associations are greater."

"We are fortunate to have found a way to link in our shared tastes. And we will disassociate when our tastes diverge—"

"And shared tastes have nothing to do with them? That's—"

"Shared tastes are big, but there is something else bigger. A great deal of the process of making unities into proper *unities* means making their minds something you can connect with."

"*Their* minds? Don't you mean *the* minds?"

"That locution captures something that—they are not minds that have a body as satellite. One can say, '*their*' minds because they are mind-body unities. They become greater—in a way that we do not—by needing to be in association with people they could not choose."

"Pretty convenient how every time having a mind linked to a body means a limitation, that limitation makes them better."

"If you chose to look at it, you would find a clue there. But you don't find it strange when the best game players prosper within the limits of the game. What would game play be if players could do anything they wanted?"

"You've made a point."

"As I was going to say, their minds develop a beauty, strength, and discipline that we never have occasion to develop."

"Can you show me this beauty?"

"Here's a concrete illustration. One thing they do is take organisms which have been modified from their biological environment, and keep them in the artificial environments which you'd say they keep their bodies in. They—"

"So even though they're stuck with biological slime, they're trying to escape it and at least pretend it's not biological? That sounds sensible."

"Um, you may have a point, but that isn't where I was hoping to go. Um... While killing another unity is something they really try to avoid, these modified organisms enjoy no such protection. And yet—"

"What do they use them for? Do the enhancements make them surrogate industrial robots? Are they kept as emergency rations?"

"The modifications aren't what you'd consider enhancements; most of them couldn't even survive in their feral ancestors' environments, and they're not really suited to the environments they live in. Some turn out to serve some 'useful' purpose... but that's a side benefit, irrelevant to what I'm trying to let you see. And they're almost never

used as food."

"Then what's the real reason? They must consume resources. Surely they must be used for something. What do they do with them?"

"I'm not sure how to explain this..."

"Be blunt."

"It won't sting, but it could lead to confusion that would take a long time to untangle."

"Ok..."

"They sense the organisms with their cameras, I mean eyes, and with the boundaries of their bodies, and maybe talk to them."

"Do the organisms give good advice?"

"They don't have sophisticated enough minds for that."

"Ok, so what else is there?"

"About all else is that they do physical activities for the organisms' benefit."

"Ok. And what's the real reason they keep them? There's got to be something pragmatic."

"That's related to why I brought it up. It has something to do with the organic, something big, but I can't explain it."

"It seems like you can only explain a small part of the organic in terms of our world, and the part you can explain isn't very interesting."

"That's like saying that when a three-dimensional solid intersects a plane in two dimensions, the only part that can be detected in the plane is a two-dimensional cross-section (the three-dimensional doesn't fit in their frame of reference) so "three-dimensional" must not refer to anything real. The reason you can't make sense of the world I'm describing in terms of our world is because it contains real things that are utterly alien to us."

"Like what? Name one we haven't discussed."

"Seeing the trouble I had with the one concept, the organic, I'm not going to take on two at once."

"So the reason these unities keep organisms is so abstract and convoluted that it takes a top-flight mind to begin to grapple with."

"Not all of them keep organisms, but most of them find the reason—it's actually more of an assumption—so simple and straightforward that they would never think it was metaphysical."

"So I've found something normal about them! Their minds are of such an incredibly high caliber that—"

"No. Most of their minds are simpler than yours or mine, and furthermore, the ability to deal with abstractions doesn't enter the picture from their perspective."

"I don't know what to make of this."

"You understand to some degree how their bodies are real in a way we can never experience, and time and space are not just 'packaging' to what they do. Their keeping these organisms... the failure of the obvious reasons should tell you something, like an uninteresting two-dimensional cross section of a three-dimensional solid. If the part we can understand does not justify the practice, there might be something big out of sight."

"But what am I to make of it now?"

"Nothing now, just a placeholder. I'm trying to convey what it means to be organic."

"Is the organic in some relation to normal technology?"

"The two aren't independent of each other."

"Is the organic defined by the absence of technology?"

"Yes... no... You're deceptively close to the truth."

"Do all unities have the same access to technology?"

"No. There are considerable differences. All have a technology of sorts, but it would take a while to explain why some of it is technology. Some of them don't even have electronic circuits—and no, they are not at an advanced enough biotechnology level to transcend electronic circuits. But if we speak of technology we would recognize, there are major differences. Some have access to no technology; some have access to the best."

"And the ones without access to technology are organic?"

"Yes. Even if they try to escape it, they are inescapably organic."

"But the ones which have the best technology are the least organic."

"Yes."

"Then maybe it was premature to define the organic by the absence of technology, but we can at least make a spectrum between the organic and the technological."

"Yes... no... You're even more deceptively close to the truth. And I emphasize, 'deceptively'. Some of the people who are most organic have the best technology—"

"So the relationship breaks down? What if we disregard outliers?"

"But the root problem is that you're trying to define the organic with reference to technology. There is some relationship, but instead of starting with a concept of technology and using it to move towards a concept of the organic, it is better to start with the organic and move towards a concept of technology. Except that the concept of the organic doesn't lead to a concept of technology, not as we would explore it. The center of gravity is wrong. It's like saying that we have our thoughts so that certain processors

can generate a stream of ones and zeroes. It's backwards enough that you won't find the truth by looking at its mirror image."

"Ok, let me process it another way. What's the difference between a truly organic consciousness, and the least organic consciousness on the net?"

"That's very simple. One exists and the other doesn't."

"So all the... wait a minute. Are you saying that the net doesn't have consciousness?"

"Excellent. You got that one right."

"In the whole of cyberspace, how? How does the net organize and care for itself if it doesn't contain consciousness?"

"It is not exactly true to say that they do have a net, and it is not exactly true to say that they do not have a net. What net they have, began as a way to connect mind-body unities—without any cyberware, I might add."

"Then how do they jack in?"

"They 'jack in' through hardware that generates stimulation for their sensory organs, and that they can manipulate so as to put data into machines."

"How does it maintain itself?"

"It doesn't and it can't. It's maintained by mind-body unities."

"That sounds like a network designed by minds that hate technology. Is the network some kind of joke? Or at least intentionally ironic? Or designed by people who hate technology and wanted to have as anti-technological of a network as they can?"

"No; the unities who designed it, and most of those using it, want as sophisticated technological access as they can have."

"Why? Next you're going to tell me that the network is not one single network, but a hodge podge of other things that have been retroactively reinterpreted as network technology and pressed into service."

"That's also true. But the reason I was mentioning this is that the network is shaped by the shadow of the organic."

"So the organic is about doing things as badly as you can?"

"No."

"Does it make minds incompetent?"

"No. Ployon, remember the last time you made a robot body for a race—and won. How well would that body have done if you tried to make it work as a factory?"

"Atrocious, because it was optimized for—are you saying that the designers were trying to optimize the network as something other than a network?"

"No; I'm saying that the organic was so deep in them that unities who could not care less for the organic, and were trying to think purely in terms of technology, still created with a thick organic accent."

"So this was their best attempt at letting minds disappear into cyberspace?"

"At least originally, no, although that is becoming true. The network was part of what they would consider 'space-conquering tools.' Meaning, although not all of them thought in these terms, tools that would destroy the reality of place for them. The term 'space-conquering tools' was more apt than they realized, at least more apt than they realized consciously; one recalls their saying, 'You cannot kill time without injuring eternity.'"

"What does 'eternity' mean?"

"I *really* don't want to get into that now. Superficially it

means that there is something else that relativizes time, but if you look at it closely, you will see that it can't mean that we should escape time. The space-conquering tools in a very real sense conquered space, by making it less real. Before space-conquering tools, if you wanted to communicate with another unity, you had to somehow reach that unity's body. The position in space of that body, and therefore the body and space, were something you could not escape. Which is to say that the body and space were real—much more real than something you could look up. And to conquer space ultimately meant to destroy some of its reality."

"But the way they did this betrays that something is real to them. Even if you could even forget that other minds were attached to bodies, the space-conquering tools bear a heavy imprint from something outside of the most internally consistent way to conquer space. Even as the organic is disintegrating, it marks the way in which unities flee the organic."

"So the network was driving the organic away, at least partly."

"It would be more accurate to say that the disintegration of the organic helped create the network. There is feedback, but you've got the arrow of causality pointing the wrong way."

"Can you tell me a story?"

"Hmm... Remember the racer I mentioned earlier?"

"The mind-body unity who runs multiple races?"

"Indeed. Its favorite story runs like this—and I'll leave in the technical language. A hungry fox saw some plump, juicy green grapes hanging from a high cable. He tried to jump and eat them, and when he realized they were out of reach, he said, 'They were probably sour anyway!'"

"What's a grape?"

"Let me answer roughly as it would. A grape is a nutritional bribe to an organism to carry away its seed. It's a strategic reproductive organ."

"What does 'green' mean? I know what green electromagnetic radiation is, but why is that word being applied to a reproductive organ?"

"Some objects absorb most of a spectrum of what they call light, but emit a high proportion of light at that wavelength—"

"—which, I'm sure, is taken up by their cameras and converted to information in their consciousness. But why would such a trivial observation be included?"

"That is the mechanism by which green is delivered, but not the nature of what green is. And I don't know how to explain it, beyond saying that mechanically unities experience something from 'green' objects they don't experience from anything else. It's like a dimension, and there is something real to them I can't explain."

"What is a fox? Is 'fox' their word for a mind-body unity?"

"A fox is an organism that can move, but it is not considered a mind-body unity."

"Let me guess at 'hungry'. The fox needed nutrients, and the grapes would have given them."

"The grapes would have been indigestible to the fox's physiology, but you've got the right idea."

"What separates a fox from a mind-body unity? They both seem awfully similar—they have bodily needs, and they can both talk. And, for that matter, the grape organism was employing a reproductive strategy. Does 'organic' mean that all organisms are recognized as mind-body unities?"

"Oh, I should have explained that. The story doesn't work that way; most unities believe there is a big difference between killing a unity and killing most other organisms; many would kill a moving organism to be able to eat its body, and for that matter many would kill a fox and waste the food. A good many unities, and certainly this one, believes there is a vast difference between unities and other organisms. They can be quite organic while killing organisms for food. Being organic isn't really an issue of treating other organisms just like mind-body unities."

Archon paused for a moment. "What I was going to say is that that's just a literary device, but I realize there is something there. The organic recognizes that there's something in different organisms, especially moving ones, that's closer to mind-body unities than something that's not alive."

"Like a computer processor?"

"That's complex, and it would be even more complex if they really had minds on a computer. But for now I'll say that unless they see computers through a fantasy—which many of them do—they experience computers as logic without life. And at any rate, there is a literary device that treats other things as having minds. I used it myself when saying the grape organism employed a strategy; it isn't sentient. But their willingness to employ that literary mechanism seems to reflect both that a fox isn't a unity and that a fox isn't too far from being a unity. Other life is similar, but not equal."

"What kind of cable was the grape organism on? Which part of the net was it used for?"

"That story is a survival from before the transition from organic to technological. Advanced technology focuses on

information—"

"Where else would technology focus?"

"—less sophisticated technology performs manual tasks. That story was from before cables were used to carry data."

"Then what was the cable for?"

"To support the grape organism."

"Do they have any other technology that isn't real?"

"Do you mean, 'Do they have any other technology that doesn't push the envelope and expand what can be done with technology?'"

"Yes."

"Then your question shuts off the answer. Their technology doesn't exist to expand what technology can do; it exists to support a community in its organic life."

"Where's the room for progress in *that*?"

"It's a different focus. You don't need another answer; you need another question. And, at any rate, that is how this world tells the lesson of cognitive dissonance, that we devalue what is denied to us."

Ployon paused. "Ok; I need time to process that story—may I say, 'digest'?"

"Certainly."

"But one last question. Why did you refer to the fox as 'he'? Its supposed mind was—"

"In that world, a unity is always male ('he') or female ('she'). A neutered unity is extraordinarily rare, and a neutered male, a 'eunuch', is still called 'he.'"

"I'm familiar enough with those details of biology, but why would such an insignificant detail—"

"Remember about being mind-*body* unities. And don't think of them as bodies that would ordinarily be neutered. That's how new unities come to be in that world, with

almost no cloning and no uterine replicators—"

"They really *are* slime!"

"—and if you only understand the biology of it, you don't understand it."

"What don't I understand?"

"You're trying to understand a feature of language that magnifies something insignificant, and what would cause the language to do that. But you're looking for an explanation in the wrong place. Don't think that the bodies are the most sexual parts of them. They're the least sexual; the minds tied to those bodies are even more different than the bodies. The fact that the language shaped by unities for a long time distinguishes 'masculine' and 'feminine' enough to have the difference written into 'it', so that 'it' is 'he' or 'she' when speaking of mind-body unities."

"Hmm... Is this another dimension to their reality that is flattened out in ours? Are their minds always thinking about that act?"

"In some cases that's not too far from the truth. But you're looking for the big implication in the wrong place. This would have an influence if a unity never thought about that act, and it has influence before a unity has any concept of that act."

"Back up a bit. Different question. You said this was their way of explaining the theory of cognitive dissonance. But it isn't. It describes one event in which cognitive dissonance occurs. It doesn't articulate the theory; at most the theory can be extracted from it. And worse, if one treats it as explaining cognitive dissonance, it is highly ambiguous about where the boundaries of cognitive dissonance are. One single instance is very ambiguous about what is and is not another instance. This is an extraordinarily poor

method of communication!"

"It is extraordinarily good, even classic, communication for minds that interpenetrate bodies. Most of them don't work with bare abstractions, at least not most of the time. They don't have simply discarnate minds that have been stuck into bodies. Their minds are astute in dealing with situations that mind-body unities will find themselves in. And think about it. If you're going to understand how they live, you're going to have to understand some very different, enfleshed ways of thought. No, more than that, if you still see the task of understanding ways of thought, you will not understand them."

"So these analyses do not help me in understanding your world."

"So far as you are learning through this kind of analysis, you will not understand... but this analysis is all you have for now."

"Are there any other stories that use an isomorphic element to this one?"

"I don't know. I've gotten deep enough into this world that I don't keep stories sorted by isomorphism class."

"Tell me another story the way that a storyteller there would tell it; there is something in it that eludes me."

Archon said, "Ok... The alarm clock chimed. It was a device such that few engineers alive fully understood its mechanisms, and no man could tell the full story of how it came to be, of the exotic places and activities needed to make all of its materials, or the logistics to assemble them, or the organization and infrastructure needed to bring together all the talent of those who designed, crafted, and maintained them, or any other of sundry details that would take a book to list. The man abruptly shifted from the vivid

kaleidoscope of the dreaming world to being awake, and opened his eyes to a kaleidoscope of sunrise colors and a room with the song of birds and the song of crickets. Outside, the grass grew, the wind blew, a busy world was waking up, and the stars continued their ordered and graceful dance. He left the slumbering form of the love of his life, showered, and stepped out with his body fresh, clean, and beautifully adorned. He stopped to kiss the fruit of their love, a boy cooing in his crib, and drove past commuters, houses, pedestrians, and jaybirds with enough stories to tell that they could fill a library to overflowing.

Archon continued, "After the majestic and ordered dance on the freeway brought him to his destination safe, unharmed, on time, and focusing on his work, he spent a day negotiating the flow of the human treasure of language, talking, listening, joking, teasing, questioning, enjoying the community of his co-workers, and cooperating to make it possible for a certain number of families to now enter the homes of their dreams. In the middle of the day he stopped to eat, nourishing a body so intricate that the state of the art in engineering could not hold a candle to his smallest cell. This done, he continued to use a spirit immeasurably greater than his body to pursue his work. Needless to say, the universe, whose physics alone is beyond our current understanding, continued to work according to all of its ordered laws and the spiritual world continued to shine. The man's time at work passed quickly, with a pitter-patter of squirrels' feet on the roof of their office, and before long he entered the door and passed a collection with copies of most of the greatest music produced by Western civilization —available for him to listen to, any time he pleased. The man absently kissed his wife, and stepped away, breathing

the breath of God.

"Hi, Honey!' she said. 'How was your day?'

"Somewhat dull. Maybe something exciting will happen tomorrow."

Ployon said, "There's someone I want to meet who is free now, so I'll leave in a second... I'm not going to ask about all the technical vocabulary, but I wanted to ask: Is this story a farce? It describes a unity who has all these ludicrous resources, and then it—"

"—*he*—"

"—he says the most ludicrous thing."

"What you've said is true. The story is not a farce."

"But the story tells of things that are momentous."

"I know, but people in that world do not appreciate many of these things."

"Why? They seem to have enough access to these momentous resources."

"Yes, they certainly do. But most of the unities are bathed in such things and do not think that they are anything worth thinking of."

"And I suppose you're going to tell me that is part of their greatness."

"To them these things are just as boring as jacking into a robotically controlled factory and using the machines to assemble something."

"I see. At least I think I see. And I really need to be going now... but one more question. What is 'God'?"

"Please, not that. Please, *any* word but that. Don't ask about that."

"I'm not expected, and you've piqued my curiosity."

"Don't you need to be going now?"

"*You've piqued my curiosity.*"

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "God is the being who made the world."

"Ok, so you are God."

"Yes... no. *No! I am not God!*"

"But you created this world?"

"Not like God did. I envisioned looking in on it, but to that world, I do not exist."

"But God exists?"

"Yes... no... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God does not exist."

"So the world is self-contradictory? Or would it therefore be true to say that God both exists and does not exist?"

"No. Um... It is false to say that God exists and it is false to say that God exists as it is false to say that a square is a line and it is false to say that a square is a point. God is reflected everywhere in the world: not a spot in the entire cosmos is devoid of God's glory—"

"A couple of things. First, is this one more detail of the universe that you cannot explain but is going to have one more dimension than our world?"

"God is of higher dimension than that world."

"So our world is, say, two dimensional, that world is three dimensional, and yet it somehow contains God, who is four dimensional?"

"God is not the next step up."

"Then is he two steps up?"

"Um..."

"Three? Four? Fifty? Some massive power of two?"

"Do you mind if I ask you a question from that world?"

"Go ahead."

"How many minds can be at a point in space?"

"If you mean, 'thinking about', there is no theoretical limit; the number is not limited in principle to two, three, or... Are you saying that God has an infinite number of dimensions?"

"You caught that quick; the question is a beautiful way of asking whether a finite or an infinite number of angels can dance on the head of a pin, in their picturesque language."

"That question is very rational. But returning to the topic, since God has an infinite number of dimensions—"

"In a certain sense. It also captures part of the truth to say that God is a single point—"

"Zero dimensions?"

"God is so great not as to need any other, not to need parts as we have. And, by the way, the world does not contain God. God contains the world."

"I'm struggling to find a mathematical model that will accommodate all of this."

"Why don't you do something easier, like find an atom that will hold a planet?"

"Ok. As to the second of my couple of things, what is glory?"

"It's like the honor that we seek, except that it is immeasurably full while our honors are hollow. As I was saying, not a place in the entire cosmos is devoid of his glory—"

"His? So God is a body?"

"That's beside the point. Whether or not God has a body, he—"

"—it—"

"—he—"

"—*it...* isn't a male life form..."

Archon said, "Ployon, what if I told you that God, without changing, could become a male unity? But you're saying you can't project maleness up onto God, without understanding that maleness is the shadow of something in God. You have things upside down."

"But maleness has to do with a rather undignified method of creating organisms, laughable next to a good scientific generation center."

"His ways are not like your ways, Ployon. Or mine."

"Of course; this seems to be true of everything in the world."

"But it's even true of men in that world."

"So men have no resemblance to God?"

"No, there's—oh, no!"

"What?"

"Um... never mind, you're not going to let me get out of it. I said earlier that that world is trying to make itself more like this one. Actually, I didn't say that, but it's related to what I said. There has been a massive movement which is related to the move from organic to what is not organic, and part of it has to do with... In our world, a symbol is arbitrary. No connection. In that world, something about a symbol is deeply connected with what it represents. And the unities, every single one, are symbols of God in a very strong sense."

"Are they miniature copies? If God does not have parts, how do they have minds and bodies?"

"That's not looking at it the right way. They indeed have parts, as God does not, but they aren't a scale model of God. They're something much more. A unity is someone whose very existence is bound up with God, who walks as a

moving... I'm not sure what to use as the noun, but a moving something of God's presence. And you cannot help or harm one of these unities without helping or harming God."

"Is this symbol kind of a separate God?"

"The unities are not separate from God."

"Are the unities God?"

"I don't know how to answer that. It is a grave error for anyone to confuse himself with God. And at the same time, the entire purpose of being a unity is to receive a gift, and that gift is becoming what God is."

"So the minds will be freed from their bodies?"

"No, some of them hope that their bodies will be deepened, transformed, become everything that their bodies are now and much more. But unities who have received this gift will always, *always*, have their bodies. It will be part of their glory."

"I'm having trouble tracking with you. It seems that everything one could say about God is false."

"That is true."

"Think about it. What you just said is contradictory."

"God is so great that anything one could say about God falls short of the truth as a point falls short of being a line. But that does not mean that all statements are equal. Think about the statements, 'One is equal to infinity.' 'Two is equal to infinity.' 'Three is equal to infinity.' and 'Four is equal to infinity.' All of them are false. But some come closer to the truth than others. And so you have a ladder of statements from the truest to the falsest, and when we say something is false, we don't mean that it has no connection to the truth; we mean that it falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing

the truth, and if we say, 'All statements fall immeasurably short of capturing the truth,' *that* falls immeasurably short of capturing the truth. Our usual ways of using logic tend to break down."

"And how does God relate to the interpenetration of mind and matter?"

"Do you see that his world, with mind and matter interpenetrating, is deeper and fuller than ours, that it has something that ours does not, and that it is so big we have trouble grasping it?"

"I see... you said that God was its creator. And... there is something about it that is just outside my grasp."

"It's outside my grasp too."

"Talking about God has certainly been a mind stretcher. I would love to hear more about him."

"Talking about God for use as a mind stretcher is like buying a piece of art because you can use its components to make rocket fuel. Some people, er, unities in that world would have a low opinion of this conversation."

"Since God is so far from that world, I'd like to restrict our attention to relevant—"

Archon interrupted. "You misunderstood what I said. Or maybe you understood it and I could only hint at the lesser part of the truth. You cannot understand unities without reference to God."

"How would unities explain it?"

"That is complex. A great many unities do not believe in God—"

"So they don't understand what it means to be a unity."

"Yes. No. That is complex. There are a great many unities who vehemently deny that there is a God, or would dismiss 'Is there a God?' as a pointless rhetorical question,

but these unities may have very deep insight into what it means to be a unity."

"But you said, 'You cannot understand—'"

Archon interrupted. "Yes, and it's true. *You* cannot understand unities without reference to God."

Archon continued. "Ployon, there are mind-body unities who believe that they are living in our world, with mind and body absolutely separate and understandable without reference to each other. And yet if you attack their bodies, they will take it as if you had attacked their minds, as if you had hurt *them*. When I described the strange custom of keeping organisms around which serve no utilitarian purpose worth the trouble of keeping them, know that this custom, which relates to their world's organic connection between mind and body, does not distinguish people who recognize that they are mind-body unities and people who believe they are minds which happen to be wrapped in bodies. Both groups do this. The tie between mind and body is too deep to expunge by believing it doesn't exist. And there are many of them who believe God doesn't exist, or it would be nice to know if God existed but unities could never know, or God is very different from what he in fact is, but they expunge so little of the pattern imprinted by God in the core of their being that they can understand what it means to be a unity at a very profound level, but not recognize God. But *you* cannot understand unities without reference to God."

Ployon said, "Which parts of unities, and what they do, are affected by God? At what point does God enter their experience?"

"Which parts of programs, and their behaviors, are affected by the fact that they run on a computer? When

does a computer begin to be relevant?"

"Touché. But why is God relevant, if it makes no difference whether you believe in him?"

"I didn't say that it makes no difference. Earlier you may have gathered that the organic is something deeper than ways we would imagine to try to be organic. If it is possible, as it is, to slaughter moving organisms for food and still be organic, that doesn't mean that the organic is so small it doesn't affect such killing; it means it is probably deeper than we can imagine. And it doesn't also mean that because one has been given a large organic capital and cannot liquidate it quickly, one's choices do not matter. The decisions a unity faces, whether or not to have relationships with other unities that fit the timeless pattern, whether to give work too central a place in the pursuit of technology and possessions or too little a place or its proper place, things they have talked about since time immemorial and things which their philosophers have assumed went without saying—the unity has momentous choices not only about whether to invest or squander their capital, but choices that affect how they will live."

"What about things like that custom you mentioned? I bet there are a lot of them."

"Looking at, and sensing, the organisms they keep has a place, if they have one. And so does moving about among many non-moving organisms. And so does slowly sipping a fluid that causes a pleasant mood while the mind is temporarily impaired and loosened. And so does rotating oneself so that one's sight is filled with clusters of moisture vapor above their planet's surface. And some of the unities urge these things because they sense the organic has been lost, and without reference to the tradition that urges

deeper goods. And yes, I know that these activities probably sound strange—"

"I do not see what rational benefit these activities would have, but I see this may be a defect with me rather than a defect with the organic—"

"Know that it is a defect with you rather than a defect with the organic."

"—but what is this about rotating oneself?"

"As one goes out from the center of their planet, the earth—if one could move, for the earth's core is impenetrable minerals—one would go through solid rock, then pass through the most rarefied boundary, then pass through gases briefly and be out in space. You would encounter neither subterranean passageways and buildings reaching to the center of the earth, and when you left you would find only the rarest vessel leaving the atmosphere—"

"Then where do they live?"

"At the boundary where space and planetary mass meet. *All* of them are priveleged to live at that meeting-place, a narrow strip or sphere rich in life. There are very few of them; it's a select club. Not even a trillion. And the only property they have is the best—a place teeming with life that would be impossible only a quarter of the planet's thickness above or below. A few of them build edifices reaching scant storeys into the sky; a few dig into the earth; there are so few of these that *not* being within a minute's travel from *literally* touching the planet's surface is exotic. But the unities, along with the rest of the planet's life, live in a tiny, priceless film adorned with the best resources they could ever know of."

Ployon was stunned. It thought of the cores of planets and asteroids it had been in. It thought of the ships and

stations in space. Once it had had the privilege of working from a subnet hosted within a comparatively short distance of a planet's surface—it was a rare privilege, acquired through deft political maneuvering, and there were fewer than 130,982,539,813,209 other minds who had shared that privilege. And, basking in that luxury, it could only envy the minds which had bodies that walked on the surface. Ployon was stunned and reeling at the privilege of—

Ployon said, "How often do they travel to other planets?"

"There is only one planet so rich as to have them."

Ployon pondered the implications. It had travelled to half the spectrum of luxurious paradises. Had it been to even one this significant? Ployon reluctantly concluded that it had not. And that was not even considering what it meant for this golden plating to teem with life. And then Ployon realized that *each* of the unities had a *body* on that surface. It reeled in awe.

Archon said, "And you're not thinking about what it means that surface is home to the biological network, are you?"

Ployon was silent.

Archon said, "This organic biological network, in which they live and move and have their being—"

"Is God the organic?"

"Most of the things that the organic has, that are not to be found in our world, are reflections of God. But God is more. It is true that in God that they live and move and have their being, but it is truer. There is a significant minority that identifies the organic with God—"

Ployon interrupted, "—who are wrong—"

Archon interrupted, "—who are reacting against the

destruction of the organic and seek the right thing in the wrong place—"

Ployon interrupted, "But how is God different from the organic?"

Archon sifted through a myriad of possible answers. "Hmm, this might be a good time for you to talk with that other mind you wanted to talk with."

"You know, you're good at piquing my curiosity."

"If you're looking for where they diverge, they don't. Or at least, some people would say they don't. Others who are deeply connected with God would say that the organic as we have been describing it is problematic—"

"But all unities are deeply connected with God, and disagreement is—"

"You're right, but that isn't where I was driving. And this relates to something messy, about disagreements when —"

"Aren't all unities able to calculate the truth from base axioms? Why would they disagree?"

Archon paused. "There are a myriad of real, not virtual disagreements—"

Ployon interrupted, "And it is part of a deeper reality to that world that—"

Archon interrupted. "No, no, or at best indirectly. There is something fractured about that world that—"

Ployon interrupted. "—is part of a tragic beauty, yes. Each thing that is artificially constricted in that world makes it greater. I'm waiting for the explanation."

"No. This does not make it greater."

"Then I'm waiting for the explanation of why this one limitation does *not* make it greater. But back to what you said about the real and the organic—"

"The differences between God and the organic are not differences of opposite directions. You are looking in the wrong place if you are looking for contradictions. It's more a difference like... if you knew what 'father' and 'mother' meant, male parent and female parent—"

Ployon interrupted, "—you know I have perfect details of male and female reproductive biology—"

Archon interrupted, "—and you think that if you knew the formula for something called chicken soup, you would know what the taste of chicken soup is for them—"

Ployon continued, "—so now you're going to develop some intricate elaboration of what it means that there is only one possible 'mother's' contribution, while outside of a laboratory the 'father's' contribution is extraordinarily haphazard..."

Archon said, "A complete non sequitur. If you only understand reproductive biology, you do not understand what a father or mother is. Seeing as how we have no concept yet of father or mother, let us look at something that's different enough but aligns with father/mother in an interesting enough way that... never mind."

Archon continued, "Imagine on the one hand a virtual reality, and on the other hand the creator of that virtual reality. You don't have to choose between moving in the virtual reality and being the creator's guest; the way to be the creator's guest is to move in the virtual reality and the purpose of moving in the virtual reality is being the creator's guest. But that doesn't mean that the creator is the virtual reality, or the virtual reality is the creator. It's not just a philosophical error to confuse them, or else it's a philosophical error with ramifications well outside of philosophy."

"Why didn't you just say that the relationship between God and the organic is creator/creation? Or that the organic is the world that was created?"

"Because the relationship is not that, or at very least not just that. And the organic is not the world—that is a philosophical error almost as serious as saying that the creator is the virtual reality, if a very different error. I fear that I have given you a simplification that is all the more untrue because of how true it is. God is in the organic, and in the world, and in each person, but not in the same way. How can I put it? If I say, 'God is in the organic,' it would be truer to say, 'The organic is not devoid of God,' because that is more ambiguous. If there were three boxes, and one contained a functional robot 'brain', and another contained a functional robot arm, and the third contained a non-functioning robot, it would be truer to say that each box contains something like a functioning robot than to say that each box contains a functioning robot. The ambiguity allows for being true in different ways in the different contexts, let alone something that words could not express even if we were discussing only one 'is in' or 'box'."

"Is there another way of expressing how their words would express it?"

"Their words are almost as weak as our words here."

"So they don't know about something this important?"

"Knowledge itself is different for them. To know something for us is to be able to analyze in a philosophical discussion. And this knowledge exists for them. But there is another root type of knowledge, a knowledge that—"

"Could you analyze the differences between the knowledge we use and the knowledge they use?"

"Yes, and it would be as useful to you as discussing

biology. This knowledge is not entirely alien to us; when a mathematician 'soaks' in a problem, or I refused to connect with anything but the body, for a moment a chasm was crossed. But in that world the chasm doesn't exist... wait, that's too strong... a part of the chasm doesn't exist. Knowing is not with the mind alone, but the whole person —"

"What part of the knowing is stored in the bones?"

"Thank you for your flippancy, but people use the metaphor of knowledge being in their bones, or drinking, for this knowing."

"This sounds more like a physical process and some hankey-pankey that has been dignified by being called knowing. It almost sounds as if they don't have minds."

"They don't."

"*What?*"

"They don't, at least not as we know them. The mathematical analogy I would use is that they... never mind, I don't want to use a mathematical analogy. The computational analogy I would use is that we are elements of a computer simulation, and every now and then we break into a robot that controls the computer, and do something that transcends what elements of the computer simulation "should" be able to do. But they don't transcend the simulation because they were never elements of the simulation in the first place—they are real bodies, or real unities. And what I've called 'mind' in them is more properly understood as 'spirit', which is now a meaningless word to you, but is part of them that meets God whether they are aware of it or not. Speaking philosophically is a difficult discipline that few of them can do—"

"They are starting to sound mentally feeble."

"Yes, if you keep looking at them as an impoverished version of our world. It is hard to speak philosophically as it is hard for you to emulate a clock and do nothing else—because they need to drop out of several dimensions of their being to do it properly, and they live in those dimensions so naturally that it is an unnatural constriction for most of them to talk as if that was the only dimension of their being. And here I've been talking disappointingly about knowledge, making it sound more abstract than our knowing, when in fact it is much less so, and probably left you with the puzzle of how they manage to bridge gaps between mind, spirit, and body... but the difficulty of the question lies in a false setup. They are *unities* which experience, interact with, know all of them as united. And the knowing is deep enough that they can speculate that there's no necessary link between their spirits and bodies, or minds and bodies, or what have you. And if I can't explain this, I can't explain something even more foundational, the fact that the greatest thing about God is not how inconceivably majestic he is, but how close."

"It sounds as if—wait, I think you've given me a basis for a decent analysis. Let me see if I can—"

"Stop there."

"Why?"

Archon said, "Let me tell you a little story."

Archon continued, "A philosopher, Berkeley, believed that the only real things are minds and ideas and experiences in those minds: hence a rock was equal to the sum of every mind's impression of it. You could say that a rock existed, but what that had to mean was that there were certain sense impressions and ideas in minds, including God's mind; it didn't mean that there was matter outside of

minds."

"A lovely virtual metaphysics. I've simulated that metaphysics, and it's enjoyable for a time."

"Yes, but for Berkeley it meant something completely different. Berkeley was a bishop,"

"What's a bishop?"

"I can't explain all of that now, but part of a bishop is a leader who is responsible for a community that believes God became a man, and helping them to know God and be unities."

"How does that reconcile with that metaphysics?"

Archon said, "Ployon, stop interrupting. He believed that they were not only compatible, but the belief that God became a man could only be preserved by his metaphysics. And he believed he was defending 'common sense', how most unities thought about the world.

Archon continued, "And after he wrote his theories, another man, Samuel Johnson, kicked a rock and said, 'I refute Berkeley thus!'"

Ployon said, "Ha ha! That's the way to score!"

"But he didn't score. Johnson established only one thing—"

"—how to defend against Berkeley—"

"—that he didn't understand Berkeley."

"Yes, he did."

"No, he didn't."

"But he did."

"Ployon, only the crudest understanding of Berkeley's ideas could mean that one could refute them by kicking a rock. Berkeley didn't make his ideas public until he could account for the sight of someone kicking a rock, or the experience of kicking it yourself, just as well as if there were

matter outside of minds."

"I know."

"So now that we've established that—"

Ployon interrupted. "I know that Berkeley's ideas could account for kicking a rock as well as anything else. But kicking a rock is still an excellent way to refute Berkeley. If what you've said about this world has any coherence at all."

"*What?*"

"Well, Berkeley's ideas are airtight, right?"

"Ployon, there is no way they could be disproven. Not by argument, not by action."

"So it is in principle impossible to force someone out of Berkeley's ideas by argument."

"Absolutely."

"But you're missing something. What is it you've been talking to me about?"

"A world where mind and matter interpenetrate, and the organic, and there are many dimensions to life—"

"And if you're just falling further into a trap to logically argue, wouldn't it do something fundamentally *unity*-like to step into another dimension?"

Archon was silent.

Ployon said, "I understand that it would demonstrate a profound misunderstanding in our world... but wouldn't it say something equally profound in that world?"

Archon was stunned.

Ployon was silent for a long time.

Then Ployon said, "When are you going to refute Berkeley?"

Since the dawn of time, those who have walked the

earth have looked up into the starry sky and wondered. They have asked, "What is the universe, and who are we?" "What are the woods?" "Where did this all come from?" "Is there life after death?" "What is the meaning of our existence?" The march of time has brought civilization, and with that, science. And science allows us to answer these age-old human questions.

That, at least, is the account of it that people draw now. But the truth is much more interesting.

Science is an ingenious mechanism to test guesses about mechanisms and behavior of the universe, and it is phenomenally powerful in that arena. Science can try to explain how the Heavens move, but it isn't the sort of thing to explain why there are Heavens that move that way—science can also describe how the Heavens have moved and reached their present position, but not the "Why?" behind it. Science can describe how to make technology to make life more convenient, but not "What is the meaning of life?" Trying to ask science to answer "Why?" (or for that matter, "Who?" or any other truly interesting question besides "How?") is a bit like putting a book on a scale and asking the scale, "What does this book mean?" And there are indeed some people who will accept the scale's answer, 429.7425 grams, as the definitive answer to what the book means, and all the better because it is so *precise*.

But to say that much and then stop is to paint a deceptive picture. *Very* deceptive. Why?

Science at that point had progressed more than at any point in history, and its effects were being felt around the world. And science enjoyed both a profound prestige and a profound devotion. Many people did not know what "understanding nature" could mean besides "learning

scientific descriptions of nature," which was a bit like not knowing what "understanding your best friend" could mean besides "learning the biochemical building blocks of your friend's body."

All this and more is true, yet this is not the most important truth. This was the Middle Age between ancient and human society and the technological, and in fact it was the early Middle Age. People were beginning to develop real technologies, the seeds of technology we would recognize, and could in primitive fashion jack into such a network as existed then. But all of this was embraced in a society that was ancient, ancient beyond measure. As you may have guessed, it is an error to misunderstand that society as an inexplicably crude version of real technological society. It is a fundamental error.

To really understand this society, you need to understand not its technology, but the sense in which it was ancient. I will call it 'medieval', but you must understand that the ancient element in that society outweighs anything we would recognize.

And even this is deceptive, not because a single detail is wrong, but because it is abstract. I will tell you about certain parts in an abstract fashion, but you must understand that in this world's thinking the concrete comes *before* the abstract. I will do my best to tell a story—not as they would tell one, because that would conceal as much as it would reveal, but taking their way of telling stories and adapting it so we can see what is going on.

For all of their best efforts to spoil it, all of them live on an exquisite garden in the thin film where the emptiness of space meets the barrier of rock—there is a nest, a cradle where they are held tightly, and even if some of those who

are most trying to be scientific want to flee into the barren wastes of space and other planets hostile to their kind of life. And this garden itself has texture, an incredible spectrum of texture along its surface. Place is itself significant, and I cannot capture what this story would have been like had it been placed in Petaling Jaya in Malaysia, or Paris in France, or Cambridge in England. What are these? I don't know... I can say that Petaling Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge are cities, but that would leave you knowing as much as you knew 5 milliseconds before I told you. And Malaysia, France, and England are countries, and now you know little besides being able to guess that a country is somehow capable of containing a city. Which is barely more than you knew before; the fact is that there is something very different between Petaling Jaya, Paris, and Cambridge. They have different wildlife and different places with land and water, but that is not nearly so interesting as the difference in people. I could say that people learn different skills, if I wanted to be very awkward and uninformative, but... the best way of saying it is that in our world, because there is nothing keeping minds apart... In that world, people have been separate so they don't even speak the same language. They almost have separate worlds. There is something common to all medievals, beyond what technology may bring, and people in other cities could find deep bonds with this story, but... Oh, there are many more countries than those I listed, and these countries have so many cities that you could spend your whole life travelling between cities and never see all of them. No, our world doesn't have this wealth. Wealthy as it is, it doesn't come close.

Petaling Jaya is a place of warm rainstorms, torrents of

water falling from the sky, a place where a little stream of unscented water flows by the road, even if such a beautiful "open sewer" is not appreciated. Petaling Jaya is a place where people are less aware of time than in Cambridge or Paris and yet a place where people understand time better, because of reasons that are subtle and hard to understand. It draws people from three worlds in the grandeur that is Asia, and each of them brings treasures. The Chinese bring with them the practice of calling adults "Uncle" or "Aunt", my father's brother or my father's sister or my mother's brother or my mother's sister, which is to say, addresses them not only by saying that there is something great about them, but they are "tied by blood"—a bond that I do not know how to explain, save to say that ancestry and origins are not the mechanism of how they came to be, or at least not just the mechanism of how they came to be. Ancestry and origins tell of the substance of who they are, and that is one more depth that cannot exist in our world with matter and mind separate. The Indians and Bumi Putras—if it is really only them, which is far from true—live a life of friendship and hospitality, which are human treasures that shine in them. What is hospitality, you ask? That is hard to answer; it seems that anything I can say will be deceptive. It means that if you have a space, and if you allow someone in that space, you serve that person, caring for every of his needs. That is a strange virtue—and it will sound stranger when I say that this is not endured as inexpedient, but something where people want to call others. Is it an economic exchange? That is beside the point; these things are at once the shadow cast by real hospitality, and at the same time the substance of hospitality itself, and you need to understand men before you can understand it. What

about friendship? Here I am truly at a loss. I can only say that in the story that I am about to tell, what happens is the highest form of friendship.

Paris is, or at least has been, a place with a liquid, a drug, that temporarily causes a pleasant mood while changing behavior and muddling a person's thoughts. But to say that misses what that liquid is, in Paris or much else. To some it is very destructive, and the drug is dangerous if it is handled improperly. But that is the hinge to something that—in our world, no pleasure is ever dangerous. You or I have experienced pleasures that these minds could scarcely dream of. We can have whatever pleasure we want at any time. And in a very real sense no pleasure *means* anything. But in their world, with its weaker pleasures, every pleasure is connected to something. And this liquid, this pleasure, if taken too far, destroys people—which is a hinge, a doorway to something. It means that they need to learn a self-mastery in using this liquid, and in using it many of them forge a beauty in themselves that affects all of life. And they live beautiful lives. Beautiful in many ways. They are like Norsemen of ages past, who sided with the good powers, not because the good powers were going to win, but because they wanted to side with the good powers and fight alongside them when the good powers lost and chaos ruled. It is a tragic beauty, and the tragedy is all the more real because it is unneeded, but it is beauty, and it is a beauty that could not exist if they knew the strength of good. And I have not spoken of the beauty of the language in Paris, with its melody and song, or of the artwork and statues, the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur, or indeed of the tapestry that makes up the city.

Cambridge is what many of them would call a

"medieval" village, meaning that it has stonework that looks to its members like the ancient world's architecture. To them this is a major difference; the ancient character of the buildings to them overwhelms the fact that they are buildings. To that medieval world, both the newest buildings and the ones they considered "medieval" had doorways, stairwells, rooms, windows, and passages. You or I would be struck by the ancient character of the oldest and newest buildings and the ancient character of the life they serve. But to these medievals, the fact that a doorway was built out of machine-made materials instead of having long ago been shaped from stone takes the door—the *door*—from being ancient to being a new kind of thing! And so in the quaintest way the medievals consider Cambridge a "medieval" village, not because they were all medievals, but because the ancient dimension to *architecture* was more ancient to them than the equally ancient ways of constructing spaces that were reflected in the "new" buildings. There was more to it than that, but...

That was not the most interesting thing about them. I know you were going to criticize me for saying that hospitality was both a human treasure and something that contributed to the uniqueness of Petaling Jaya, but I need to do the same thing again. Politeness is... how can I describe it? Cynics describe politeness as being deceit, something where you learn a bunch of standard things to do and have to use them to hide the fact that you're offended, or bored, or want to leave, or don't like someone. And *all of that is true*—and deceptive. A conversation will politely begin with one person saying, "Hi, Barbara, how are you?" And Barbara will say, "Fine, George, how are you?" "Fine!" And the exact details seem almost arbitrary between

cultures. This specific interaction is, on the surface, superficial and not necessarily true: people usually say they feel fine whether or not they really feel fine at all. And so politeness can be picked apart in this fashion, as if there's nothing else there, but *there is*. Saying "How are you?" opens a door, a door of concern. In one sense, what is given is very small. But if a person says, "I feel rotten," the other person is likely to listen. Barbara might only "give" George a little bit of chatter, but if he were upset, she would comfort him; if he were physically injured, she would call an ambulance to give him medical help; if he were hungry, she might buy him something to eat. But he only wants a little chat, so she only gives him a little chat—which is not really a little thing at all, but I'm going to pretend that it's small. Politeness stems from a concern for others, and is in actuality quite deep. The superficial "Hi, how are you?" is really not superficial at all. It is connected to a much deeper concern, and the exterior of rules is connected to a heart of concern. And Cambridge, which is a place of learning, and has buildings more ancient than what these medieval people usually see, is perhaps most significantly distinguished by its politeness.

But I have not been telling you a story. These observations may not be completely worthless, but they are still not a dynamic story. The story I'm about to tell you is not in Petaling Jaya, nor in Paris, nor in Cambridge, nor in any of thousands of other worlds. And I would like to show you what the medieval society looks like in action. And so let's look at Peter.

Peter, after a long and arduous trek, opened the car door, got out, stretched, looked at the vast building before him, and listened as his father said, "We've done it! The rest

should be easy, at least for today." Then Peter smiled, and smashed his right thumb in the car door.

Then suddenly they moved—their new plan was to get to a hospital. Not much later, Peter was in the Central DuPage Hospital emergency room, watching people who came in after him be treated before him—not because they had more clout, but because they had worse injuries. The building was immense—something like one of our biological engineering centers, but instead of engineering bodies according to a mind's specification, this used science to restore bodies that had been injured and harmed, and reduce people's suffering. And it was incredibly primitive; at its best, it helped the bodies heal itself. But you must understand that even if these people were far wealthier than most others in their tiny garden, they had scant resources by our standard, and they made a major priority to restore people whose bodies had problems. (If you think about it, this tells something about how they view the value of each body.) Peter was a strong and healthy young man, and it had been a while since he'd been in a hospital. He was polite to the people who were helping him, even though he wished he were anywhere else.

You're wondering why he deliberately smashed his thumb? Peter didn't deliberately smash his thumb. He was paying attention to several other things and shoved the door close while his thumb was in its path. His body is not simply a device controlled by his mind; they interact, and his mind can't do anything he wishes it to do—he can't add power to it. He thinks by working with a mind that operates with real limitations and can overlook something in excitement—much like his body. If he achieves something, he doesn't just requisition additional mental power. He struggles

within the capabilities of his own mind, and that means that when he achieves something with his mind, he *achieves* something. Yes, in a way that you or I cannot. Not only is his body in a very real sense more real to him than any of the bodies you or I have jacked into and swapped around, but his *mind* is more real. I'm not sure how to explain it.

Peter arrived for the second time well after check-in time, praying to be able to get in. After a few calls with a network that let him connect with other minds while keeping his body intact, a security officer came in, expressed sympathy about his bandaged thumb—what does 'sympathy' mean? It means that you share in another person's pain and make it less—and let him up to his room. The family moved his possessions from the car to his room and made his bed in a few minutes, and by the time it was down, the security guard had called the RA, who brought Peter his keys.

It was the wee hours of the morning when Peter looked at his new home for the second time, and tough as Peter was, the pain in his thumb kept the weary man from falling asleep. He was in as much pain as he'd been in for a while. What? Which part do you want explained? Pain is when the mind is troubled because the body is injured; it is a warning that the body needs to be taken care of. No, he can't turn it off just because he thinks it's served his purpose; again, you're not understanding the intimate link between mind and body. And the other thing... sleep is... Their small globe orbits a little star, and it spins as it turns. At any time, part of the planet faces the star, the sun, and part faces away, and on the globe, it is as if a moving wall comes, and all is light, then another wall comes, and it is dark. The globe has a rhythm of light and dark, a rhythm of day and night, and

people live in intimate attunement to this rhythm. The ancients moved about when it was light and slept when it was dark—to sleep, at its better moments, is to come fatigued and have body and mind rejuvenate themselves to awaken full of energy. The wealthier medievals have the ability to see by mechanical light, to awaken when they want and fall asleep when they want—and yet they are still attuned, profoundly attuned, to this natural cycle and all that goes with it. For that matter, Peter can stick a substance into his body that will push away the pain—and yet, for all these artificial escapes, medievals feel pain and usually take care of their bodies by heeding it, and medievals wake more or less when it is light and sleep more or less when it is dark. And they don't think of pain as attunement to their bodies—most of them wish they couldn't feel pain, and certainly don't think of pain as good—nor do more than a few of them think in terms of waking and sleeping to a natural rhythm... but so much of the primeval way of being human is so difficult to dislodge for the medievals.

He awoke when the light was ebbing, and after some preparations set out, wandering this way and that until he found a place to eat. The pain was much duller, and he made his way to a selection of different foods—meant not only to nourish but provide a pleasant taste—and sat down at a table. There were many people about; he would not eat in a cell by himself, but at a table with others in a great hall.

A young man said, "Hi, I'm John." Peter began to extend his hand, then looked at his white bandaged thumb and said, "Excuse me for not shaking your hand. I am Peter."

A young woman said, "I'm Mary. I saw you earlier and

was hoping to see you more."

Peter wondered about something, then said, "I'll drink for that," reached with his right hand, grabbed a glass vessel full of carbonated water with sugar, caffeine, and assorted unnatural ingredients, and then winced in pain, spilling the fluid on the table.

Everybody at the table moved. A couple of people dodged the flow of liquid; others stopped what they were doing, rushing to take earth toned objects made from the bodies of living trees (napkins), which absorbed the liquid and were then shipped to be preserved with other unwanted items. Peter said, "I keep forgetting I need to be careful about my thumb," smiled, grabbed another glass with fluid cows had labored to create, until his wet left hand slipped and he spilled the organic fluid all over his food.

Peter stopped, sat back, and then laughed for a while. "This is an interesting beginning to my college education."

Mary said, "I noticed you managed to smash your thumb in a car door without saying any words you regret. What else has happened?"

Peter said, "Nothing great; I had to go to the ER, where I had to wait, before they could do something about my throbbing thumb. I got back at 4:00 AM and couldn't get to sleep for a long time because I was in so much pain. Then I overslept my alarm and woke up naturally in time for dinner. How about you?"

Mary thought for a second about the people she met. Peter could see the sympathy on her face.

John said, "Wow. That's nasty."

Peter said, "I wish we couldn't feel pain. Have you thought about how nice it would be to live without pain?"

Mary said, "I'd like that."

John said, "Um..."

Mary said, "What?"

John said, "Actually, there are people who don't feel pain, and there's a name for the condition. You've heard of it."

Peter said, "I haven't heard of that before."

John said, "Yes you have. It's called leprosy."

Peter said, "What do you mean by 'leprosy'? I thought leprosy was a disease that ravaged the body."

John said, "It is. But that is only because it destroys the ability to feel pain. The way it works is very simple. We all get little nicks and scratches, and because they hurt, we show extra sensitivity. Our feet start to hurt after a long walk, so without even thinking about it we... shift things a little, and keep anything really bad from happening. That pain you are feeling is your body's way of asking room to heal so that the smashed thumbnail (or whatever it is) that hurts so terribly now won't leave you permanently maimed. Back to feet, a leprosy patient will walk exactly the same way and get wounds we'd never even think of for taking a long walk. All the terrible injuries that make leprosy a feared disease happen *only* because leprosy keeps people from feeling pain."

Peter looked at his thumb, and his stomach growled.

John said, "I'm full. Let me get a drink for you, and then I'll help you drink it."

Mary said, "And I'll get you some dry food. We've already eaten; it must—"

Peter said, "Please, I've survived much worse. It's just a bit of pain."

John picked up a clump of wet napkins and threatened to throw it at Peter before standing up and walking to get

something to drink. Mary followed him.

Peter sat back and just laughed.

John said, "We have some time free after dinner; let's just wander around campus."

They left the glass roofed building and began walking around. There were vast open spaces between buildings. They went first to "Blanchard", a building they described as "looking like a castle." Blanchard, a tall ivory colored edifice, built of rough limestone, which overlooked a large expanse adorned with a carefully tended and *living* carpet, had been modelled after a building in a much older institution called Oxford, and... this is probably the time to explain certain things about this kind of organization.

You and I simply requisition skills. If I were to imagine what it would mean to educate those people—or at least give skills; the concept of 'education' is slightly different from either inserting skills or inserting knowledge into a mind, and I don't have the ability to explain exactly what the distinction is here, but I will say that it is significant—then the obvious way is to simply make a virtual place on the network where people can be exposed to knowledge. And that model would become phenomenally popular within a few years; people would pursue an education that was a niche on such a network as they had, and would be achieved by weaving in these computer activities with the rest of their lives.

But this place preserved an ancient model of education, where disciples would come to live in a single place, which was in a very real sense its own universe, and meet in ancient, face-to-face community with their mentors and be shaped in more than what they know and can do. Like so many other things, it was ancient, using computers here

and there and even teaching people the way of computers while avoiding what we would assume comes with computers.

But these people liked that building, as contrasted to buildings that seemed more modern, because it seemed to convey an illusion of being in another time, and let you forget that you were in a modern era.

After some wandering, Peter and those he had just met looked at the building, each secretly pretending to be in a more ancient era, and went through an expanse with a fountain in the center, listened to some music, and ignored clouds, trees, clusters of people who were sharing stories, listening, thinking, joking, and missing home, in order to come to something exotic, namely a rotating platform with a mockup of a giant mastodon which had died before the end of the last ice age, and whose bones had been unearthed in a nearby excavation. Happy to have seen something exotic, they ignored buildings which have a human-pleasing temperature the year round, other people excited to have seen new friends, toys which sailed through the air on the same principles as an airplane's wings, a place where artistic pieces were being drawn into being, a vast, stonehard pavement to walk, and a spectrum of artefacts for the weaving of music.

Their slow walk was interrupted when John looked at a number on a small machine he had attached to his wrist, and interpreted it to mean that it was time for the three of them to stop their leisured enjoyment of the summer night and move with discomfort and haste to one specific building—they all were supposed to go to the building called Fischer. After moving over and shifting emotionally from being relaxed and joyful to being bothered and stressed,

they found that they were all on a brother and sister floor, and met their leaders.

Paul, now looking considerably more coherent than when he procured Peter's keys, announced, "Now, for the next exercise, I'll be passing out toothpicks. I want you to stand in two lines, guy-girl-guy-girl, and pass a lifesaver down the line. If your team passes the lifesaver to the end first, you win. Oh, and if you drop the lifesaver your team has to start over, so don't drop it."

People shuffled, and shortly Peter was standing in line, looking over the shoulder of a girl he didn't know, and silently wishing he weren't playing this game. He heard a voice say, "Go!" and then had an intermittent view of a tiny sugary torus passing down the line and the two faces close to each other trying simultaneously to get close enough to pass the lifesaver, and control the clumsy, five centimeter long toothpicks well enough to transfer the candy. Sooner than he expected the girl turned around, almost losing the lifesaver on her toothpick, and then began a miniature dance as they clumsily tried to synchronize the ends of their toothpicks. This took unpleasantly long, and Peter quickly banished a thought of "This is almost kissing! That can't be what's intended." Then he turned around, trying both to rush and not to rush at the same time, and repeated the same dance with the young woman standing behind him—Mary! It was only after she turned away that Peter realized her skin had changed from its alabaster tone to pale rose.

Their team won, and there was a short break as the next game was organized. Peter heard bits of conversation: "This has been a bummer; I've gotten two papercuts this week." "—and then I—" "What instruments do you—" "I'm from France too! *Tu viens de Paris?*" "Really? You—" Everybody

seemed to be chattering, and Peter wished he could be in one of—actually, several of those conversations at once.

Paul's voice cut in and said, "For this next activity we are going to form a human circle. With your team, stand in a circle, and everybody reach in and grab another hand with each hand. Then hold on tight; when I say, "Go," you want to untangle yourselves, without letting go. The first team to untangle themselves wins!"

Peter reached in, and found each of his hands clasped in a solid, masculine grip. Then the race began, and people jostled and tried to untangle themselves. This was a laborious process and, one by one, every other group freed itself, while Peter's group seemed stuck on—someone called and said, "I think we're knotted!" As people began to thin out, Paul looked with astonishment and saw that they were indeed knotted. "A special prize to them, too, for managing the best tangle!"

"And now, we'll have a three-legged race! Gather into pairs, and each two of you take a burlap sack. Then—" Paul continued, and with every game, the talk seemed to flow more. When the finale finished, Peter found himself again with John and Mary and heard the conversations flowing around him: "Really? You too?" "But you don't understand. Hicks have a slower pace of life; we enjoy things without all the things you city dwellers need for entertainment. And we learn resourceful ways to—" "—and only at Wheaton would the administration *forbid* dancing while *requiring* the games we just played and—" Then Peter lost himself in a conversation that continued long into the night. He expected to be up at night thinking about all the beloved people he left at home, but Peter was too busy thinking about John's and Mary's stories.

The next day Peter woke up when his machine played a hideous sound, and groggily trudged to the dining hall to eat some chemically modified grains and drink water that had been infused with traditionally roasted beans. There were pills he could have taken that would have had the effect he was looking for, but he savored the beverage, and after sitting at a table without talking, bounced around from beautiful building to beautiful building, seeing sights for the first time, and wishing he could avoid all that to just get to his advisor.

Peter found the appropriate hallway, wandered around nervously until he found a door with a yellowed plaque that said "Julian Johnson," knocked once, and pushed the door open. A white-haired man said, "Peter Jones? How are you? Do come in... What can I do for you?"

Peter pulled out a sheet of paper, an organic surface used to retain colored trails and thus keep small amounts of information inscribed so that the "real" information is encoded in a personal way. No, they don't need to be trained to have their own watermark in this encoding.

Peter looked down at the paper for a moment and said, "I'm sorry I'm late. I need you to write what courses I should take and sign here. Then I can be out of your way."

The old man sat back, drew a deep breath, and relaxed into a fatherly smile. Peter began to wonder if his advisor was going to say anything at all. Then Prof. Johnson motioned towards an armchair, as rich and luxurious as his own, and then looked as if he remembered something and offered a bowl full of candy. "Sit down, sit down, and make yourself comfortable. May I interest you in candy?" He picked up an engraved metal bowl and held it out while Peter grabbed a few Lifesavers.

Prof. Johnson sat back, silent for a moment, and said, "I'm sorry I'm out of butterscotch; that always seems to disappear. Please sit down, and tell me about yourself. We can get to that form in a minute. One of the privileges of this job is that I get to meet interesting people. Now, where are you from?"

Peter said, "I'm afraid there's not much that's interesting about me. I'm from a small town downstate that doesn't have anything to distinguish itself. My amusements have been reading, watching the cycle of the year, oh, and running. Not much interesting in that. Now which classes should I take?"

Prof. Johnson sat back and smiled, and Peter became a little less tense. "You run?"

Peter said, "Yes; I was hoping to run on the track this afternoon, after the lecture. I've always wanted to run on a real track."

The old man said, "You know, I used to run myself, before I became an official Old Geezer and my orthopaedist told me my knees couldn't take it. So I have to content myself with swimming now, which I've grown to love. Do you know about the Prairie Path?"

Peter said, "No, what's that?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Years ago, when I ran, I ran through the areas surrounding the College—there are a lot of beautiful houses. And, just south of the train tracks with the train you can hear now, there's a path before you even hit the street. You can run, or bike, or walk, on a path covered with fine white gravel, with trees and prairie plants on either side. It's a lovely view." He paused, and said, "Any ideas what you want to do after Wheaton?"

Peter said, "No. I don't even know what I want to major

in."

Prof. Johnson said, "A lot of students don't know what they want to do. Are you familiar with Career Services? They can help you get an idea of what kinds of things you like to do."

Peter looked at his watch and said, "It's chapel time."

Prof. Johnson said, "Relax. I can write you a note."

Peter began to relax again, and Prof. Johnson continued, "Now you like to read. What do you like to read?"

Peter said, "Newspapers and magazines, and I read this really cool book called *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. Oh, and I like the Bible."

Prof. Johnson said, "I do too. What do you like about it most?"

"I like the stories in the Old Testament."

"One general tip: here at Wheaton, we have different kinds of professors—"

Peter said, "Which ones are best?"

Prof. Johnson said, "Different professors are best for different students. Throughout your tenure at Wheaton, ask your friends and learn which professors have teaching styles that you learn well with and mesh well with. Consider taking other courses from a professor you like. Now we have a lot of courses which we think expose you to new things and stretch you—people come back and see that these courses are best. Do you like science?"

"I like it; I especially liked a physics lab."

Prof. Johnson took a small piece of paper from where it was attached to a stack with a strange adhesive that had "failed" as a solid adhesive, but provided a uniquely useful way to make paper that could be attached to a surface with a slight push and then be detached with a gentle pull,

remarkably enough without damage to the paper or the surface. He began to think, and flip through a book, using a technology thousands of years old at its heart. "Have you had calculus?" Prof. Johnson restrained himself from launching into a discussion of the grand, Utopian vision for "calculus" as it was first imagined and how different a conception it had from anything that would be considered "mathematics" today. Or should he go into that? He wavered, and then realized Peter had answered his question. "Ok," Prof. Johnson said, "the lab physics class unfortunately requires that you've had calculus. Would you like to take calculus now? Have you had geometry, algebra, and trigonometry?"

Peter said, "Yes, I did, but I'd like a little break from that now. Maybe I could take calculus next semester."

"Fair enough. You said you liked to read."

"Magazines and newspapers."

"Those things deal with the unfolding human story. I wonder if you'd like to take world civilization now, or a political science course."

"History, but why study world history? Why can't I just study U.S. history?"

Prof. Johnson said, "The story of our country is intertwined with that of our world. I think you might find that some of the things in world history are a lot closer to home than you think—and we have some real storytellers in our history department."

"That sounds interesting. What else?"

"The Theology of Culture class is one many students find enjoyable, and it helps build a foundation for Old and New Testament courses. Would you be interested in taking it for A quad or B quad, the first or second half of the

semester?"

"Could I do both?"

"I wish I could say yes, but this course only lasts half the semester. The other half you could take Foundations of Wellness—you could do running as homework!"

"I think I'll do that first, and then Theology of Culture. That should be new," Peter said, oblivious to how tightly connected he was to theology and culture. "What else?"

Prof. Johnson said, "We have classes where people read things that a lot of people have found really interesting. Well, that could describe several classes, but I was thinking about Classics of Western Literature or Literature of the Modern World."

Peter said, "Um... Does Classics of Western Literature cover ancient and medieval literature, and Literature of the Modern World cover literature that isn't Western? Because if they do, I'm not sure I could connect with it."

Prof. Johnson relaxed into his seat, a movable support that met the contours of his body. Violating convention somewhat, he had a chair for Peter that was as pleasant to rest in as his own. "You know, a lot of people think that. But you know what?"

Peter said, "What?"

"There is something human that crosses cultures. That is why the stories have been selected. Stories written long ago, and stories written far away, can have a lot to connect with."

"Ok. How many more courses should I take?"

"You're at 11 credits now; you probably want 15. Now you said that you like *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. I'm wondering if you would also like a philosophy course."

Peter said, "*Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* is... I don't suppose there are any classes that use that. Or are there? I've heard Pirsig isn't given his fair due by philosophers."

Prof. Johnson said, "If you approach one of our philosophy courses the way you approach *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I think you'll profit from the encounter. I wonder if our Issues and Worldviews in Philosophy might interest you. I'm a big fan of thinking worldviewishly, and our philosophers have some pretty interesting things to say."

Peter asked, "What does 'worldviewishly' mean?"

Prof. Johnson said, "It means thinking in terms of worldviews. A worldview is the basic philosophical framework that gives shape to how we view the world. Our philosophers will be able to help you understand the basic issues surrounding worldviews and craft your own Christian worldview. You may find this frees you from the Enlightenment's secularizing influence—and if you don't know what the Enlightenment is now, you will learn to understand it, and its problems, and how you can be free of them." He spoke with the same simplistic assurance of artificial intelligence researchers who, seeing the power of computers and recognizing how simple certain cognitive feats are for humans, assumed that it was only a matter of time that artificial intelligence would "bridge the gap"—failing to recognize the tar pit of the peaks of intelligence that seem so deceptively simple and easy to human phenomenology. For computers could often defeat the best human players at chess—as computerlike a human skill as one might reasonably find—but deciphering the language of a children's book or walking through an unfamiliar room, so

easy to humans, seemed more difficult for computers the more advanced research began. Some researchers believed that the artificial intelligence project had uncovered the non-obvious significance of a plethora of things humans take for granted—but the majority still believed that what seemed trivial for humans must be the sort of thinking a computer can do, because there is no other kind of thinking... and an isomorphic simplicity, an apparent and deceptive simplicity much like this one, made it seem as if ideas were all that really mattered: not all that existed, but all that had an important influence. Prof. Johnson did not consciously understand how the Enlightenment worldview—or, more accurately, the Enlightenment—created the possibility of seeing worldviews that way, nor did he see how strange the idea of crafting one's own worldview would seem to pre-Enlightenment Christians. He did not realize that his own kindness towards Peter was not simply because he agreed with certain beliefs, but because of a deep and many-faceted way in which he had walked for decades, and walked well. It was with perfect simplicity that he took this way for granted, as artificial intelligence researchers took for granted all the things which humans did so well they seemed to come naturally, and framed worldviewish thought as carrying with it everything he assumed from his way.

Peter said, "Ok. Well, I'll take those classes. It was good to meet you."

Prof. Johnson looked over a document that was the writeup of a sort of game, in which one had a number of different rooms that were of certain sizes, and certain classes had requirements about what kind of room they needed for how long, and the solution involved not only

solving the mathematical puzzle, but meeting with teachers and caring for their concerns, longstanding patterns, and a variety of human dimensions derisively labelled as "political." Prof. Johnson held in his hands the schedule with the official solution for that problem, and guided Peter to an allowable choice of class sections, taking several different actions that were considered "boring paperwork."

Prof. Johnson said, "I enjoyed talking with you. Please do take some more candy—put a handful in your pocket or something. I just want to make one more closing comment. I want to see you succeed. Wheaton wants to see you succeed. There are some rough points and problems along the way, and if you bring them to me I can work with them and try to help you. If you want to talk with your RA or our chaplain or someone else, that's fine, but please... my door is *always* open. And it was good to meet you too! Goodbye!"

Peter walked out, completely relaxed.

The next activity, besides nourishing himself with lunch (and eating, sleeping, and many other activities form a gentle background rhythm to the activities people are more conscious of. I will not describe each time Peter eats and sleeps, even though the 100th time in the story he eats with his new friends is as significant as the first, because I will be trying to help you see it their way), requires some explanation.

The term "quest," to the people here, is associated with an image of knights in armor, and a body of literature from writers like Chretien de Troyes and Sir Thomas Mallory who described King Arthur and his knights. In Chretien de Troyes, the knight goes off in various adventures, often quests where he is attempting different physical feats. In Sir Thomas Mallory, a new understanding of quests is

introduced, in the quest for the holy grail—a legendary treasure which I cannot here explain save to say that it profoundly altered the idea of a quest, and the quest took a large enough place in many people's consciousness that it is used as a metaphor of the almost unattainable object of an ultimate pursuit (so that physicists would say that a grand unified theory which crystallizes all physical laws into a few simple equations is the "holy grail of physics"), and that the holy grail is itself in the shadow of a greater treasure, and this treasure was one many people in fact had possessed (some after great struggle, while others had never known a time when they were without it). In Mallory in particular the quest can be more than a physical task; most of Arthur's knights could not reach the holy grail because of—they weren't physical blemishes and they weren't really mental blemishes either, but what they were is hard to say. The whole topic (knights, quests, the holy grail...) connects to something about that world that is beyond my ability to convey; suffice it to say that it is connected with one more dimension we don't have here.

Peter, along with another group of students, went out on a quest. The object of this quest was to acquire seven specific items, on conditions which I will explain below:

1. "A dog biscuit." In keeping with a deeply human trait, the food they prepare is not simply what they judge adequate to sustain the body, but meant to give pleasure, in a sense adorned, because eating is not to them simply a biological need. They would also get adorned food to give pleasure to organisms they kept, including dogs, which include many different

breeds which in turn varied from being natural sentries protecting territories to a welcoming committee of one which would give a visitor an exuberant greeting just because he was there.

2. "An M16 rifle's spent shell casing." That means the used remnant after... wait a little bit. I need to go a lot farther back to explain this one.

You will find something deceptively familiar in that in that universe, people strategically align resources and then attack their opponents, usually until a defeat is obvious. And if you look for what is deceptive, it will be a frustrating search, because even if the technologies involved are primitive, it is a match of strategy, tactics, and opposition.

What makes it different is that this is not a recreation or an art form, but something many of them consider the worst evil that can happen, or among the worst. The resources that are destroyed, the bodies—in our world, it is simply what is involved in the game, but many of them consider it an eternal loss.

Among the people we will be meeting, people may be broken down into "pacifists" who believe that war is always wrong, and people who instead of being pure pacifists try to have a practical way of pursuing pacifist goals: the disagreement is not whether one should have a

war for amusement's sake (they both condemn that), but what one should do when not having a war looks even more destructive than having a war. And that does not do justice to either side of the debate, but what I want to emphasize that to both of them this is not simply a game or one form of recreation; it is something to avoid at almost *any* cost.

A knight was someone who engaged in combat, an elite soldier riding an animal called a horse. In Chretien de Troye's day and Mallory's day, the culture was such that winning a fight was important, but fighting according to "chivalry" was more important. Among other things, chivalry meant that they would only use simple weapons based on mechanical principles—no poison—and they wouldn't even use weapons with projectiles, like arrows and (armor piercing) crossbow bolts. In practice that only meant rigid piercing and cutting weapons, normally swords and spears. And there was a lot more. A knight was to protect women and children.

The form that chivalry took in Peter's day allowed projectile weapons, although poison was still not allowed, along with biological, thermonuclear, and other weapons which people did not wish to see in war, and the fight to disfigure the tradition's understanding women had accorded them meant that women

could fight and be killed like men, although people worked to keep children out of warfare, and in any case the "Geneva Convention", as the code of chivalry was called, maintained a sharp distinction between combatants and non-combatants, the latter of which were to be protected.

The specific projectile weapon carried by most members of the local army was called an M16 rifle, which fired surprisingly small .22 bullets—I say "surprisingly" because if you were a person fighting against them and you were hit, you would be injured but quite probably not killed.

This was intentional. (Yes, they knew how to cause an immediate kill.)

Part of it is the smaller consideration that if you killed an enemy soldier immediately, you took one soldier out of action; on the other hand, if you wounded an enemy soldier, you took three soldiers out of action. But this isn't the whole reason. The much bigger part of the reason is that their sense of chivalry (if it was really just chivalry; they loved their enemies) meant that even in their assaults they tried to subdue with as little killing as possible.

There were people training with the army in that community (no, not Peter; Peter was a

pure pacifist) who trained, with M16 rifles, not because they wanted to fight, but as part of a not entirely realistic belief that if they trained hard enough, their achievement would deter people who would go to war. And the "Crusader battalion" (the Crusaders were a series of people who fought to defend Peter's spiritual ancestors from an encroaching threat that would have destroyed them) had a great sense of chivalry, even if none of them used the word "chivalry".

3. "A car bumper." A car bumper is a piece of armor placed on the front and back of cars so that they can sustain low-velocity collisions without damage. (At higher velocities, newer cars are designed to serve as a buffer so that "crumple zones" will be crushed, absorbing enough of the impact so that the "passenger cage" reduces injuries sustained by people inside; this is part of a broader cultural bent towards minimizing preventable death because of what they believe about one human life.) Not only is a car bumper an unusual item to give, it is heavy and awkward enough that people tend not to carry such things with them—even the wealthy ones tend to be extraordinarily lightly encumbered.
4. "An antique." It is said, "The problem with England is that they believe 100 miles is a long distance, and the problem with America is that

they believe 100 years is a long time." An antique—giving the rule without all the special cases and exceptions, which is to say giving the rule as if it were not human—is something over 100 years old. To understand this, you must appreciate that it does not include easily available rocks, many of which are millions or billions of years old, and it is not based on the elementary particles that compose something (one would have to search hard to find something *not* made out of elementary particles almost as old as the universe). The term "antique" connotes rarity, and in a sense something out of the ordinary; that people's way is concerned with "New! New! New!" and it is hard to find an artifact that was created more than 100 years ago, which is what was intended.

This quest is all the more interesting because there is an "unwritten rule" that items will be acquired by asking, not by theft or even purchase—and, as most antiques are valuable, it would be odd for someone you've just met—and therefore with whom you have only the general human bond but not the special bond of friendship—to give you such an item, even if most of the littler things in life are acquired economically while the larger things can only be acquired by asking.

5. "A note from a doctor, certifying that you do not

have bubonic plague." Intended as a joke, this refers to a health, safeguarded by their medicine, which keeps them from a dreadful disease which tore apart societies some centuries ago: that sort of thing wasn't considered a live threat because of how successful their medicine was (which is why it could be considered humorous).

6. "A burning piece of paper which no one in your group lit. (Must be presented in front of Fischer and not brought into the building.)" This presents a physical challenge, in that there is no obvious way to transport a burning piece of paper—or what people characteristically envision as a burning piece of paper—from almost anywhere else to in front of Fischer.
7. "A sheet of paper with a fingerpaint handprint from a kindergartener."

"Kindergarten" was the first year of their formal education, and a year of preparation before students were ready to enter their first grade. What did this society teach at its first, required year? Did it teach extraordinarily abstract equations, or cosmological theory, or literary archetypes, or how to use a lathe?

All of these could be taught later on, and for that matter there is reason to value all of them. But the very beginning held something

different. It taught people to take their turn and share; it taught people "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the Golden Rule by which their great Teachers crystallized so much wisdom. All of this work and play, some of the most advanced lessons they could learn, were placed, not at the end, but at the *beginning* of their education.

That is what kindergarten was. What was a kindergartener? The true but uninformative answer would be "a person in kindergarten."

To get past that uninformative answer, I need to stress that their minds are bound up with organic life—they did *not* spring, fully formed, as you and I did. In most complex organisms, there is a process that transforms a genetically complete organism of just one cell to become a mature member of the species; among humans, that process is one of the longest and most complex. During that time their minds are developing as well as their bodies; in that regard they are not simply in harmony with the natural world this society believes it is separate from... but one of its best examples.

But to say that alone is to flatten out something interesting... even more interesting than the process of biological mental development is the place that society has for something called "childhood". Not all cultures have that concept

—and again I am saying "culture" without explaining what it means. I can't. Not all societies understand "childhood" as this society does; to many, a child is a smaller and less capable adult, or even worse, a nonentity. But in this culture, childhood is a distinctive time, and a child, including a kindergardener, is something special—almost a different species of mind. Their inability to healthily sustain themselves is met, not always with scorn, but with a giving of support and protection—and this is not always a grudging duty, but something that can bring joy. They are viewed as innocent, which is certainly not true, and something keeps many people from resenting them when they prove that they are not innocent by doing things that would not be tolerated if an adult did it. And the imperviousness of this belief to contrary experience is itself the shadow of the whole place of childhood as a time to play and learn and explore worlds of imagination and the things most adults take for granted. And many adults experience a special pleasure, and much more than a pleasure, from the company of children, a pleasure that is tied to something much deeper.

This pleasure shines through even a handprint left with "fingerpaints," a way of doing art reserved for children, so that this physical object is itself a symbol of all that is special

about childhood, and like symbols of that world carries with it what is evoked: seeing such a handprint is a little like seeing a kindergartener.

And they were off. They stopped for a brief break and annoyedly watched the spectacle of over a hundred linked metal carts carrying a vast quantity of material, and walked in and out of the surrounding neighborhoods. Their knocks on the door met a variety of warm replies. Before long, they had a handprint from a kindergartener, a dog biscuit (and some very enthusiastic attention from a kind dog!), a note from an off-duty doctor (who did not examine them, but simply said that if they had the bubonic plague there would be buboes bulging from them in an obvious way), a cigarette lighter and a sheet of paper (unlit), a twisted bumper (which Peter surprised people by flipping over his shoulder), and finally a spent shell casing from a military science professor. When they climbed up "Fischer beach," John handed the paper and lighter to his RA and said, "Would you light this?" It was with an exhausted satisfaction that they went to dinner and had entirely amiable conversation with other equally students who scant minutes ago had been their competitors.

When dinner was finished, Peter and Mary sat for a while in exhausted silence, before climbing up for the next scheduled activity—but I am at a loss for how to describe the next scheduled activity. To start with, I will give a deceptive description. If you can understand this activity, you will have understood a great deal more of what is in that world that doesn't fit in ours.

Do I have to give a deceptive description, in that any

description in our terms will be more or less deceptive? I wasn't trying to make that kind of philosophical point; I wasn't trying to make a philosophical point at all. I am choosing a description of the next scheduled activity that is more deceptive than it needs to be.

When students studied an academic discipline called "physics," the curriculum was an initiation into progressively stranger and more esoteric doctrines, presented at the level which students were able to receive them. Students were first taught "Newtonian mechanics" (which openly regarded as false), before being initiated into "Einstein's relativity" at the next level (which was also considered false, but was widely believed to be closer to the truth). Students experienced a "night and day" difference between Newtonian mechanics and all higher order mysteries. If you were mathematically adept enough to follow the mathematics, then Newton was easy because he agreed with good old common sense, and Einstein and even stranger mysteries were hard to understand because they turned common sense on its head. Newton was straightforward while the others were profoundly counterintuitive. So Einstein, unlike Newton, required a student to mentally engulf something quite alien to normal, common sense ways of thinking about the world around oneself. Hence one could find frustrated student remarks about, "And God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was Newton. Then the Devil howled, 'Let Einstein be!' and restored the status quo."

Under this way of experiencing physics, Newton simply added mathematical formality to what humans always knew: everything in space fit in one long and continuous three-dimensional grid, and time could be measured almost

as if it were a line, and so Einstein was simply making things more difficult and further from humans' natural perceptions when his version of a fully mathematical model softened the boundaries of space and time so that one could no longer treat it as if it had a grid for a skeleton.

Someone acquainted with the history of science might make the observation that it was not so much that Newton's mechanics were a mathematically rigorous formalization of how people experienced space and time, but that how people experienced space and time had *become* a hazy and non-mathematical paraphrase of Newtonian mechanics: in other words, some students some students learned Newtonian mechanics easily, not because Newtonian physics was based on common sense, but because their "common sense" had been profoundly shaped by Newtonian physics.

This seemingly pedantic distinction was deeply tied to how the organic was being extinguished in their society.

I suspect you are thinking, "What other mathematical model was it based on instead?" And that's why you're having trouble guessing the answer.

The answer is related to the organic. Someone who knew Newton and his colleagues, and what they were rebelling against, could get a sense of something very different even without understanding what besides mathematics would undergird what space meant to them. In a certain sense, Newton forcefully stated the truth, but in a deceptive way. He worked hard to forge a concept of cold matter, pointing out that nature was not human—and it was a philosophical error to think of nature as human, but it was not nearly so great as one might think. Newton and his colleagues powerfully stressed that humans were superior

to the rest of the physical world (which was not human), that they were meant not simply to be a part of nature but to conquer and rule it. And in so doing they attacked an equally great truth, that not only other life but even "inanimate" matter was kin to humans—lesser kin, perhaps, but humans and the rest of the natural world formed a continuity. They obscured the wisdom that the lordship humans were to exercise was not of a despot controlling something worthless, but the mastery of the crowning jewel of a treasure they had been entrusted to them. They introduced the concept of "raw material", something as foreign to their thinking as... I can't say what our equivalent would be, because everything surrounding "raw material" is so basic to us, and what they believed instead, their organic perception, is foreign to us. They caused people to forget that, while it would be a philosophical error to literally regard the world as human, it would be much graver to believe it is fundamentally described as inert, cold matter. And even when they had succeeded in profoundly influencing their cultures, so that people consciously believed in cold matter to a large degree, vestiges of the ancient experience survived in the medieval. It is perhaps not a coincidence that hundreds of years since Newton, in Newton's own "mother tongue" (English), the words for "matter" and "mother" both sprung from the same ancient root word.

The Newtonian conception of space had displaced to some degree the older conception of place, a conception which was less concerned with how far some place was from other different places, and more concerned with a sort of color or, to some extent, meaning. The older conception also had a place for some things which couldn't really be

stated under the new conception: people would say, "You can't be in two places at once." What they meant by that was to a large degree something different, "Your body cannot be at two different spatial positions at the same time." This latter claim was deceptive, because it was true so far as it goes, but it was a very basic fact of life that people could be in two places at once. The entire point of the next scheduled activity was to be in two places at once.

Even without describing what the other place was (something which could barely be suggested even in that world) and acknowledging that the point of the activity was to be in two places at once, this description of that activity would surprise many of the people there, and disturb those who could best sense the other place. The next scheduled activity was something completely ordinary to them, a matter of fact event that held some mystery, and something that would not occur to them as being in two places at once. The activity of being present in two or more places at once was carried on, on a tacit level, even when people had learned to conflate place with mathematical position. One such activity was confused with what we do when we remember: when we remember, we recall data from storage, while they cause the past to be present. The words, "This do in remembrance of me," from a story that was ancient but preserved in the early medieval period we are looking at, had an unquestioned meaning of, "Cause me to be present by doing this," but had suffered under a quite different experience of memory, so that to some people it meant simply to go over data about a person who had been present in the past but could not be present then.

But this activity was not remembering. Or at least, it was not *just* remembering. And this leaves open the

difficulty of explaining how it was ordinary to them. It was theoretically in complete continuity with the rest of their lives, although it would be more accurate to say that the rest of their lives were theoretically in complete continuity with it. This activity was in a sense the most human, and the most organic, in that in it they led the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the plants, the rocks, the mountains, and the seas in returning to the place they came from. This description would also likely astonish the people who were gathered in a painted brick room, sitting on carpet and on movable perches, and seeing through natural light mixed with flickering fluorescent lights. Not one of them was thinking about "nature."

What went on there was in a very real sense mediocre. Each activity was broken down, vulgarized, compared to what it could be—which could not obliterate what was going on. When they were songs, they were what were called "7-11" songs, a pejorative term which meant songs with seven words repeated eleven times. There was a very real sense in which the event was diminished by the music, but even when you factor in every diminishing force, there was something going on there, something organic and more than organic, which you and I do not understand—for that matter, which many people in that world do not understand.

Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "What is it?"

Archon said, "I can't do it. I can't explain this world. All I've really been doing is taking the pieces of that world that are a bit like ours. You've been able to understand much of

it because I haven't tried to convey several things that are larger than our world. 'God' is still a curious and exotic appendage that isn't connected to anything, not really; I haven't been able to explain, really explain, what it is to be male and female unities, or what masculinity and femininity are. There are a thousand things, and... I've been explaining what three-dimensional substance is to a two-dimensional world, and the way I've been doing it is to squash it into two dimensions, and make it understandable by removing from it everything that makes it three dimensional. Or almost everything..."

"How would a three dimensional being, a person from that world, explain the story?"

"But it wouldn't. A three dimensional being wouldn't collapse a cube into a square to make it easier for itself to understand; that's something someone who couldn't free itself from reading two dimensional thinking into three dimensions would do. You're stuck in two dimensions. So am I. That's why I failed, utterly failed, to explain the "brother-sister floor fellowship", the next scheduled activity. And my failure is structural. It's like I've been setting out to copy a living, moving organism by sculpturing something that looks like it out of steel. And what I've been doing is making intricate copies of its every contour, and painting the skin and fur exactly the same color, and foolishly hoping it will come alive. And this is something I can't make by genetic engineering."

"But how would someone from that world explain the story? Even if I can't understand it, I want to know."

"But people from that world don't explain stories. A story isn't something you *explain*; it's something that may be told, shared, but usually it is a social error to explain a

story, because a story participates in human life and telling a story connects one human to another. And so it's a fundamental error to think a story is something you convey by explaining it—like engineering a robotic body for an animal so you can allow it to have a body. I have failed because I was trying something a mind could only fail at."

"Then can you tell the story, like someone from that world would tell it?"

Peter and Mary both loved to run, but for different reasons. Peter was training himself for various races; he had not joined track, as he did in high school, but there were other races. Mary ran to feel the sun and wind and rain. And, without any conscious effort, they found themselves running together down the prairie path together, and Peter clumsily learning to match his speed to hers. And, as time passed, they talked, and talked, and talked, and talked, and their runs grew longer.

When the fall break came, they both joined a group going to the northwoods of Wisconsin for a program that was half-work and half-play. And each one wrote a letter home about the other. Then Peter began his theology of culture class, and said, "This is what I want to study." Mary did not have a favorite class, at least not that she realized, until Peter asked her what her favorite class was and she said, "Literature."

When Christmas came, they went to their respective homes and spent the break thinking about each other, and they talked about this when they returned. They ended the conversation, or at least they thought they did, and then each hurried back to catch the other and say one more

thing, and then the conversation turned out to last much longer, and ended with a kiss.

Valentine's Day was syrupy. It was trite enough that their more romantically inclined friends groaned, but it did not seem at all trite or syrupy to them. As Peter's last name was Patrick, he called Mary's father and prayed that St. Patrick's Day would be a momentous day for both of them.

Peter and Mary took a slow run to a nearby village, and had dinner at an Irish pub. Amidst the din, they had some hearty laughs. The waitress asked Mary, "Is there anything else that would make this night memorable?" Then Mary saw Peter on his knee, opening a jewelry box with a ring: "I love you, Mary. Will you marry me?"

Mary cried for a good five minutes before she could answer. And when she had answered, they sat in silence, a silence that overpowered the din. Then Mary wiped her eyes and they went outside.

It was cool outside, and the moon was shining brightly. Peter pulled a camera from his pocket, and said, "Stay where you are. Let me back up a bit. And hold your hand up. You look even more beautiful with that ring on your finger."

Peter's camera flashed as he took a picture, just as a drunk driver slammed into Mary. The sedan spun into a storefront, and Mary flew up into the air, landed, and broke a beer bottle with her face.

People began to come out, and in a few minutes the police and paramedics arrived. Peter somehow managed to answer the police officers' questions and to begin kicking himself for being too stunned to act.

When Peter left his room the next day, he looked for Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson asked, "May I give you a

hug?" and then sat there, simply being with Peter in his pain. When Peter left, Prof. Johnson said, "I'm not just here for academics. I'm here for you." Peter went to chapel and his classes, feeling a burning rage that almost nothing could pierce. He kept going to the hospital, and watching Mary with casts on both legs and one arm, and many tiny stitches on her face, fluttering on the borders of consciousness. One time Prof. Johnson came to visit, and he said, "I can't finish my classes." Prof. Johnson looked at him and said, "The college will give you a full refund." Peter said, "Do you know of any way I can stay here to be with Mary?" Prof. Johnson said, "You can stay with me. And I believe a position with UPS would let you get some income, doing something physical. The position is open for you." Prof. Johnson didn't mention the calls he'd made, and Peter didn't think about them. He simply said, "Thank you."

A few days later, Mary began to be weakly conscious. Peter finally asked a nurse, "Why are there so many stitches on her face? Was she cut even more badly than—"

The nurse said, "There are a lot of stitches very close together because the emergency room had a cosmetic surgeon on duty. There will still be a permanent mark on her face, but some of the wound will heal without a scar."

Mary moved the left half of her mouth in half a smile. Peter said, "That was a kind of cute smile. How come she can smile like that?"

The nurse said, "One of the pieces of broken glass cut a nerve. It is unlikely she'll ever be able to move part of her face again."

Peter looked and touched Mary's hand. "I still think it's really quite cute."

Mary looked at him, and then passed out.

Peter spent a long couple of days training and attending to practical details. Then he came back to Mary.

Mary looked at Peter, and said, "It's a Monday. Don't you have classes now?"

Peter said, "No."

Mary said, "Why not?"

Peter said, "I want to be here with you."

Mary said, "I talked with one of the nurses, and she said that you dropped out of school so you could be with me.

"Is that true?" she said.

Peter said, "I hadn't really thought about it that way."

Mary closed her eyes, and when Peter started to leave because he decided she wanted to be left alone, she said, "Stop. Come here."

Peter came to her bedside and knelt.

Mary said, "Take this ring off my finger."

Peter said, "Is it hurting you?"

Mary said, "No, and it is the greatest treasure I own. Take it off and take it back."

Peter looked at her, bewildered. "Do you not want to marry me?"

Mary said, "This may sting me less because I don't remember our engagement. I don't remember anything that happened near that time; I have only the stories others, even the nurses, tell me about a man who loves me very much."

Peter said, "But don't you love me?"

Mary forced back tears. "Yes, I love you, yes, I love you. And I know that you love me. You are young and strong, and have the love to make a happy marriage. You'll make some woman a very good husband. I thought that woman would be me.

"But I can see what you will not. You said I was beautiful, and I was. Do you know what my prognosis is? I will probably be able to stand. At least for short periods of time. If I'm fortunate, I may walk. With a walker. I will never be able to run again—Peter, I am nobody, and I have no future. Absolutely nobody. You are young and strong. Go and find a woman who is worth your love."

Mary and Peter both cried for a long time. Then Peter walked out, and paused in the doorway, crying. He felt torn inside, and then went in to say a couple of things to Mary. He said, "I believe in miracles."

Then Mary cried, and Peter said something else I'm not going to repeat. Mary said something. Then another conversation began.

The conversation ended with Mary saying, "You're stupid, Peter. You're really, really stupid. I love you. I don't deserve such love. You're making a mistake. I love you." Then Peter went to kiss Mary, and as he bent down, he bent his mouth to meet the lips that he still saw as "really quite cute."

The stress did not stop. The physical therapists, after time, wondered that Mary had so much fight in her. But it stressed her, and Peter did his job without liking it. Mary and Peter quarreled and made up and quarreled and made up. Peter prayed for a miracle when they made up and sometimes when they quarreled. Were this not enough stress, there was an agonizingly long trial—and knowing that the drunk driver was behind bars surprisingly didn't make things better. But Mary very slowly learned to walk again. After six months, if Peter helped her, she could walk 100 yards before the pain became too great to continue.

Peter hadn't been noticing that the stress diminished,

but he did become aware of something he couldn't put his finger on. After a night of struggling, he got up, went to church, and was floored by the Bible reading of, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." and the idea that when you do or do not visit someone in prison, you are visiting or refusing to visit Christ. Peter absently went home, tried to think about other things, made several phone calls, and then forced himself to drive to one and only one prison.

He stopped in the parking lot, almost threw up, and then steeled himself to go inside. He found a man, Jacob, and... Jacob didn't know who Peter was, but he recognized him as looking familiar. It was an awkward meeting. Then he recognized him as the man whose now wife he had crippled. When Peter left, he vomited and felt like a failure. He talked about it with Mary...

That was the beginning of a friendship. Peter chose to love the man in prison, even if there was no pleasure in it. And that created something deeper than pleasure, something Peter couldn't explain.

As Peter and Mary were planning the wedding, Mary said, "I want to enter with Peter next to me, no matter what the tradition says. It will be a miracle if I have the strength to stand for the whole wedding, and if I have to lean on someone I want it to be Peter. And I don't want to sit on a chair; I would rather spend my wedding night wracked by pain than go through my wedding supported by something lifeless!"

When the rehearsal came, Mary stood, and the others winced at the pain in her face. And she stood, and walked, for the entire rehearsal without touching Peter once. Then

she said, "I can do it. I can go through the wedding on my own strength," and collapsed in pain.

At the wedding, she stood next to Peter, walking, her face so radiant with joy that some of the guests did not guess she was in exquisite pain. They walked next to each other, not touching, and Mary slowed down and stopped in the center of the church. Peter looked at her, wondering what Mary was doing.

Then Mary's arm shot around Peter's neck, and Peter stood startled for a moment before he placed his arm around her, squeezed her tightly, and they walked together to the altar.

On the honeymoon, Mary told Peter, "You are the only person I need." This was the greatest bliss either of them had known, and the honeymoon's glow shined and shined.

Peter and Mary agreed to move somewhere less expensive to settle down, and were too absorbed in their wedded bliss and each other to remember promises they had made earlier, promises to seek a church community for support and friends. And Peter continued working at an unglamorous job, and Mary continued fighting to walk and considered the housework she was capable of doing a badge of honor, and neither of them noticed that the words, "I love you" were spoken ever so slightly less frequently, nor did they the venom creeping into their words.

One night they exploded. What they fought about was not important. What was important was that Peter left, burning with rage. He drove, and drove, until he reached Wheaton, and at daybreak knocked on Prof. Johnson's door. There was anger in his voice when he asked, "Are you still my friend?"

Prof. Johnson got him something to eat and stayed with

him when he fumed with rage, and said, "I don't care if I'm supposed to be with her, I can't go back!" Then Prof. Johnson said, "Will you make an agreement with me? I promise you I won't ever tell you to go back to her, or accept her, or accept what she does, or apologize to her, or forgive her, or in any way be reconciled. But I need you to trust me that I love you and will help you decide what is best to do."

Peter said, "Yes."

Prof. Johnson said, "Then stay with me. You need some rest. Take the day to rest. There's food in the fridge, and I have books and a nice back yard. There's iced tea in the—excuse me, there's Coke and 7 Up in the boxes next to the fridge. When I can come back, we can talk."

Peter relaxed, and he felt better. He told Prof. Johnson. Prof. Johnson said, "That's excellent. What I'd like you to do next is go in to work, with a lawyer I know. You can tell him what's going on, and he'll lead you to a courtroom to observe."

Peter went away to court the next day, and when he came back he was ashen. He said nothing to Prof. Johnson.

Then, after the next day, he came back looking even more unhappy. "The first day, the lawyer, George, took me into divorce court. I thought I saw the worst that divorce court could get. Until I came back today. It was the same—this sickening scene where two people had become the most bitter enemies. I hope it doesn't come to this. This was atrocious. It was vile. It was more than vile. It was—"

Prof. Johnson sent him back for a third day. This time Peter said nothing besides, "I think I've been making a mistake."

After the fourth day, Peter said, "Help me! I've been making the biggest mistake of my *life!*"

After a full week had passed, Peter said, "*Please, I beg you, don't send me back there.*"

Prof. Johnson sent Peter back to watch a divorce court for one more miserable, excruciating day. Then he said, "Now you can do whatever you want. What do you want to do?"

The conflict between Peter and Mary ended the next day.

Peter went home, begging Mary for forgiveness, and no sooner than he had begun his apology, a thousand things were reflected in Mary's face and she begged his forgiveness. Then they talked, and debated whether to go back to Wheaton, or stay where they were. Finally Mary said, "I really want to go back to Wheaton."

Peter began to shyly approach old friends. He later misquoted: "I came crawling with a thimble in the desperate hope that they'd give a few tiny drops of friendship and love. Had I known how they would respond, I would have come running with a bucket!"

Peter and Mary lived together for many years; they had many children and were supported by many friends.

Ployon said, "I didn't follow every detail, but... there was something in that that stuck."

Archon said, "How long do you think it lasted?"

"A little shorter than the other one, I mean first part."

"Do you have any idea how many days were in each part?"

"About the same? I assume the planet had slowed down so that a year and a day were of roughly equal length."

"The first part took place during three days. The latter part spanned several thousand days—"

"I guess I didn't understand it—"

"—which is... a sign that you understood something quite significant... that you knew what to pay attention to and were paying attention to the right thing."

"But I didn't understand it. I had a sense that it was broken off before the end, and that was the end, right?"

Archon hesitated, and said, "There's more, but I'd rather not go into that."

Ployon said, "Are you sure?"

"You won't like it."

"Please."

The years passed and Peter and Mary grew into a blissfully happy marriage. Mary came to have increasing health problems as a result of the accident, and those around them were amazed at how their love had transformed the suffering the accident created in both of their lives. At least those who knew them best saw the transformation. There were many others who could only see their happiness as a mirage.

As the years passed, Jacob grew to be a good friend. And when Peter began to be concerned that his wife might be... Jacob had also grown wealthy, very wealthy, and assembled a top-flight legal team (without taking a dime of Peter's money—over Peter's protests!), to prevent what the doctors would normally do in such a case, given recent shifts in the medical system.

And then Mary's health grew worse, much worse, and

her suffering grew worse with it, and pain medications seemed to be having less and less effect. Those who didn't know Mary were astonished that someone in so much pain could enjoy life so much, nor the hours they spent gazing into each other's eyes, holding hands, when Mary's pain seemed to vanish. A second medical opinion, and a third, and a fourth, confirmed that Mary had little chance of recovery even to her more recent state. And whatever measures been taken, whatever testimony Peter and Mary could give about the joy of their lives, the court's decision still came:

The court wishes to briefly review the facts of the case. Subject is suffering increasingly severe effects from an injury that curtailed her life greatly as a young person. from which she has never recovered, and is causing increasingly complications now that she will never again have youth's ability to heal. No fewer than four medical opinions admitted as expert testimony substantially agree that subject is in extraordinary and excruciating pain; that said excruciating pain is increasing; that said excruciating pain is increasingly unresponsive to medication; that subject has fully lost autonomy and is dependent on her husband; that this dependence is profound, without choice, and causes her husband to be dependent without choice on others and exercise little autonomy; and the prognosis is only of progressively worse deterioration and increase in pain, with no question of recovery.

The court finds it entirely understandable that the subject, who has gone through such trauma, and is suffering increasingly severe complications, would be

in a state of some denial. Although a number of positions could be taken, the court also finds it understandable that a husband would try to maintain a hold on what cannot exist, and needlessly prolong his wife's suffering. It is not, however, the court's position to judge whether this is selfish...

For all the impressive-sounding arguments that have been mounted, the court cannot accord a traumatized patient or her ostensibly well-meaning husband a privilege that the court itself does not claim. The court does not find that it has an interest in allowing this woman to continue in her severe and worsening state of suffering.

Peter was at her side, holding her hand and looking into his wife's eyes, The hospital doctor had come. Then Peter said, "I love you," and Mary said, "I love you," and they kissed.

Mary's kiss was still burning on Peter's lips when two nurses hooked Mary up to an IV and injected her with 5000 milligrams of sodium thiopental, then a saline flush followed by 100 milligrams of pancurium bromide, then a saline flush and 20 milligrams of potassium chloride.

A year later to the day, Peter died of a broken heart.

Ployon was silent for a long time, and Archon was silent for an even longer time. Ployon said, "I guess part of our world is present in that world. Is that what you mean by being in two places at once?"

Archon was silent for a long time.

Ployon said, "It seems that that world's problems and failings are somehow greater than our achievements. I wish that world could exist, and that we could somehow visit it."

Archon said, "Do you envy them that much?"

Ployon said, "Yes. We envy them as—"

Archon said, "—as—" and searched through his world's images.

Ployon said, "—as that world's eunuchs envy men."

Archon was silent.

Ployon was silent.

Fire in the Hole

The professor continued his reading.

In *The Divine Names* I have shown the sense in which God is described as good, existent, life, wisdom, power, and whatever other things pertain to the conceptual names for God. In my *Symbolic Theology* I have discussed analogies of God drawn from what we perceive. I have spoken of the images we have of him, of the forms, figures, and instruments proper to him, of the places in which he lives and the ornaments which he wears. I have spoken of his anger, grief, and rage, of how he is said to be drunk and hungover, of his oaths and curses, of his sleeping and waking, and indeed of all those images we have of him, images shaped by the workings of the representations of God. And I feel sure that you have noticed how these latter come much more abundantly than what went before, since *The Theological Representations* and a discussion of the names appropriate to God are inevitably briefer than what can be said in *The*

Symbolic Theology. The fact is that the more we take flight upward, the more find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing. In the earlier books my argument this downward path from the most exalted to the humblest categories, taking in on this downward path an ever-increasing number of ideas which multiplied what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.

Now you may wonder why it is that, after starting out from the highest category when our method involves assertions, we begin now from the lowest category involves a denial. The reason is this. When we assert what is beyond every assertion, we must then proceed from what is most akin to it, and as we do so we make the affirmation on which everything else depends. But when we deny that which is beyond every denial, we have to start by denying those qualities which differ most from the goal we hope to attain. Is it not closer to truth to say that God is life and goodness rather than that he is air or stone? Is it not more accurate to deny that drunkenness and rage can be attributed to him than to deny that we can apply to him the terms of speech and thought?

So this is what we say. The Cause of all is above all and is not inexistent, lifeless, speechless, mindless. It is not a material body, and hence has neither shape nor form, quality, quantity, or weight. It is not in any place and can be neither seen nor touched. It is

neither perceived nor is it perceptible. It suffers neither disorder nor disturbance and is overwhelmed by no earthly passion. It is not powerless and subject to the disturbances caused by sense perception. It endures no deprivation of light. It passes through no change, decay, division, loss, no ebb and flow, nothing of which the senses may be aware. None of this can either be identified with it nor attributed.

Again, as we climb higher we say this. It is not soul or mind, nor does it possess imagination, conviction, speech, or understanding. Nor is it speech per se, understanding per se. It cannot be spoken of and it cannot be grasped by understanding. It is not number or order, greatness or smallness, equality or inequality, similarity or dissimilarity. It is not immovable, moving, or at rest. It has no power, it is not power, nor is it light. It does not live nor is it light. It does not live nor is it life. It is not a substance, nor is it eternity or time. It cannot be grasped by the understanding since it is neither knowledge nor truth. It is not kingship. It is not wisdom. It is neither one nor oneness, divinity nor goodness. Nor is it a spirit, in the sense in which we understand the term. It is not sonship or fatherhood and it is nothing known to us or any other being. Existing beings do not know it as it actually is and it does not know them as they are. There is no speaking of it, nor name or knowledge of it. Darkness and light, error and truth—it is none of these. It is beyond assertion and denial. We make assertions and denials of what is next to it, but never of it, for it is both beyond every assertion, being the perfect and unique cause of all things, and, by virtue of

its preeminently simple and absolute nature, free of every limitation, beyond every limitation, it is also beyond every denial.

Prof. Sarovsky slowly and reverently closed the book.

“St. Dionysius says elsewhere that God is known by every name and no name, and that everything that is is a name of God. And in fact in discussing symbols which have some truth but are necessarily inadequate to reality, crude symbols are to be preferred to those which appear elevated, since even their ‘crassness’ is a ‘goad’ spurring us to reach higher.”

“So now I’d like to have an exercise. Could somebody please name something at random, and I can tell how it tells the glory of God?”

A young man from the back called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “Ha ha, hysterical. Could I have another suggestion?”

Another young man called out, “Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky said, “I’m serious. Porn, when you start using it, seems to be a unique spice. But the more you use it, the more it actually *drains* spice from everything else, and eventually drains itself, and when pornography can only go so far, you find yourself not only jailed but charged with *rape*. Lustfulness is in the beginning as sweet as honey and in the end as bitter as gall and as sharp as a double-edged sword. And much as I disagree with feminists on important points, I agree with a feminist dictionary: ‘Pornography is the theory; rape is the practice.’ Could I have a *serious* suggestion?”

A couple of cellphones started playing, “Internet is for Porn.”

Prof. Sarovsky called on the class's most vocal feminist. "Delilah! Would you pick a topic?"

Delilah grinned wickedly and said, "I'm with the boys on this one. *Porn*."

Prof. Sarovsky paused briefly and says, "Very well, then, porn it is. The famous essay 'I, Pencil' takes the humble pencil up and just starts to dig and dig at the economic family tree of just what resources and endeavors make up the humble lead pencil. So it talks about logging, and all the work in transporting the wood, and the mining involved in the graphite, and the exquisite resources that go just to make the blue strip on the metal band, and so on and so forth, and the 'rubber' eraser and whatnot. The conclusion is that millions of dollars' resources (he does not calculate a figure) went into making a humble wooden pencil, and he pushes further: only God knows how to make a pencil. And if only God knows how to make a pencil, *a fortiori* only God knows how to make a porn site...

"And, I suppose, a pencil must be a phallic symbol."

Then he paused, and said, "*Just kidding!*"

The room was silent.

Prof. Sarovsky bowed deeply and grinned: "I'll see you and raise you."

And this is what he said.

I, Porn, want to tell you about myself. There are options that eclipse me, but I can make my point more strongly if I speak for myself, Porn, who represent myriads of wonders.

It is not my point in particular that only God knows how to make a Porn site. The point has been well enough made that only God knows how to make a pencil, and is a less interesting adjustment to acknowledge that only God

knows how to make a Porn site.

Nor do I suggest that the straight-laced print off a Porn image and frame and hang it on the wall. Though if they understood my lineage, the question would then become whether they were worthy to do so.

I have a magnificent and vaster lineage than “I, Pencil” begins to draw out. A brilliance in economics, the author simply underscores a great interdependent web of economic resources in the humble pencil’s family tree. Equipment, mining, logging, transportation: the economic underpinnings of a humble pencil amount to millions of dollars, and the details mentioned only scratch the surface even of the economics involved.

I have a vaster lineage, including such things as war in Heaven. Now the war in Heaven is over, and was over when the Archangel Michael only said his name, which in the Hebrew tongue says, “Who is like God?” and with that, the devils were cast down, sore losers afflicting the Royal Race one and all. And even then, it was only angelic spirits that could come anywhere close to their war against God. Even then, they are limited. They are on a leash. Perhaps someday I will tell you of why you are summoned to a holy and blinding arrogance towards that whole camp.

What is the Royal Race? I get ahead of myself.

I, Porn, don’t merely share a universe with the divine virtues. In my production there is the cutting off of self-will, long suffering, and as little lust as might be found in a monastery. Dostoevsky offers the image of the chaste harlot; I can add only that if Christ were walking today, Porn models would be among the first he would associate with.

The core impulse I, Porn, draw on, is good. It is a

testament to the human spirit that nine months after a natural disaster, there is a wave of babies born. The core impulse is the impulse for the preservation of the species, the possibility by which a community of mortals has itself no automatic end.

It is closer to my point to say that God is not just good and divine; he has created a world that in every way reflects his grandeur. There are no small parts: only actors who are not really small. Every superstring vibration in the cosmos is grander and vaster than all the pagan gods of all worlds put together.

Or as G.K. Chesterton said, "Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pocket. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past."

It is still closer to my majesty to observe Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who suffered in the Gulag that Hitler sent observers for inspiration for Nazi concentration camps, "Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, not between political parties either — but right through every heart — and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unrooted small corner of evil."

The Heavens declare the glory of God—*and so do I, Porn.*

Perhaps the most beautiful doctrine in Origen that Orthodox must condemn is the final and ultimate salvation of all Creation: that the Devil himself will be a last prodigal son returning to home in Heaven. But the Orthodox

teaching is more beautiful: a teaching that every spiritual being, every man, every fallen or unfallen angel, is given an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell and not one of these will God rape, however much he desires their salvation. To quote *The Dark Tower*: “A man can’t be taken to hell, or sent to hell: you can only get there on your own steam.” God has made a rock he could not move, and that rock is man and angel.

The rising crescendo that practically seals C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” is:

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities, it is with the awe and the circumspection proper to them, that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilization—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit—immortal horrors or everlasting splendours.

Which brings us to the messy circumstances of your lives.

George Bernard Shaw said, "There are two tragedies in life. One is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it." We can see it, perhaps in a fantasy setting, in a passage from C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, as Lucy tiptoe to a room with a spellbook and see a singular spell:

Then she came to a page which was such a blaze of pictures that one hardly noticed the writing. Hardly—but she *did* notice the first words. They were, *An infallible spell to make beautiful she that uttereth it beyond the lot of mortals*. Lucy peered at the pictures with her face close to the page, and though they had seemed crowded and muddlesome before, she found she could now see them quite clearly. The first was a picture of a girl standing at a reading-desk reading in a huge book. And the girl was dressed up exactly like Lucy. In the next picture Lucy (for the girl in her picture was Lucy herself) was standing up with her mouth open and a rather terrible expression on her face, chanting or reciting something. In the third picture the beauty beyond the lot of mortals had come to her. It was strange, considering how small the pictures had looked at first, that the Lucy in the picture now seemed quite as big as the real Lucy; and they looked into each other's eyes and the real Lucy was dazzled by the beauty of the other Lucy; though she could still see a sort of likeness to herself in that beautiful face. And now the pictures came crowding on her thick and fast. She saw herself throned on high at a great tournament in Calormen and all the Kings of the world fought because of her beauty. After that it turned from tournaments to real wars, and all Narnia

and Archenland, Telmar and Calormen, Galma and Terebithinia, were laid waste with the fury of the kings and dukes and great lords who fought for her favor. Then it changed and Lucy, still beautiful beyond the lot of mortals, was back in England. And Susan (who had always been the beauty of the family) came home from America. The Susan in the picture looked exactly like the real Susan only plainer and with a nasty expression. And Susan was was jealous of the dazzling beauty of Lucy, but that didn't matter a bit because no one cared anything about Susan now.

The temptation, patterned after real temptation of the real world, is to want a horror. It is because Lucy is bewitched that she even wants what the spell promises. The destruction of kingdoms when lords vie for her beauty? Women may want to feel like the most beautiful woman in the world, but the count in stacking dead bodies like cordwood is no true metric for beauty. As a faithfully portrayed temptation by C.S. Lewis, what is being desired is not something Heavenly. *It is a vision of Hell, pure and simple.* While in the grips of temptation, she could not be happy without casting that spell until she let go of it from a strong warning from Aslan. But even if she succeeded, she would be even more unhappy. Her success would rival world wars or nuclear wars in its destruction of beautiful worlds, and if it didn't bring her death, she would live on in a wrecked world, knowing for the rest of her life that it was her petty self-absorption that obliterated the majesty of worlds.

Even if we scale from back from undisguised fantasy, we can look at what is a practical possibility for some people

in the real world. Cameron Russell's Looks Aren't Everything. Believe me, I'm a model. The TED talk eloquently explains that being a supermodel is not all sunshine and not the solution to all life's problems. For that matter it isn't even the solution to *body image* problems, and the final point she shares is that as a model she has to be *more*, not less, insecure about her body, no matter how lovely she may appear to others. It turns out that supermodels are intimidated by... other supermodels. Being a model is not a way to be exempt from body image struggles.

And this is in no way a solely a phenomenon about body image. There is one man where professional opinion is that he is smarter than most geniuses, and that the average Harvard PhD has never met someone so talented. And his work history, given that he's tried to give his best? Here's something really odd. One job assistant said, "You don't want your boss figuring out you're smarter than him." When he hands in his first piece of work, only some bosses respond kindly to work that is beyond the boss's wildest dreams. Most of them find themselves in unfamiliar social territory, and strike out or retaliate. He's been terminated a dozen times and is now retired on disability, the best financial arrangement he has had yet. It may be true, up to a point, that there's something likable about being smart. That doesn't mean in any sense that the smarter you get, the more people like you, or that your life is easy.

There is a portal that far excels entering another world, entering Narnia, Hogwarts, or Middle Earth. And this portal is much harder to see or look for than Narnia. It is entering the here and now you have been placing.

Spiritual masters have said to want what you have, not

what you don't have, and want things to be for you just the way they are. Now there is such a thing as legitimately seeking to solve, lessen, or improve a problem, and wishing you had a better-paying job, a car, or a nicer house. Wishing never runs out, and if you get the Apple Watch you want, wishing will just wish for newer or different things. Buy something you don't need but will make you enchanted for a month. *I dare you.*

Oh, and by the way, I, Porn, know all about wishing. I know *everything* about it, and I know everything it *can't* do.

When you let go of escape, soon you may let go of relating the here and now as the sort of thing one should flee, and some thick, sticky grey film will slowly melt away from your eyes and they will open on beauty all around you, and you will have crossed a threshold no fantasy portal even comes close. And you will have every treasure that you have. And perhaps, in and through ancient religion or postmodern positive psychology, cultivate a deep and abiding gratefulness for all the blessings you have.

In the Way of Things, there are two basic options one can pursue. One is the Sexual Way, and the other is the Hyper-Sexual Way. Let me explain.

Study after study has been launched to investigate which group of mavericks has the best sex, and they have been repeatedly been dismayed to find that the overlooked Sexual Way has the most pleasure. The overlooked Sexual Way is that of a contest of love, for life, between one lord and one wife, chaste before the wedding and faithful after, grateful for children, and knowing that the best sex *ever* is when you are trying to make a baby. After the first year or two some outward signs get quiet and subdued, but the marriage succeeds because the honeymoon has failed. It

deepens year after year and decade after a decade, and a widowed senior can say, "You don't know what love is when you're a kid." And here, like no other place, *beauty is forged in the eye of the beholder*. Here, unlike fashion magazines, sweaty fitness regimens, and dieting, and weighing, and accursed "bodysculpting," a woman can and should be made to feel like she is the most beautiful woman in the world, to a husband to whom she really is the most beautiful woman in the world, as naturally as the Church on Sunday. As Homer and Marge humbly and quietly sing to each other, "You are so *beautiful* to me!"

If the sexual impulse is spent wisely in the Sexual Way, it is invested at exorbitant interest on the Hyper-Sexual Way. Wonder what all that curious monastic modesty about? It compounds an essential sexual condition, by which a monastic, man or woman, becomes a transgendered god and his sexual desire is entirely fixed on God. Does this seem strange? Let us listen to St. Herman of Alaska:

Further on Yanovsky writes, "Once the Elder was invited aboard a frigate which came from Saint Petersburg. The Captain of the frigate was a highly educated man, who had been sent to America by order of the Emperor to make an inspection of all the colonies. There were more than twenty-five officers with the Captain, and they also were educated men. In the company of this group sat a monk of a hermitage, small in stature and wearing very old clothes. All these educated conversationalists were placed in such a position by his wise talks that they did not know how to answer him. The Captain himself used to say, 'We

were lost for an answer before him.’

“Father Herman gave them all one general question: ‘Gentlemen, What do you love above all, and what will each of you wish for your happiness?’ Various answers were offered ... Some desired wealth, others glory, some a beautiful wife, and still others a beautiful ship he would captain; and so forth in the same vein. ‘It is not true,’ Father Herman said to them concerning this, ‘that all your various wishes can bring us to one conclusion—that each of you desires that which in his own understanding he considers the best, and which is most worthy of his love?’ They all answered, ‘Yes, that is so!’ He then continued, ‘Would you not say, Is not that which is best, above all, and surpassing all, and that which by preference is most worthy of love, the Very Lord, our Jesus Christ, who created us, adorned us with such ideals, gave life to all, sustains everything, nurtures and loves all, who is Himself Love and most beautiful of all men? Should we not then love God above every thing, desire Him more than anything, and search Him out?’

“All said, ‘Why, yes! That’s self-evident!’ Then the Elder asked, ‘But do you love God?’ They all answered, ‘Certainly, we love God. How can we not love God?’ ‘And I a sinner have been trying for more than forty years to love God, I cannot say that I love Him completely,’ Father Herman protested to them. He then began to demonstrate to them the way in which we should love God. ‘If we love someone,’ he said, ‘we always remember them; we try to please them. Day and night our heart is concerned with the subject. Is that the way you gentlemen love God? Do you turn to

Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and fulfill His holy commandments?' They had to admit that they had not! 'For our own good, and for our own fortune,' concluded the Elder, 'let us at least promise ourselves that from this very minute we will try to love God more than anything and to fulfill His Holy Will!' Without any doubt this conversation was imprinted in the hearts of the listeners for the rest of their lives.'

Fr. Herman had something better than pixels on a screen. *Much* better.

Perhaps the most controversial argument in the history of philosophy is by Anselm of Canterbury, who said, "If God exists, nothing greater than him could exist. Now God either exists in reality and also in our minds, or only as a concept in our minds. But to exist in reality as well as our minds is greater than to exist only in our minds. Therefore, God must have the higher excellence of existing in reality as well as our minds."

I am not specifically interested in bringing agreement or disagreement to this argument. First, most people first meeting this argument feel that something has been slipped past them, but they can't put a finger on where the error is. However, I did not exactly include this argument to discuss what it *asserts*, but what it *assumes*: if God is greater than anything else that can be thought, then we have something that pierces deeply into the Christian God.

The joke is told that four rabbis would get together to discuss Torah, and one specific rabbi was the odd man out, every single time. And they said, "Three against one." Finally, the exasperated odd rabbi out knelt down, prayed,

“Gd, I’ve worked very hard, and they never listen. Please send them a sign that I’m right.” It was a warm day out, but a sudden chilly wind blew by, and some clouds appeared in the sky. The other three rabbis said, “That’s odd, but it’s still three against one.” Then the rabbi knelt down, prayed, “Please make a clearer sign,” and the wind grew more bitter and it began sleeting. The rabbi said, “Well?” The other rabbis said, “This is quite a coincidence, but it’s still three against one.” Then before the rabbi could begin to pray, bolts of lightning splintered a nearby tree, there was an earthquake, the earth opened, and a deep voice thundered, “*HE’S RIGHT!*” The rabbi said, “Well?” Quick as a flash, another rabbi said, “Well? It’s still three against two!”

The humor element in this element extends beyond, “If God has spoken, the discussion is over.” The humor element hinges on the fact that counting does not go from “one, two, three, four” to “one, two, three, four, **Five**”: there is infinite confusion in adding one God to four men. As written in Doxology:

Thou who art One,
 Eternally beyond time,
 So wholly One,
 That thou mayest be called infinite,
 Timeless beyond time thou art,
 The One who is greater than infinity art thou.
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 The Three who are One,
 No more bound by numbers than by word,
 And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,
 The Word,
 Divine ordering Reason,

Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,
Way pre-eminent of all things,
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,
The Creator entered into his Creation,
Sharing with us humble glory,
Lowered by love,
Raised to the highest,
The Suffering Servant known,
The King of Glory,
O ΩN....

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

But thou art beyond all thought,
All word, all being,
We may say that thou existest,
But then we must say,
Thou art, I am not.
And if we say that we exist,
It is inadequate to say that thou existest,
For thou art the source of all being,
And beyond our being;
Thou art the source of all mind, wisdom, and reason,
Yet it is a fundamental error to imagine thee,
To think and reason in the mode of mankind.
Thou art not one god because there happeneth not

more,
 Thou art The One God because there mighteth not be
 another beside thee.
 Thus thou spakest to Moses,
 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.
 Which is to say,
 Thou shalt admit no other gods to my presence.

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

The Trinity does not represent a weaker or less consistent monotheism than Islam. The Trinity represents a stronger and more consistent monotheism than Islam, and that is why it can afford things that are unthinkable to a Muslim.

A Hindu once asked a Christian, “I can accept the truth of the incarnation, but why only one?” And in that conversation, where the Christian defended only one incarnation, both were wrong. Or rather, the Christian was *wrong*; the Hindu was merely *mistaken*.

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to BECOME him forever.

One theology professor tried to explain to a Muslim that the Trinity is how Christians get to the absolute Oneness of God. The men who first articulated the doctrine looked with some horror on the concept of using the word "Trinity" as a handle for the doctrine.

Regarding the Hindu mentioned, I would say that there have been many, many true incarnations of God, and they still continue. Now the Hindu concept of an Avatar can be what Christianity rejected as docetistic, with Christ not recognized to have real flesh. However, what I would rather have been said is this: No one besides Christ enters the world with part or all of God as part of them. However, the reason for the coming of the Son of God is to destroy the devil's work. An ancient hymn states, "Trying to be god, Adam failed to be God. Christ became man, to make Adam god." And the vast company of Saints that God keeps on giving are in fact the gift of a company of Avatars; we just have a different understanding of how one reaches a very similar goal.

The Philokalia says, "Blessed is the monk who regards each man as God after God."

St. John Chrysostom comments on the Scripture: "We beheld," he says, "His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father."

Having declared that we were made "sons of God," and having shown in what manner namely, by the "Word" having been "made Flesh," he again mentions another advantage which we gain from this same circumstance. What is it? "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father"; which we could not have beheld, had it not been shown to us, by

means of a body like to our own. For if the men of old time could not even bear to look upon the glorified countenance of Moses, who partook of the same nature with us, if that just man needed a veil which might shade over the purity⁷ of his glory, and show to them have face of their prophet mild and gentle; how could we creatures of clay and earth have endured the unveiled Godhead, which is unapproachable even by the powers above? Wherefore He tabernacled among us, that we might be able with much fearlessness to approach Him, speak to, and converse with Him.

But what means “the glory as of the Only-Begotten of the Father”? Since many of the Prophets too were glorified, as this Moses himself, Elijah, and Elisha, the one encircled by the fiery chariot (2 Kings vi. 17), the other taken up by it; and after them, Daniel and the Three Children, and the many others who showed forth wonders; and angels who have appeared among men, and partly disclosed to beholders the flashing light of their proper nature; and since not angels only, but even the Cherubim were seen by the Prophet in great glory, and the Seraphim also: the Evangelist leading us away from all these, and removing our thoughts from created things, and from the brightness of our fellow-servants, sets us at the very summit of good. For, “not of prophet,” says he, “nor angel, nor archangel, nor of the higher power, nor of any other created nature,” if other there be, but of the Master Himself, the King Himself, the true Only-Begotten Son Himself, of the Very Lord of all, did we “behold the glory.”

For the expression “as,” does not in this place

belong to similarity or comparison, but to confirmation and unquestionable definition; as though he said, "We beheld glory, such as it was becoming, and likely that He should possess, who is the Only-Begotten and true Son of God, the King of all." The habit (of so speaking) is general, for I shall not refuse to strengthen my argument even from common custom, since it is not now my object to speak with any reference to beauty of words, or elegance of composition, but only for your advantage; and therefore there is nothing to prevent my establishing my argument by the instance of a common practice. What then is the habit of most persons? Often when any have seen a king richly decked, and glittering on all sides with precious stones, and are afterwards describing to others the beauty, the ornaments, the splendor, they enumerate as much as they can, the glowing tint of the purple robe, the size of the jewels, the whiteness of the mules, the gold about the yoke, the soft and shining couch. But when after enumerating these things, and other things besides these, they cannot, say what they will, give a full idea of the splendor, they immediately bring in: "But why say much about it; once for all, he was like a king;" not desiring by the expression "like," to show that he, of whom they say this, resembles a king, but that he is a real king. Just so now the Evangelist has put the word As, desiring to represent the transcendent nature and incomparable excellence of His glory.

Elsewhere we are asked to consider what things would

be like if a King were to take up residence in one of the houses of a city. Would not the entire city, and each house in it, be forever honored? And the Son of God is now one of our homeboys. He ascended into Heaven and brought us with him, enthroned in Heaven with him.

We are the Royal Race. We are made in the image of God, and made to reach unimaginable glory.

And there may be named three laws that are the Constitution of the Royal Race, three laws which are one and the same.

The first law is the Law of the Canoe, as C.S. Lewis summarized his friend Charles Williams:

It is Virgil himself who died without reaching the *patria*, who saw 'Italy' only from a wave before he was engulfed forever. It is Virgil himself who stretches out his hands among the ghosts *ripae ulterioris amore*, longing to pass a river that he cannot pass. This poet from whose work so many Christians have drawn spiritual nourishment was not himself a Christian—did not himself know the full meaning of his own poetry, for (in Keble's fine words) 'thoughts beyond their thought to those high bards were given'. This is exquisite cruelty; he made honey not for himself; he helped to save others, himself he could not save.

...The Atonement was a Substitution, just as Anselm said. But that Substitution, far from being a mere legal fiction irrelevant to the normal workings of the universe, was simply the supreme instance of a universal law. 'He saved others, himself he cannot save' is a *definition* of the Kingdom. All salvation, everywhere and at all times, in great things or in little,

is vicarious. The courtesy of the Emperor has absolutely decreed that no man can paddle his own canoe and every man can paddle his fellow's, so that the shy offering and modest acceptance of indispensable aid shall be the very form of the celestial etiquette. [emphasis original]

The second law is the Law of the Long Spoon. As one telling goes from a liberal enough source:

One day a man said to God, "God, I would like to know what Heaven and Hell are like."

God showed the man two doors. Inside the first one, in the middle of the room, was a large round table with a large pot of stew. It smelled delicious and made the man's mouth water, but the people sitting around the table were thin and sickly. They appeared to be famished. They were holding spoons with very long handles and each found it possible to reach into the pot of stew and take a spoonful, but because the handle was longer than their arms, they could not get the spoons back into their mouths.

The man shuddered at the sight of their misery and suffering. God said, "You have seen Hell."

Behind the second door, the room appeared exactly the same. There was the large round table with the large pot of wonderful stew that made the man's mouth water. The people had the same long-handled spoons, but they were well nourished and plump, laughing and talking.

The man said, "I don't understand."

God smiled. "It is simple," he said, "These people

share and feed one another. While the greedy only think of themselves...”

The last law is the Law of Narcissus’s Mirror. It states that the Royal Race are absolutely *forbidden* to stand and gaze at themselves in Narcissus’s Mirror, entranced at their own beauty, and *commanded* to gaze at other members of the Royal Race, entranced at *their* beauty.

These three laws are one and the same. One joke, about “communio” theologians who hold the Trinity to mean that God himself is a community, ran:

Q: How many communio theologians does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but he thinks he is a community.

But we are *not* communities. We are *part* of a community, and the full grandeur of being a member of the Royal Race is that you are no *island*, but a connected and beautiful part of a *continent*.

And furthermore, God has ordered Heaven and Earth for the benefit of us as the Royal Race.

Though this may be more subtle in the Sexual Way than in the Hyper-Sexual Way, but the behavior enjoined on the Hyper-Sexual Way is that of a spiritual miser, who constantly thinks his Heavenly wealth is too little and he must spare no effort to get more, and no matter how much treasure in Heaven he acquires, he never rests on his laurels, but keeps on storing up more and more and more.

Men each have one interest, one *real* interest, and only *one* interest: a good answer before the Dread Judgment-

Throne of Christ. This life is inestimably precious, and in treasures such as repentance, Heaven's best-kept secret, we can only store up these treasures before this fleeting life is over. Now the Church Triumphant is no terrible place to be, but there are profound goods that are only open to us, the living, for as long as we live. And the various strange prescriptions of the Philokalia and the Orthodox Way, about believing oneself to be the worst of sinners, about giving oneself no credit for any good actions, about believing "All the world will be saved and I will be damned," about repenting as if one will die tomorrow but treating your body as if it will last for many years, are in fact braces to support being one hoarding spiritual miser for the rest of one's life, and crossing the finish line, in triumph, and with treasure after treasure after treasure in your hoard. It is explained that God conceals from us the day of our death, because if we knew we would not die for some decades, we would put off repentance and be incorrigible. Not that God is absolutely unwilling to reveal to people the day of their death: it is in fact considered a mark of holiness to know that, because a person is in a good enough state for the secret not to need to be hidden. But the Philokalia's discussion, perhaps here most clearly of all, explains that things are ordered this way because God has stacked the deck, in *our* favor. And as regards the Sexual Way, the path is said not to be an environment for children to grow up, but an environment for parents to grow up.

C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, fields an objection which was apparently on people's minds but I have not heard brought up live in my lifetime. However, the answer says everything to a world in disintegrating economy, COVID, Jihad, and more:

I'd like to deal with a difficulty some people find about the whole idea of prayer. Somebody put it to me by saying: "I can believe in God alright, but what I can't swallow is this idea of Him listening to several hundred million human beings who are all addressing Him at the same moment." And I find quite a lot of people feel that difficulty. Well, the first thing to notice is that the whole sting of it comes in the words "at the same moment." Most of us can imagine a God attending to any number of claimants if only they come one by one and He has an endless time to do it in. So what's really at the back of the difficulty is this idea of God having to fit too many things into one moment of time. Well that, of course, is what happens to us. Our life comes to us moment by moment. One moment disappears before the next comes along, and there's room for precious little in each. That's what Time is like. And, of course, you and I tend to take it for granted that this Time series — this arrangement of past, present and future — isn't simply the way life comes to us but is the way all things really exist. We tend to assume that the whole universe and God Himself are always moving on from a past to a future just as we are. But many learned men don't agree with that. I think it was the Theologians who first started the idea that some things are not in Time at all. Later, the Philosophers took it over. And now some of the scientists are doing the same. Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life doesn't consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He hasn't got to listen to

them all in that one little snippet which we call “ten-thirty.” Ten-thirty, and every other moment from the beginning to the end of the world, is always the Present for Him. If you like to put it that way, He has infinity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames. That’s difficult, I know. Can I try to give something, not the same, but a bit like it. Suppose I’m writing a novel. I write “Mary laid down her book; next moment came a knock at the door.” For Mary, who’s got to live in the imaginary time of the story, there’s no interval between putting down the book and hearing the knock. But I, her creator, between writing the first part of that sentence and the second, may have gone out for an hour’s walk and spent the whole hour thinking about Mary. I know that’s not a perfect example, but it may just give a glimpse of what I mean. The point I want to drive home is that God has infinite attention, infinite leisure to spare for each one of us. He doesn’t have to take us in the line. You’re as much alone with Him as if you were the only thing He’d ever created. When Christ died, He died for you individually just as much as if you’d been the only man in the world.

And God’s Providence is not just Providence in great things. It is Providence in the small. It is not just Providence in a career, or entering the Sexual Way. It is also Providence when you are stuck in traffic and the light seems never to be turning green and that still, small voice urges you to grow just a little as a person so you can be as happy in your car as in a lounge chair at home. And it is the mighty

arm of Providence all the more powerfully revealed when we are persecuted, or lose money, or any number of other things. And it is a Providence that gives you the here and now, a here and now chosen for you from all eternity, and will, if you cooperate, help you appreciate the gift.

And if you are one of the many who believe that I, Porn, am the only interesting spice in a fatally dull world, I, Porn, can only say this:

Watch me when I am Transfigured.

To quote your own age's little reflection of *The Divine Comedy*:

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

'Off so soon?' said a voice.

The speaker was more or less human in shape but larger than a man, and so bright that I could hardly look at him. His presence smote on my eyes and on my body too (for there was heat coming from him as well as light) like the morning sun at the beginning of a tyrannous summer day.

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

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

'Of course I would,' said the Ghost.

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

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

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

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

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

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

'May I kill it?'

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

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

'Please, I never meant to be such a nuisance. Please—really—don't bother. Look! It's gone to sleep of its own accord. I'm sure it'll be all right now. Thanks ever so much.'

'May I kill it?'

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

‘The gradual process is of no use at all.’

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

‘There is no other day. All days are present now.’

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

‘It is not so.’

‘Why, you’re hurting me now.’

‘I never said it wouldn’t hurt you. I said it wouldn’t kill you.’

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

‘This moment contains all moments.’

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

‘I cannot kill it against your will. It is impossible. Have I your permission?’

The Angel’s hands were almost closed on the Lizard, but not quite. Then the Lizard began

chattering to the Ghost so loud that even I could hear what it was saying.

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

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

'I know it will kill me.'

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

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

'Then I may?'

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

Next moment the Ghost gave a scream of agony such as I never heard on Earth. The Burning One closed crimson grip on the reptile: twisted it, while it bit and writhed, and then flung it, broken-backed, on the turf.

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

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

The new-made man turned and clapped the new horse's neck. It nosed his bright body. Horse and master breathed into each other's nostrils. The man turned from it, flung himself at the feet of the Burning One, and embraced them. When he rose I thought his face shone with tears, but may have only been the liquid love and brightness (one cannot distinguish them in that country) which flowed from him. I had not long to think about it. In joyous haste the young man leaped upon the horse's back. Turning in his

seats he waved a farewell, then nudged the stallion with his heels. They were off before I knew well what was happening. There was riding if you like! I came out as quickly as I could from among the bushes to follow them with my eyes; but already they were only like a shooting star far off on the green plain, and soon among the foothills of the mountains. Then, still like a star, I saw them winding up, scaling what seemed impossible steeps, and quicker every moment, till near the dim brow of the landscape, so high that I must strain my neck to see them, they vanished, bright themselves, into the rose-brightness of that everlasting morning.

An Orthodox would realize in the Burning Angel a clearest reference to the fiery Seraphim, the highest of the nine angel choirs, and the one for whom St. Seraphim of Sarov came, the most beloved Orthodox saint in centuries, the St. Seraphim whose extraordinary conversation with the pilgrim Motovilov reveals the purpose of human life.

We live in interesting times. There is a singularity, or rather has been but keeps growing exponentially, and this singularity may turn in to the end of the world: a strange Ragnarok where the forces of Good resound with apocalyptic triumph. And I, Porn, am part of the singularity, an important part.

Did you know that I, Porn, am not the only thing in life?

Remember: “Every man who visits a Porn site is looking for God.”

Delilah's friend turned back. "Yep, dear, he does that sort of thing in practically every class."

The Luddite's Guide to Technology

Fasting from technologies

Since the Bridegroom was taken from the disciples, it has been a part of the Orthodox Church's practice to fast. What is expected in the ideal has undergone changes, and one's own practice is done in submission to one's priest. The priest may work on how to best relax rules in many cases so that your fasting is a load you can shoulder. There is something of a saying, "*As always, ask your priest,*" and that goes for fasting from technology too. Meaning, specifically, that if you read this article and want to start fasting from technologies, and your priest says that it won't be helpful, leave this article alone and follow your priest's guidance.

From ancient times there has been a sense that we need to transcend ourselves. When we fast, we choose to set limits and master our belly, at least partly. "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—maybe, but God will destroy them both." So the Apostle answered the hedonists

of his day. The teaching of fasting is that you are more than the sum of your appetites, and we can grow by giving something up in days and seasons. And really fasting from foods is not saying, "I choose to be greater than this particular luxury," but "I choose to be greater than this *necessity*." Over ninety-nine percent of all humans who have ever lived never saw a piece of modern technology: Christ and his disciples reached far and wide without the benefit of even the most obsolete of electronic communication technologies. And monks have often turned back on what luxuries were available to them: hence in works like the *Philokalia* or the *Ladder* extol the virtue of sleeping on the floor. If we fast from technologies, we do not abstain from basic nourishment, but what Emperors and kings never heard of. At one monastery where monks lived in cells without running water or electricity, a monk commented that peasants and for that matter kings lived their whole lives without tasting these, or finding them a necessity. (Even Solomon in all his splendor did not have a Facebook page.)

In Orthodoxy, if a person is not able to handle the quasi-vegan diet in fasting periods, a priest may relax the fast, not giving carte blanche to eat anything the parishioner wants, but suggesting that the parishioner relax the fast to some degree, eating some fish or an egg. This basic principle of fasting is applicable to technology: rather than immediately go cold turkey on certain technologies, use "some fish or an egg" in terms of older technologies. Instead of texting for a conversation, drive over to a nearby friend.

(Have you ever noticed that during Lent many Orthodox Christians cut down or eliminate their use of Facebook?)

Donald Knuth, one of the leading lights in computer science, got rid of his email address well over ago. He said that email was good for being on top of the world, and what he wanted was to be at the bottom of the world and do research. In other words, he had certain goals, and he found that email was not a helpful luxury in reaching those goals. Knuth is also a (non-Orthodox) Christian.

As mentioned in “Technonomicon,” what we call space-conquering technologies might slightly more appropriately be called body-conquering technologies, because they neutralize some of the limitations of our embodied state. The old wave of space-conquering technologies moves people faster or farther than they could move themselves, and older science fiction and space opera often portrays bigger and better versions of this kind of space conquering technologies: personal jet packs, cars that levitate (think Luke Skywalker's land speeder), or airplanes that function as spacecraft (his X-Wing). What is interesting to me here is that they serve as bigger and better versions of the older paradigm of space-conquering technologies, even if Luke remains in radio contact with the Rebel base. That is the older paradigm. The newer paradigm is technologies that make one's physical location irrelevant, or almost irrelevant: cell phones, texting, Facebook, and remote work, are all not bigger and better ways to move your body, but bigger and better ways to do things in a mind-based context where the location of your body may be collected as in Google Plus, but your actual, physical location is really neither here nor there.

My own technology choices

I purchased a MacBook Pro laptop, and its specs are really impressive. Eight cores, eight gigabytes of RAM, a 1920x1200 17" display, and gracefully runs Ubuntu Linux, Windows XP, Windows 7, and Windows 8 as guest OS'es. And it is really obsolete in one respect: it doesn't have the hot new Retina display that has been migrated to newer MacBook Pros. I want to keep it for a long time; but my point in mentioning it here is that *I did not purchase it as the hot, coolest new thing, but as a last hurrah of an old guard*. The top two applications I use are Google Chrome and the Mac's Unix terminal, and the old-fashioned laptop lets me take advantage of the full power of the Unix command line, and lets me exercise root privilege without voiding the warranty. For a Unix wizard, that's a lot of power. And the one major thing which I did not "upgrade" was replacing the old-fashioned spindle drives with newer, faster solid state drives. The reason? Old-fashioned spindle drives can potentially work indefinitely, while spindle drives wear out after a certain number of times saving data: saving data slowly uses the drive up. And I realized this might be my only opportunity in a while to purchase a tool I want to use for a long while.

Laptops might continue to be around for a while, and desktops for that matter, but their place is a bit like landline phones. If you have a desk job, you will probably have a desktop computer and a landline, but the wave of the future is smartphones and tablets; the hot, coolest new thing is not a bulky, heavy MacBook, but whatever the current generation of iPad or Android-based tablet is. One youngster said, "Email is for old people," and perhaps the

same is to be said of laptops.

I also have an iPhone, which I upgraded from one of the original iPhones to an iPhone 4, not because I needed to have the latest new thing, but because my iPhone was necessarily on an AT&T contract, and however much they may advertise that the EDGE network my iPhone was on was "twice the speed of dialup," I found when jobhunting that a simple, short "thank you" letter after an interview took amazingly many minutes for my phone to send, at well below the speed of obsolete dial-up speeds I had growing up: AT&T throttled the bandwidth to an incredibly slow rate and I got a newer iPhone with Verizon which I want to hold on to, even though there is a newer and hotter model available. But I am making conscious adult decisions about using the iPhone: I have sent perhaps a dozen texts, and have not used the iPod functionality. I use it, but I draw lines. My point is not exactly that you should adopt the exact same conscious adult decisions as I do about how to use a smartphone, but that you make a conscious adult decision in the first place.

And lastly, I have another piece of older technology: a SwissChamp XLT, the smallest Swiss Army Knife that includes all the functionality of a SwissChamp while also having the functionality of a CyberTool knife. It has, in order, a large blade, small blade, metal saw, nail file, metal file, custom metal-cutting blade, wood saw, fish scaler, ruler in centimeters and inches, hook remover, scissors, hooked blade, straight blade with concave curved mini-blade, pharmacist's spatula, cybertool (Phillips screwdrivers in three sizes, Torx screwdrivers in three sizes, hexagonal bit, and a slotted screwdriver), pliers, magnifying glass, larger Phillips screwdriver, large slotted screwdriver, can opener,

wire stripper, small slotted screwdriver, can opener, corkscrew, jeweller's screwdriver, pin, wood chisel, hook, smaller slotted screwdriver, and reamer. It's somewhat smaller than two iPhones stacked on top of each other, and while it's wider than I like, *it is also something of a last hurrah*. It is a useful piece of older technology.

I mention these technologies not to sanction what may or may not be owned—I tried to get as good a computer as I could partly because I am an IT professional, and I am quite grateful that my employer let me use it for the present contract. I also drive a white 2001 Saturn, whose front now looks a bit ugly after cosmetic damage. I could get it fixed fairly easily, but it hasn't yet been a priority. (But this car has also transported the Kursk Root icon.) But with this as with other technologies, I haven't laid the reins on the horse's neck. I only use a well-chosen fragment of my iPhone's capabilities, and I try not to use it too much: I like to be able to use the web without speed being much of an issue, but I'm not on the web all the time. And I have never thought "My wheels are my freedom;" I try to drive insofar as it advances some particular goal.

And there are some things when I'm not aware of the brands too much. I don't really know what brands my clothing are, with one exception, Hanes, which I am aware of predominantly because the brand name is sewed in large, hard-to-miss letters at the top.

And I observe that technologies are becoming increasingly "capture-proof". Put simply, all technologies can be taken away from us physically, but technologies are increasingly becoming something that FEMA can shut off from far away in a heartbeat. All network functionality on smartphones and tablets are at the mercy of network

providers and whoever has control over them; more broadly, "The network is the computer," as Sun announced slightly prematurely in its introduction of Java; my own Unix-centric use of my Mac on train rides, without having or wanting it to have internet access during the train ride, may not be much more than a historical curiosity.

But the principle of fasting from technology is fine, and if we can abstain from foods on certain days, we can also abstain from or limit technologies on certain days. Furthermore, there is real merit in knowing how to use older technologies. GPS devices can fail to pick up a signal. A trucker's atlas works fine even if there's no GPS signal available.

The point of this soliloquoy

The reason I am writing this up is that I am not aware of too many works on how to use technology ascetically. St. Paul wrote, There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; **but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content.** This statement of necessities does not include shelter, let alone "a rising standard of living" (meaning more things that one uses). Perhaps it is OK to have a car; it is what is called "socially mandated", meaning that there are many who one cannot buy groceries or get to their jobs without a car. Perhaps a best rule of thumb here is, to repeat another author, "*Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need.*" It is a measure by which I have real failings. And don't ask, "Can we afford what we need?", but "*Do we need what we can afford?*" If we only purchase things that have real ascetical

justification, there's something better than investing for the left-over money: we can give to the poor as an offering to Christ. Christ will receive our offering as a loan.

Some years ago I wanted to write *The Luddite's guide to technology*, and stopped because I realized I wasn't writing anything good or worthy of the title. But the attitude of the Church Fathers given the technology of the day: monasticism renounces all property, and the faithful are called to renounce property in their hearts even if they have possessions. Monastic literature warns the monk of seeking out old company, where "old company" does not mean enticement to sexual sin exactly, but one's very own kin. The solitary and coenobetic alike cut ties to an outside world, even ties one would think were sacrosanct (and the Bible has much to say about caring for one's elders). If a monk's desire to see his father or brother is considered a temptation to sin that will dissipate monastic energy, what do we have to make of social media? The friendships that are formed are of a different character from face-to-face relationships. If monks are forbidden to return to their own kin as shining example, in what light do we see texting, email, IM's, and discussion forums? If monks are forbidden to look at women's faces for fear of sexual temptation, what do we make of an internet where the greatest assault on manhood, porn, comes out to seek you even if you avoid it? It's a bit like a store that sells food, household supplies, and cocaine: and did I mention that the people driving you to sample a little bit of cocaine are much pushier than those offering a biscuit and dip sample?

The modern Athonite tradition at least has Luddite leanings; Athos warns against national identification numbers and possibly computers, and one saint wrote

apocalyptically about people eating eight times as much as people used to eat (has anyone read “The Supersizing of America?”) and of "wisdom" being found that would allow people to swim like fish deep into the sea (we have two technologies that can do that: SCUBA gear and submarines), and let one person speak and be heard on the other side of the world (how many technologies do we have to do that? Quite a lot).

All of this is to say that Orthodoxy has room to handle technologies carefully, and I would suggest that not all technologies are created equal.

The Luddite's guide to technology

For the different technologies presented my goal is not exactly to point to a course of action as to suggest a conscious adult decision to make, perhaps after consulting with one's priest or spiritual father. And as is usual in Orthodoxy, the temptation at least for converts is to try to do way too much, too fast, at first, and then backslide when that doesn't work.

It is better to keep on stretching yourself a little.

Sometimes, perhaps most of the time, using technology in an ascetical way will be countercultural and constitute outlier usage.

**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O
P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**

Advertising

Advertising is kin to manipulation, propaganda, and pornography.

Advertising answers the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" by decisively saying, "Man was made for economic wealth." It leads people to buy things that are not in their best interest. If you see someone using a technology as part of a form of life that is unhelpful, the kind of thing that makes you glad to be a Luddite, you have advertising to thank for that.

Advertising stirs discontent, which is already a problem, and leads people to ever higher desires, much like the trap of pornography. The sin is covetousness and lust, but the core structure is the same. Advertising and pornography are closely related kin.

Advertising doesn't really sell product functionality; it sells a mystique. And we may have legitimate reason to buy the product, but not the mystique. And maybe back off on a useful purchase until we are really buying the product and not the mystique.

Alcohol

Alcohol is not exactly a new technology, although people have found ways of making stronger and stronger drinks as time goes on. However, there is a lesson to learn with alcohol that applies to technology.

One article read outlined a few positions on Christian use of alcohol, ending with a position that said, in essence, "Using alcohol appropriately is a spiritual challenge and there is more productive spiritual work in drinking responsibly than just not

drinking." I don't think the authors would have imposed this position on people who know they have particular dangers in using alcohol, but they took a sympathetic look at positions of Christians who don't drink, and then said "The best course of all is not from trying to cut off the danger by not drinking, but rising to the spiritual lesson."

Yet an assumption behind all of the positions presented is that alcohol is something where you cannot safely lay the reins on the horse's neck. You need to be in command, or to put it differently ceaselessly domineer alcohol if you use it. This domineering is easy for some people and harder for others, and some people may be wisest to avoid the challenge.

Something of the same need exists in our use of technology. We may use certain technologies or may not, but it is still a disaster to let the technology go wherever it wills. Sometimes and with some technologies, we may abstain. Other technologies we may domineer, even if we may find if we are faithful that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light:" establishing dominion and holding the reins may be easier when it becomes a habit. But the question with a technology we use is not, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?", any more than the question about wine would be, "May we use it as much as we want, or not at all?" Proper use is disciplined. Proper use is domineering. And we do not always have it spelled out what is like having one or two drinks a day, and what is like having five or ten. Nor do we have other rules of thumb spelled out, like, "Think carefully

about drinking when you have a bad mood, and don't drink in order to fix a bad mood."

The descriptions of various "technologies and other things" are meant to provide some sense of what the contours of technologies are, and what is like drinking one or two drinks, and what is like drinking five or ten drinks a day.

Anti-aging medicine

The Christian teaching is that life begins at conception and ends at natural death, *and not* that life begins at 18 and ends at 30.

The saddest moment in *The Chronicles of Narnia* comes when we hear that Her Majesty Queen Susan the Gentle is "no longer a friend of Narnia;" she is rushing as quickly as possible to the silliest age of her life, and will spend the rest of her life trying to remain at that age, which besides being absolutely impossible, is absolutely undesirable.

Quite a lot of us are afflicted by the Queen Susan syndrome, but there is a shift in anti-aging medicine and hormone replacement therapy. Part of the shift in assistive technologies discussed below is that assistive technologies are not just intended to do what a non-disabled person can do, so for instance a reader can read a page of a book, giving visually impaired people equivalent access to a what a sighted person could have, to pushing as far what they think is an improvement, so that scanning a barcode may not just pull up identification of the product bearing the barcode, but have augmented reality features of

pulling a webpage that says much more than what a sighted person could see on the tab. One of the big tools of anti-aging medicine is hormone replacement therapy, with ads showing a grey-haired man doing pushups with a caption of, "My only regret about hormone replacement therapy is that I didn't start it sooner," where the goal is not to restore functionality but improve it as much as possible. And the definition of improvement may be infantile; here it appears to mean that a man who might be a member of the AARP has the same hormone levels as he did when he was 17.

There was one professor I had who was covering French philosophy, discussed Utopian dreams like turning the seas to lemonade, and called these ideas "a Utopia of spoiled children." Anti-aging medicine is not about having people better fulfill the God-ordained role of an elder, but be a virtual youth. Now I have used nutraceuticals to bring more energy and be able to create things where before I was not, and perhaps that is like anti-aging medicine that has me holding on to youthful creativity when God summons me to go "Further up and further in!" But everything I know about anti-aging is that it is not about helping people function gracefully in the role of an elder, but about making any things about aging optional.

In my self-absorbed "Seven-Sided Gem," I talked about one cover to the AARP's magazine, then called *My Generation*, which I originally mistook for something GenX. In the AARP's official magazine as I have seen it, the marketing proposition is the good news, not that it is not that bad to be old, but it is not that *old* to be old. The women portrayed look maybe

GenX in age, and on the cover I pulled out, the person portrayed, in haircut, clothing, and posture, looked like a teenager. "Fifty and better people" may see political and other advice telling them what they can do to fight high prescription prices, but nothing I have seen gives the impression that they can give to their community, as elders, out of a life's wealth of experience.

Not that there are not proper elders out there. I visited a family as they celebrated their son's graduation, and had long conversations with my friend's mother, and with an elderly gentleman (I've forgotten how he was related). She wanted to hear all about what I had to say about subjects that were of mutual interest, and he talked about the wealth of stories he had as a sailor and veterinarian. In both cases I had the subtle sense of a younger person being handled masterfully by an elder, and the conversation was unequal—unequal but entirely fitting, and part of the "entirely fitting" was that neither of them was trying to say, "We are equal—I might as well be as young as you."

Anti-aging medicine is not about aging well, but trying to be a virtual young person when one should be doing the serious, weight, and profoundly important function as elders.

Assistive technologies

This, at least, will seem politically incorrect: unless they have an inordinate monetary or moral cost, assistive technologies allow disabled people to

function at a much higher level than otherwise. And I am not going to exactly say that people with disabilities who have access to assistive technologies should turn them down, but I am going to say that there is something I am wary of in the case of assistive technologies.

There is the same question as with other technologies: "Is this really necessary? Does this help?" A blind friend said,

I was recently interviewed for a student's project about assistive technology and shopping, and I told her that I wouldn't use it in many circumstances. First of all, I think some of what is available has more 'new toy' appeal and is linked to advertising. Secondly, I think some things, though they may be convenient, are dehumanising. Why use a barcode scanner thingummy to tell what's in a tin when I can ask someone and relate to someone?

Now to be clear, this friend does use assistive technologies and is at a high level of functioning: "to whom much is given, much is required." I get the impression that the assistive technologies she has concerns about, bleed into augmented reality. And though she is absolutely willing to use assistive technologies, particularly when they help her serve others, she is more than willing to ask as I am asking of many technologies, "What's the use? Does this help? *Really help?*"

But there is another, more disturbing question

about assistive technologies. The question is not whether individual assistive technologies are helpful when used in individual ways, but whether a society that is always inventing higher standards for accessibility and assistive technology has its deepest priorities straight. And since I cannot answer that out of what my friend has said, let me explain and talk about the Saint and the Activist and then talk about how similar things have played out in my own life.

I write this without regrets about my own efforts and money spent in creating assistive technologies, and with the knowledge that in societies without assistive technologies many disabled people have no secular success. There are notable examples of disabled people functioning at a high level of secular success, such as the noted French Cabalist Isaac the Blind, but the much more common case was for blind people to be beggars. The blind people met by Christ in the Gospel were without exception beggars. And there are blind beggars in first world countries today.

So what objection would I have to assistive technologies which, if they may not be able to create sight, none the less make the hurdles much smaller and less significant. So, perhaps, medicine cannot allow some patients to read a paper book. Assistive technologies make a way for them to access the book about as well as if they could see the book with their eyes. What is there to object in making disabled people more able to function in society as equal contributors?

The answer boils down to the distinction between the Saint and the Activist as I have discussed them in "An Open Letter to Catholics on Orthodoxy and

Ecumenism,” “The Most Politically Incorrect Sermon in History: A commentary on the Sermon on the Mount,” and “Farewell to Gandhi: The Saint and the Activist.” The society that is patterned after the Saint is ordered towards such things as faith and contemplation. The society patterned after the Activist is the one that seeks to ensure the maximum secular success of its members. And if the Activist says, "Isn't it wonderful how much progress we have made? Many disabled people are functioning at a high level!", the Saint says, "There are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your Activism. We have bigger fish to fry." And they do.

Now to be clear, I am not saying that you should not use assistive technologies to help give back to society. Nor do I regret any of the time I've spent on assistive technologies. The first idea I wanted to patent was an assistive technology. But we have bigger fish to fry.

There is a way in which I am a little like the blind beggar in many societies that took the Saint for their pattern. It's on a much lesser scale, but I tried my hardest to earn a Ph.D. in theology. At Cambridge University in England the faculty made me switch thesis topic completely, from a topic I had set at the beginning of the year, when two thirds of the year had passed and I had spent most of my time on my thesis. My grades were two points out of a hundred less than the cutoff for Ph.D. continuation, and Cambridge very clearly refused for me to continue beyond my master's. So then I applied to other programs, and Fordham offered an assistantship, and I honestly found cancer

easier than some of the things that went wrong there. I showed a writeup to one friend and he wrote, "*I already knew all the things you had written up, and I was still shocked when I read it.*" All of which to say is that the goal I had of earning a doctorate, and using that degree to teach at a seminary, seemed shattered. With all that happened, the door to earning a Ph.D. was decisively closed.

Now I know that it is possible to teach at a seminary on a master's; it may be a handicap, but it certainly does not make such a goal impossible. But more broadly God's hand was at work. For starters, I survived. I believe that a doctor would look at what happened and say, "*There were a couple of places where what happened could have killed you. Be glad you're alive.*" And beyond that, there is something of God's stern mercy: academic writing takes a lot more work than being easy to read, and only a few people can easily read it. I still have lessons to learn about work that is easy to read, and this piece may be the least readable thing I've written in a while. But all the same, there is a severe mercy in what God has given. I have a successful website largely due to chance, or rather God's providence; I was in the right place at the right time and for all my skill in web work happened to have successes I had no right to expect.

And God works through assistive technologies and medicine. When I was in middle school, I had an ankle that got sorer and sorer until my parents went to ask a doctor if hospitalization was justified. The doctor's response, after taking a sample of the infection, said, "Don't swing by home; go straight to the hospital and

I'll take care of the paperwork on this end for his admission." And I was hospitalized for a week or so—the bed rest day and night being the first time ever that I managed to get bored teaching myself from my father's calculus textbook—and after I was discharged I still needed antibiotic injections every four hours. That involved medical treatment is just as activist as assistive technology, and without it I would not have written any the pieces on this website besides the Apple][BASIC four dimensional maze.

I am rather glad to be alive now.

So I am in a sense both a Ph.D. person who was lost on Activist terms, but met with something fitting on a Saint's terms, and a person who was found on Activist terms. God works both ways. But still, there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Activism.

Augmented Reality

When I was working at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications, one part of the introduction I received to the CAVE and Infinity Wall virtual reality was to say that virtual reality "is a superset of reality," where you could put a screen in front of a wall and see, X-ray-style, wires and other things inside the wall.

Virtual reality does exist, and is popularized by SecondLife among many others, but that may not be the main niche carved out. The initial thought was virtual reality, and when the dust has started to settle, the niche carved out is more a matter of augmented

reality. Augmented reality includes, on a more humble level, GPS devices and iPhone apps that let you scan a barcode or QR code and pull up web information on the product you have scanned. But these are not the full extent of augmented reality; it's just an early installment. It is an opportunity to have more and more of our experience rewritten by computers and technology. Augmented technology is probably best taken at a lower dose and domineered.

Big Brother

Big Brother is a collection of technologies, but not a collection of technologies you choose because they will deliver a Big Brother who is watching you. Everything we do electronically is being monitored; for the moment the U.S. government is only using it for squeaky-clean apparent uses, and has been hiding its use. Even the Amish now are being monitored; they have decided not to hook up to a grid, such as electricity or landline phones, but cell phones can be used if they find them expedient to their series of conscious decisions about whether to adopt technologies. Amish use the horse and buggy but not the car, not because the horse is older, but because the horse and buggy provide some limited mobility without tearing apart the local community. The car is rejected not because it is newer, but because it frees people from the tightly bound community they have. And because they carry cell phones, the NSA tracks where they go. They might not do anything about it, but almost everything about us is in control of Big

Brother. And though I know at least one person who has decided carrying a cell phone and having an iPass transponder is not worth being tracked, you have to be more Luddite than the Luddites, and know enough of what you are doing that you are already on file, if you are to escape observation.

Big Brother has been introduced step by step, bit by bit. First there were rumors that the NSA was recording all Internet traffic. Then it came out in the open that the NSA was indeed recording all Internet traffic and other electronic communications, and perhaps (as portrayed on one TV program) we should feel sorry for the poor NSA which has to deal with all this data. That's not the end. Now Big Brother is officially mainly about national security, but this is not an outer limit either. Big Brother will probably appear a godsend in dealing with local crime before an open hand manipulating the common citizen appears. But Big Brother is here already, and Big Brother is growing.

Books and ebooks

I was speaking with one friend who said in reference to *Harry Potter* that the *Harry Potter* series got people to read, and anything that gets people to read is good. My response (a tacit response, not a spoken one) is that reading is not in and of itself good. If computers are to be used in an ascetically discriminating fashion, so is the library; if you will recall my earlier writing about slightly inappropriate things at Cambridge and worse at Fordham, every

single person I had trouble with was someone who read a lot, and presumably read much more than someone caught up in *Harry Potter* mania.

Orthodoxy is at heart an oral, or oral-like culture, and while it uses books, it was extremely pejorative when one friend said of a Protestant priest in Orthodox clothes, "I know what book he got that [pastoral practice] from." The first degree of priesthood is called a 'Reader', and when one is tonsured a Reader, the bishop urges the Reader to read the Scriptures. The assumption is not that the laity should be reading but need not read the Scriptures, but that the laity can be doing the job of laity without being literate. Or something like that. Even where there is reading, the transmission of the most important things is oral in character, and the shaping of the laity (and presumably clergy) is through the transmission of oral tradition through oral means. In that sense, I as an author stand of something exceptional among Orthodox, and "exceptional" does not mean "exceptionally good." Most of the Orthodox authors now came to Orthodoxy from the West, and their output may well be appropriate and a fitting offering from what they have. However, the natural, consistent result of formation in Orthodoxy does not usually make a non-author into an author.

As far as books versus ebooks, books (meaning codices) are a technology, albeit a technology that has been around for a long time and will not likely disappear. Ebooks in particular have a long tail effect. The barriers to put an ebook out are much more than to put a traditional book out. It has been said that

ebooks are killing Mom and Pop bookstores, and perhaps it is worth taking opportunities to patronize local businesses. But there is another consideration in regards to books versus cheaper Kindle editions. The Kindle may be tiny in comparison to what it holds, and far more convenient than traditional books.

But it is much more capture proof.

"Capture proof"

In military history, the term "capture proof" refers to a weapon that is delicate and exacting in its maintenance needs, so that if it is captured by the enemy, it will rather quickly become useless in enemy soldiers' hands.

The principle can be transposed to technology, except that possessing this kind of "capture proof" technology does not mean that it is an advantage that "we" can use against "them." It comes much closer to say that FEMA can shut down its usefulness at the flick of a switch. As time has passed, hot technologies become increasingly delicate and capture proof: a laptop is clunkier than a cool tablet, but the list of things one can do with a tablet without network access is much shorter than the list of things can do with a laptop without network access. Or, to take the example of financial instruments, the movement has been towards more and more abstract derivatives, and these are fragile compared to an investment in an indexed mutual fund, which is in turn fragile compared to old-fashioned money.

"Cool," "fragile," and "capture proof" are

intricately woven into each other.

Einstein said, "I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." We might not have to wait until World War IV. Much of World War III may be fought with sticks and stones.

Cars

Perhaps the most striking Luddite horror of cars that I have seen is in C.S. Lewis. He talked about how they were called "space-conquering devices," while they should have been called "space-annihilating devices," because he experienced future shock that cars could make long distances very close. (And someone has said, "The problem with the English is that they think a hundred miles is a long distance, and the problem with the U.S. is that they think a hundred years is a long time.") The "compromise solution" he offered was that it was OK to use cars to go further as a special solution on weekend, but go with other modes of transport for the bread-and-butter of weekdays. (And this is more or less how Europeans lean.)

Cars are one of many technologies that, when introduced, caused future shock. It's taken as normal by subsequent generations, but there is a real sense of "This new technology is depriving us of something basically human," and that pattern repeats. And perhaps, in a sense, this shock is the pain we experience as we are being lessened by degrees and slowly turning from man to machine-dominated.

CFLs and incandescent bulbs

There is something striking about CFL's. American society has a long history of technology migrations, and a thorough enough "out with the old, in with the new" that working 16mm film projectors, for instance, now fetch a price because we have so thoroughly gotten rid of them in favor of video. And people who use them now aren't using them as the normal way to see video; they may want to see old film canisters and maybe even digitize them (so they can be seen without the use of a film projector).

Compare with other countries such as Lebanon which have no real concept of being obsolete; they have a mix of old and new technologies and they get rid of an old piece of technology, not because it is old, but because it is worn out.

The fact that we are transitioning to CFL's for most purposes is not striking; transitions happen all the time. One could trace "If you have a phone, it's a landline," to "You can have a two pound car phone, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone that fits in your hand, but it's expensive," to "You can have a cell phone, which is much cheaper now," to "You can have a cell phone that does really painful Internet access," to "You can have a cell phone with graceful Internet access." And there have been many successions like this, all because the adopters thought the new technology was an improvement on the old.

CFL's are striking and disturbing because, while there may be a few people who think that slightly reduced electricity usage (much smaller than a major

household appliance) justifies the public handling fragile mercury containers, by and large the adoption is not of a snazzier successor to incandescent bulbs. Not only must they be handled like live grenades, but the light is inferior. The human race grew up on full-spectrum light, such as the sun provides. Edison may not have been aiming for a full-spectrum light, but his light bulb does provide light across the spectrum; that is an effect of an incandescent light that produces light that looks at all near. This is a strange technology migration, and a rather ominous omen.

Given that most bulbs available now are CFL's, there are better and worse choices. Some bulbs have been made with a filter outside the glass so they give off light that looks yellow rather than blue. I wouldn't look for that in and of itself. But some give a full spectrum, even if it is a bluish full spectrum, and that is better. There are also lights sold that are slightly more shatter resistant, which is commendable, and there are some bulbs that are both full spectrum and shatter resistant. I'd buy the last kind if possible, or else a full spectrum CFL, at a hardware store if possible and online if not.

But I would momentarily like to turn attention from the extinction of regular use of incandescent bulbs to their introduction. Candles have been used since time immemorial, but they're not a dimmer version of a light bulb. Even if you have candlesticks and candles lit, the candle is something of a snooze button or a minor concession: societies that used candles still had people active more or less during daylight hours. (Daylight Saving Time was an attempt

to enable people to use productive daylight hours which they were effectively losing.) People who used candles were still effectively tied to the cycle of day and night. Light bulbs caused a shock because they let you operate as early or as late as you wanted. Candles allowed you to wrap up a few loose ends when night had really fallen. *Light bulbs made nighttime optional.* And it caused people future shock.

I have mentioned a couple of different responses to CFL's: the first is to buy full spectrum and preferably shatter resistant (and even then handle the mercury containers like a live grenade), the second is turning to the rhythm of day and light and getting sunlight where you can. Note that inside most buildings, even with windows, sunlight is not nearly as strong as what the human person optimally needs. Let me mention one other possibility.

There is a medical diagnosis called 'SAD' for 'Seasonal Affective Disorder', whose patients have lower mood during the winter months when we see very little light. The diagnosis seems to me a bit like the fad diagnosis of YTD, or Youthful Tendency Disorder, discussed in *The Onion*. If you read about it and are half-asleep it sounds like a description of a frightening syndrome. If you are awake you will recognize a description of perfectly normal human tendencies. And the SAD diagnosis of some degree of depression when one is consistently deprived of bright light sounds rather normal to me. And for that reason I think that some of the best lighting you can get is with something from the same manufacturer of the Sunbox DL SAD Light Box Light Therapy Desk Lamp.

That manufacturer is one I trust; I am a little wary of some of their cheaper competitors. There is one cheaper alternative that provides LED light. Which brings me to a problem with LED's. Basically, LEDs emit light of a single color. While you can choose what that color may be, white represents a difficult balancing act. If you've purchased one of those LED flashlights, it has what is called "lunar white", which is basically a way of cheating at white light. (If you've ever gone to a dark closet and tried to pick out clothing by a lunar white flashlight, this may be why you had trouble telling what color your clothing was.) Expensive as they may be, a Sunbox light box may fit in to your best shot at taking in a healthy level of light.

Children's toys

Charles Baudelaire, in his "*la Morale du Joujou*" ("the moral of the toy") talks about toys and the fact that the best toys leave something to the imagination. Children at play will imagine that a bar of soap is a car; girls playing with dolls will play the same imagined drama with rag dolls as they will with dolls worth hundreds of dollars. There has been a shift, where Lego sets have shifted from providing raw material to being a specific model, made of specialized pieces, that the child is not supposed to imagine, only to assemble. Lego sets are perhaps the preferred childhood toy of professional engineers everywhere; some of them may have patronized Lego's competitors, but the interesting thing about Legos that are not "you assemble it" models is that you have to

supply something to what you're building. Lego the company might make pieces of different sizes and shapes and made them able to stick together without an adhesive; I wouldn't downplay that achievement on the part of the manufacturer, but the child playing with Legos supplies half of the end result. But this is not just in assembly; with older models, the Legos didn't look exactly like what they were supposed to be. There was one time when I saw commercials for a miniature track where some kind of car or truck would transport a payload (a ball bearing, perhaps), until it came to a certain point and the payload fell through the car/track through a chute to a car below. And when I asked my parents to buy it for me and they refused, I built it out of Legos. Of course it did not look anything like what I was emulating, but I had several tracks on several levels and a boxy square of a vehicle would carry a marble along the track until it dropped its payload onto a car in the level below. With a bit of imagination it was a consolation for my parents not getting the (probably expensive) toy I had asked for, and with a bit of imagination a short broom is a horse you can ride, a taut cord with a sheet hung over it is an outdoor tent, and a shaky box assembled from sofa cushions is a fort. Not, perhaps, that children should be given no toys, or a square peg should be pounded into a round hole by giving everyone old-style Lego kits, but half of a children's toy normally resides in the imagination, and the present fashion in toys is to do all the imagining for the child.

And there is a second issue in what is imagined for children. I have not looked at toys recently, but from

what I understand dragons and monsters are offered to them. I have looked rather deeply into what is offered to children for reading. The more innocuous part is bookstores clearing the classics section of the children's area for Disney Princess books. The more serious matter is with *Dealing with Dragons* and other Unman's Tales.

The Cloud

Cloud computing is powerful, and it originated as a power tool in supercomputing, and has now come down to personal use in software like Evernote, a note-taking software system that synchronizes across all computers and devices which have it installed.

Essentially, besides being powerful, *cloud computing, besides being very powerful, is one more step in abstraction in the world of computing.* It means that you use computers you have never even seen. Not that this is new; it is a rare use case for someone using the Web to own any of the servers for the sites he is visiting. But none the less the older pattern is for people to have their own computers, with programs they have downloaded and/or purchased, and their own documents. The present trend to offload more and more of our work to the cloud is a step in the direction of vulnerability to the damned backswing. The more stuff you have in the cloud, the more of your computer investment can be taken away at the flick of a switch, or collapse because some intervening piece of the puzzle has failed. Not that computers are self-sufficient, but the move to the

cloud is a way of being less self-sufficient.

My website is hosted on a cloud virtual private server, with one or two "hot spares" that I have direct physical access to. There are some reasons the physical machine, which has been flaky for far longer than a computer should be allowed to be flaky (and which keeps not getting fixed), is one I keep as a hot spare.

Contraception and Splenda

There was one mostly Catholic where I was getting annoyed at the degree of attention given to one particular topic: I wrote,

Number of posts in this past month about faith:
6

Number of posts in this past month about the Bible: 8

Number of posts in this past month about the Eucharist: 9

Number of posts in this past month extolling the many wonders of Natural Family Planning: 13

The Catholic Church's teaching on Natural Family Planning is not, "Natural Family Planning, done correctly, is a 97% effective way to simulate contraception." The Catholic Church's teaching on children is that they are the crown and glory of sexual love, and way down on

page 509 there is a footnote saying that Natural Family Planning can be permissible under certain circumstances.

And if I had known it, I would have used a quotation from Augustine I cited in "Contraception, Orthodoxy, and Spin Doctoring: A Look at an Influential but Disturbing Article:"

Is it not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in flesh? This proves that you approve of having a wife, not for the procreation of children, but for the gratification of passion. In marriage, as the marriage law declares, the man and woman come together for the procreation of children. Therefore whoever makes the procreation of children a greater sin than copulation, forbids marriage, and makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion. Where there is a wife there must be marriage. But there is no marriage where motherhood is not in view; therefore neither is there a wife. In this way you forbid marriage. Nor can you defend yourselves successfully from this charge, long ago brought against you prophetically by the Holy Spirit (source; the Blessed Augustine is referring to I Tim 4:1-3).

Thus spoke the Catholic Church's favorite ancient theologian on contraception; and to this it may be added that the term 'Natural Family Planning' is deceptive and perhaps treacherous in how it frames things. There is nothing particularly natural about artificially abstaining from sexual intercourse precisely when a woman is capable of the greatest desire, pleasure, and response.

The chief good of the marriage act is that it brings in to being new images of God; "a baby is God's vote that the world should go on." The chief good of eating is that it nourishes the body. Now there are also pleasures, but it is an act of confusion to see them as pleasure delivery systems and an act of greater confusions to frustrate the greater purpose of sex or eating so that one may, as much as possible, use them just as pleasure delivery systems.

There are other strange effects of this approach: for starters, Splenda use correlates to increased weight gain. Perhaps this is not strange: if you teach someone, "You can eat as much candy and drink as many soft drinks as you like," the lesson is "You can consume more without worrying about your waistline," and you will consume more: not only more foods containing Splenda, but more foods not containing Splenda.

There is an interesting history, as far as "Natural" Family Planning goes, about how in ancient times Church Fathers were skeptical at best of the appropriateness of sex during the infertile period, then people came to allow sex during the infertile period despite the fact that it was shooting blanks, and then

the West came to a point where priests hearing confessions were to insinuate "Natural" Family Planning to couples who were using more perverse methods to have sex without children, and finally the adulation that can say that Natural Family Planning is the gateway to the culture of life.

Contraception and Splenda are twins, and with Splenda I include not only other artificial sweeteners, but so-called "natural" sweeteners like Agave and Stevia which happen not to be manufactured in a chemical factory, but whose entire use is to do Splenda's job of adding sweetness without calories. What exists in the case of contraception and Splenda alike is neutralizing a greater good in order to have as much of the pleasure associated with that good as possible. It says that the primary purpose of food and sex, important enough to justify neutralizing other effects as a detriment to focusing on the pleasure, is to be a pleasure delivery system.

About pleasure delivery systems, I would refer you to an article on my site, "The Pleasure-Pain Syndrome," at cjshayward.com/pleasure.

The dialectic between pleasure and pain is a recurrent theme among the Fathers and it is something of a philosophical error to pursue pleasure and hope that no pain will come. If you want to see real discontent with one's sexual experiences, look for those who are using Viagra and its kin to try to find the ultimate sexual thrill. What they will find is that sex becomes a disappointment: first sex without drugged enhancement becomes underwhelming, and then Viagra or Cialis fail to deliver the evanescent

ultimate sexual thrill.

The damned backswing

There is a phenomenon where something appears to offer great improvements, but it has a damned backswing. For one example in economics, in the 1950's the U.S. had an unprecedentedly high standard of living (meaning more appliances in houses—not really the best measure of living), and for decades it just seemed like, *It's Getting Better All the Time*. But now the U.S. economy is being destroyed, and even with another regime, we would still have all the debts we incurred making things better all the time.

Another instance of the damned backswing is how medieval belief in the rationality of God gave rise to the heroic labors of science under the belief that a rational God would create a rational and ordered world, which gave way to modernism and positivism which might as well have put science on steroids, which in turn is giving way to a postmodernism and subjectivism that, even as some of it arose from the philosophy of science, is fundamentally toxic to objectivist science.

I invite you to read more about the damned backswing.

Email, texting, and IM's

"Email is for old people," one youngster said, and email is largely the wave of the past. Like landlines and desktop computers, it will probably not disappear

completely; it will probably remain the communication channel of corporate notifications and organizational official remarks. But social communication via email is the wave of the past: an article in *A List Apart* said that the website had originated as a mailing list, and added, "Kids, go ask your parents."

When texting first caught on it was neither on the iPhone nor the Droid. If you wanted to say, "hello", you would probably have to key in, "4433555555666". But even then texting was a sticky technology, and so far it is the only common technology I know of that is illegal to use when driving. It draws attention in a dangerous way and is treated like alcohol in terms of something that can impair driving. It is a strong technological drug.

The marketing proposition of texting is an intravenous drip of noise. IM's are similar, if not always as mobile as cell phones, and email is a weaker form of the drug that youth are abandoning for a stronger version. Now, it should also be said that they are useful, and the proper ascetical use is to take advantage of them because they are useful (or not; I have a phone plan without texting and I text rarely enough that the default \$.20 per text makes sense and is probably cheaper than the basic plan.

Fasting and fasting from technologies

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise,

she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

The healing of this comes in partly by eating, in the Holy Mysteries where we eat from the Tree of Life. But this is no imitation of Eve's sin, or Adam's. They lived in the garden of paradise, and there is no record of them fasting before taking from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before we take communion, we answer the question "Where are you?", the question in which God invited Adam and Eve to come clean and expose their wound to the Healer, and we prepare for confession and answer the question Adam and Eve dodged: "*Where are you?*" We do not live in a garden of delights, but our own surroundings, and we turn away from sensual pleasures. Adam and Eve hid from God; we pray to him and do not stop praying because of our own sordid unworthiness. And, having prepared, we eat from the Tree of Life.

You shall not surely die. and Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, are some of the oldest marketing propositions, but they are remarkably alive in the realm of technology. Witness the triumph of hope over experience in the artificial intelligence project. Witness a society like the meticulously groomed technology of a Buddha who saw an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, and wondered whatever on earth they can mean. Mortality may be as total in our generation as any other, but we've done a good job of hiding it. Perhaps doctors

might feel inadequate in the face of real suffering, but modern medicine can do a lot. In many areas of the third world, it might be painful, but it is not surprising to play with a child who was doing well two weeks ago and be told that he is dead. Death is not something one expects in homes; it is out of sight and half out of mind in hospitals and hospices. All of this is to say that those of us in the first world have a death-denying society, and if we have not ultimately falsified "You will surely die," we've done a pretty good job of being in denial about it. And "You shall be as gods" is the marketing proposition of luxury cars, computers, smartphones, and ten thousand other propositions. My aunt on discovering Facebook said, "It feels like I am walking on water," and Facebook offers at least a tacit marketing proposition of, "You shall be as gods." Information technology in general, and particularly the more "sexy" forms of information technology, offer the marketing proposition of, Your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods.

There was one time as an undergraduate when I tried to see what it would be like to live as blind for a day, and so I was blindfolded and had a fascinating day which I wrote up for my psychology class. Now I would be careful in saying based on one day's experience would let me understand the life experience of being blind, any more than a few days spent in Ontario entitle me to say that I understand Canadian culture. However, the experience was an interesting challenge, and it had something to do with fasting, even if it was more adventuresome than fasting normally is.

Fasting is first and foremost fasting from food, but there are other things one can fast from. Some Orthodox bid Facebook a temporary farewell for fasting seasons. On fasting days, we are bidden to cut back on sensory pleasures, which can mean cutting back on luxury technologies that give us pleasure.

I'm not sure how much fasting from technologies should form a part of one's rule; it is commonplace to discuss with one's priest or spiritual father how one will keep one's fast, and with what *oikonomia* if such is needed. But one of the rules of fasting is that one attempts a greater and greater challenge. Far from being a spiritual backwater, Lent is the central season of the Christian year. And so I will present twenty-three things you might do to fast from technology. (Or might not.)

1. Sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor. (Monks mention sleeping on the floor as a discipline; the attenuated fast of sleeping on a sleeping bag on the floor may help.)
2. Leave your smartphone at home for a day.
3. Leave all consumer electronics at home for a day.
4. Only check for email, Facebook, etc. once every hour, instead of all the time.
5. Don't check your email; just write letters with a pen or lead pencil.

6. Camp out in your back yard.
7. Read a book outside, using sunscreen if appropriate.
8. Organize some outdoor activity with your friends or family.
9. Don't use your computer or smartphone while you are preparing for the Eucharist.
10. *Basic*: If you have games and entertainment apps or application, don't play them when you are fasting.
11. *Harder*: If you have games and entertainment applications, delete them.
12. *Basic*: Spend an hour outside with a book or an ebook Kindle, doing nothing but read and observe the trees, the wind. and the grass growing. (You are welcome to use my ebooks.)
13. *Harder*: Spend an hour outside, but not with a book, just observing the trees, the wind, and the grass growing.
14. Don't use your car for a week. It's OK to get rides, and it may be a pleasure speaking with your friends, but experience being, in part, dependent, and you may be surprised how some of your driving suddenly seems superfluous.

15. Shut off power for an hour. If you keep your fridge and freezer doors shut, you shouldn't lose food, and sometimes power loss has meant adventure.
16. Turn off your computer's network access but still see what you can do with it for a day. (*The Luddite's Guide to Technology* is written largely on a computer that doesn't have internet access for the majority of the time it is being used to write this.)
17. Especially if you have a beautiful screensaver, set your computer to just display a blank screen, and have a single color or otherwise dull wallpaper for a time, perhaps for a fasting season.
18. Switch your computer's resolution to 800x600 or the tiniest it can go. That will take away much of its status as a luxury.
19. Make a list of interesting things to do that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
20. Do some of the vibrant things on the list that do not involve a computer, tablet, or smartphone.
21. Use computers or whatever other technologies, not for what you can get from them, but what you can give through them.
22. Bear a little more pain. If pain is bearable, don't

take pain medication. If you can deal with a slightly warmer room in the summer, turn down the air conditioning. If you can deal with a slightly cooler room in the winter, turn down the heat.

23. Visit a monastery.

A monastery is not thought of in terms of being Luddite, but monasteries tend to be lower in level than technology, and a good monastery shows the vibrancy of life not centered about technology. And this suggestion is different.

All the other suggestions say, "I would suggest." The suggestion about the monastery says, "God has given."

Food

There is some ambiguity, or better yet a double meaning, when the New Testament uses the term "breaking bread." On one level, breaking bread means a shared meal around the table. On another, it means celebrating the Eucharist.

You can say that there is one sacrament, or that there are seven, or that there are a million sacraments. A great many things in life have a sacramental dimension, even if the man on the street would not consider these to be religious matters. There is something sacramental about friendship. And there is something sacramental about a meal around a table.

Even if the sacramental character of a meal is vanishing.

Proverbs said, "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fatted ox and hatred with it." Today one may draw forth an implication: "Better is a dinner of really bad fast food than the most exquisite Weston A. Price Foundation meal where there is hatred."

However, there are ways that the sacramental character of meals is falling away. Many foods are not intended to be eaten around a table with family or friends: think of microwave dinners and the 100 calorie snack pack. Read *Nourishing Traditions*, which tells how far our industrial diet has diverged from meals that taste delicious precisely because they are nutritionally solid.

But besides the plastic-like foods of the industrial diet, there is another concern with munching or inhaling. The Holy Eucharist can legitimately be served, in an extreme case, with plastic-like foods. For that matter it is normal for it to be made with white flour, and white flour is high on the list of foods that should be limited. And it would be a mistake to insist on whole wheat flour because it is overall healthier. But with extreme exceptions such as grave illness, the Holy Mysteries are not to be consumed by oneself off in a corner. They are part of the unhurried unfolding of the Divine Liturgy, which ideally unfolds rather naturally into the unhurried unfolding of a common meal.

Both eating snacks continually to always have the pleasure of the palate, and the solo meal that is inhaled so it can be crammed into an over-busy

schedule, fall short of the (broadly) sacramental quality of a common meal around a table.

In Alaska there are many people but not so many priests, and therefore many parishes rarely celebrate the Divine Liturgy. And a bishop, giving advice, gave two pastoral directions to the faithful: first that they should pray together, and second that they should eat together.

Let us try harder to eat with others.

"Forms of life" (Wittgenstein)

I'm not Wittgenstein's biggest fan, and I wince when people speak of "after Wittgenstein." But his concept of "forms of life" is relevant here. A form of life is something that is structural to how people live, and normally tacit; a professor was searching for an example of "forms of life" to give to the class, and after a couple of minutes of silence I said, "You are trying to a difficult thing. You are trying to find something that is basically tacit and not consciously realized, but that people will recognize once it is pointed out. I guess that you have thought of a few possibilities and rejected them because they fall around on one of those criteria." And he searched a bit more, and gave the example of, "It used to be that procreation was seen as necessary for human flourishing. Now people think that limiting procreation is seen as necessary for human flourishing."

Arguably a *Luddite's Guide to Forms of Life* would be more useful than *The Luddite's guide to technology*, but in the discussion of different

technologies there is always a concern for what Wittgenstein would call forms of life. It is possible to turn on the television for 10 minutes a day for weather information, and that retains the same form of life as not using television at all. Watching television for hours a day is, and shapes, a distinct form of life. And in some sense the basic question addressed in this work is not, "What technologies are you using?" but "*What forms of life do you have given your technology usage?*"

Future shock

Some people have said that Americans are in a constant state of "future shock," "future shock" being understood by analogy to "culture shock", which is a profoundly challenging state when you are in a culture that tramples assumptions you didn't know you had. Not all of future shock is in relation to technology, but much of it is.

We think of a "rising standard of living," meaning more unfamiliar possessions in many cases, and even if the economy itself is not a rising standard of living now, we have accepted the train of new technology adoption as progress, but there has been something in us that says, "This is choking something human." And in a sense this has always been right, the older technologies as the new, for movies as much as augmented reality.

One author said, "The future is here. It's just unevenly distributed."

GPS

GPS is in general an example of something that has a double effect. Traditionally advertising in an overall effect helps people to covet what a company has to offer, and the behavior stimulated by the advertising is to advance the company's interest, even though the company never says "We are making this so that we will acquire more money or market share." As in *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, the prime actor is attempting to pursue his or her own interests, while it is presented entirely as being to the advantage of the other party on the other party's terms.

Apple didn't just change the game by making the first smartphone done right, in which regard the iPhone is commonly considered more significant than the Macintosh. The company that invented and still sells the Macintosh has established something more important than owning a Macintosh: owning an iPhone or iPad, which unlike the Macintosh generate a steady subscription income stream. The price for my MacBook was 100% up front: now that I've made the one-time purchase, I do not have any further financial obligations that will filter to Apple. My iPhone, on the other hand, has a subscription and contract; part of my hefty baseline phone bill goes to Apple. And if I were to purchase an iPad, I would have two subscriptions. (The main reason I have not seriously moved towards buying an iPad is not what I would pay up front; it is adding another subscription.)

The GPS also has a double effect. It is what science

fiction writers called a "tracking device." Now it is a terrifically useful traffic advice; part of the marketing proposition offered for Sila on the iPhone 4 S is that it makes terrifically resourceful use of a GPS. (*"I feel like a latte."*—and it is the GPS that Sila uses to find nearby locations where one might find a latte.) On a more pedestrian level GPS for driving (or biking, or walking) has become so entrenched that people don't know what they'd do without it to reach unfamiliar locations. I have never heard someone question the utility of a GPS for this or other purposes, and I've heard of interesting-sounding hobbies like geocaching where you navigate to specified coordinates and then search out and find some hidden attraction in the area indicated by the GPS.

But for all of these things, GPSes, as well as cell phones in general, provide one more means for Big Brother (and possibly more than one Big Brother) to know exactly where you go, when you go there, what the patterns are, and other things where Big Brother will keep closer tabs on your whereabouts and activities than your spouse or parent. IBM published a book on "Why IBM for Big Data?" and made it very clear that Big Brother analysis of data isn't just for No Such Agency. It's also for the corporate world. One author told the seemingly attractive story of having made repeated negative posts on his FaceBook wall, slamming an airline after repeated problems, and the airline reached out to him and gave him a service upgrade. This was presented in the most positive light, but it was very clear that business were being invited to use IBM's expertise to do Big Data Big Brother

analysis on social networks.

Guns and modern weapons (for fantasy swords, see Teleporters)

Let me give a perhaps controversial preamble before directly talking about weapons.

I have spoken both with NRA types and anti-gun advocates, and there is a telling difference. The anti-gun advocates point to hard-hitting, emotional news stories where a walking arsenal opens fire in a school and kills many people. The NRA types may briefly talk about selective truth-telling and mention an incident where someone walked into a church armed to kill a bear, and an off-duty security guard who was carrying a gun legally and with the explicit permission of church leadership, "stopped the crime." But that is something of a tit-for-tat sideline to the main NRA argument, which is to appeal to statistical studies that show that legal gun ownership does not increase crime.

I have a strong math background and I am usually wary of statistics. However, I find it very striking that anti-gun advocates have never in my experience appealed to statistics to show that legal gun ownership increases crime, but only give hard-hitting emotional images, while the bread-and-butter of NRA argument is an appeal to research and statistics. I've never personally investigated those statistics, but there is something suspicious and fishy when only one side of a debate seriously appeals to research and statistics.

With that preamble mentioned, learning to really

use a gun is a form of discipline and stillness, and I tried to capture it in the telescope scene in “Within the Steel Orb.” Hunting can be a way to be close to your food, and I approve of hunting for meat but not hunting for taxidermy. *However*, sacramental shopping for weapons is as bad as any other sacramental shopping. I would tentatively say that if you want skill with a weapon, and will train to the point that it becomes something of a spiritual discipline, then buying a weapon makes sense. If you want to buy a gun because all the cool guys in action-adventure movies have one, or you are not thinking of the work it takes to handle a gun safely and use it accurately, I would question the appropriateness of buying a gun.

(Owning a gun because that is part of your culture is one thing; buying a gun because they are glamorized in movies is another thing entirely.)

And that is without investigating the question of whether it is appropriate to use violence in the first place. St. George the soldier and the passion-bearers Ss. Boris and Gleb are both honored by the Church; yet the better path is the one set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

Heating and air conditioning

A college roommate commented that middle class Americans had basically as much creature comforts were available. Not that they can buy everything one would want; but there is a certain point beyond which money cannot purchase necessities, only luxuries, and

then a certain point after that where money cannot purchase luxuries, only status symbols, and a point beyond that where money cannot purchase any more meaningful status symbols, only power. And middle class Americans may well not be able to purchase every status symbol they want, but really there is not much more creature comfort that would come with ten times one's salary.

Heating and air conditioning are one such area, and monastics wear pretty much the same clothing in summer and winter. One Athonite monk talked about a story about how several Russian sailors made a fire and stood close, and still did not feel warm, while islanders who were barely clad stood some distance off and were wincing because of the heat. We lose some degree of spiritual strength if we insist on having cool buildings in the summer and warm buildings in the winter. Even just cutting back a bit, so that buildings are warm but not hot in the summer and cool but not cold in the winter would constitute a spiritual victory. Usually this sort of thing is argued for environmental reasons; I am not making the argument that the lowered utility usage is good for the environment but that the lowered utility usage is constructive and, in the old phrase, "builds character." Indoor tracks exist, but in the summer I see bicyclists and runners exercising hard in the summer. These people are not super-heroes, and exercising in the heat really does not seem to be much of a deterrent to getting one's artificially added exercise. The human body and spirit together are capable of a great deal more sturdiness, when instead of always seeking comfort we learn that

we can function perfectly well after adjusting to discomfort. (And this is not just with heating and air conditioning; it is true with a lot of things.)

Hospitality

There is an ancient code of hospitality that recently has been influenced by consumer culture. What commercial marketing does, or at least did, to make a gesture of friendship and welcome was by offering a selection of choices carefully fitted to the demographics being targeted. Starbucks not only established that you could market an experience that would command a much higher price than a bottomless cup of coffee at a regular diner; they sold not one coffee but many coffees. You had a broad selection of consumer choices. Starbucks was doubtlessly more successful than some frozen yoghurt places I visited in grad school, which offered something like fifty or more flavors and varieties of yoghurts and had staff who were mystified when customers said, "But I just want some frozen yoghurt!" As a nuance, Starbucks offers guidance and suggestions for the undecided—and a large number of choices for the decided.

And in light of the hospitality industry, hosts offer guests choices and sometimes mystify them by the offering: a guest, according to the older (unwritten) code, did not have the responsibility of choosing what would be offered. Now perhaps I need to clarify, or maybe don't need to clarify, that if you have a severe peanut allergy and your host offers you a peanut

butter and jelly sandwich, you are not duty bound to accept it. But even then, social graces come to play. I remembered one time, at a feast although not strictly a host/guest relationship, when I offered a friend a glass of port and he kindly reminded me that he was a recovering alcoholic. I apologized profusely, and he stopped me and said, "I appreciate the offer, I just can't drink it." So then I offered him something he could consume, and he took it and thanked me for it. Social graces apply.

But this is something of a footnote. There is a story of a staretz or monastic spiritual father who was going with one of a monk's disciples, and they visited a monastery that was feasting with bread, and the elder and disciple both shared in that informal communion, and then the two of them resumed their journey. The disciple asked the master if he could drink water, and to his astonishment was told no. The master, in answering his question, said, "That was love's bread. But let us keep the fast." The Fathers are very clear: as one priest said, "Hospitality trumps fasting." And the assumption there is that fasting is important enough. *This piece originated with the title, "Fasting from technologies."* But hospitality is even more important.

The ancient rule of hospitality, although this is never thought of in these terms with today's understanding of authority, is that the host has a profound authority over the guest which the guest will obey, even to the point of trumping fasting. But this is not what we may think of as despotism: the entire purpose and focus of the host's role in hospitality is to extend the warmest welcome to the guest. I remember

one time when a friend visited from Nigeria, and although I set some choices before them, when I said, "We can do A, B, and C; I would recommend B," in keeping with hospitality they seemed to always treat my pick as tacit authority and went along with me. It was a wonderful visit; my friend made a comment about being treated like royalty, but my thought was not about how well I was treating them. My thought was that this would probably be the last time I saw my friend and her immediate family face to face, and I'd better make it count.

I might comment that this is tied to our inability today to understand a husband's authority over his wife and the wife's submission. The rôle is somewhat like that of host and guest. A liberal source speaking on the Ephesians haustafel as it dealt with husbands and wives said that it did not portray marriage in terms of the husband's authority, while a conservative source understood authority at a deeper level: it said that nowhere here (or anywhere else in the Bible) are husbands urged, "Exercise your authority!", but the text that says, Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord, also says, Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it. If the wife's role is to submit herself to her husband as to the Lord, the husband's role is to give up his life as Christ was crucified for the Church.

And all of this seems dead to us as we have grown dead to it. The role of hospitality, including authority, is infinitely less important than marriage, yet we see a husband's authority as external and domineering, when it is less external than the host's authority. And I

am drawn to memories of visiting one very traditional couple where both of them exuded freedom and comfort and dealing with them felt like a foot sliding into a well-fitting shoe. But if we see a husband having authority over a wife as a foreign imposition and nothing like the implicit authority we do not even recognize between host and guest (where the host's authority consists in making every decision to show as much kindness as possible to the guest), this is not a defect in marriage but in our deafened ears.

An intravenous drip of noise

"Silence is the language of the age to come," as others have said. Hesychasm is a discipline of stillness, of silence, of Be still and know that I am God. Whether spiritual silence is greater than other virtues, I do not wish to treat here; suffice it to say that all virtues are great health, and all vices are serious spiritual diseases, and all are worth attention.

There are a number of technologies whose marketing proposition is as a noise delivery system. The humble radio offers itself as a source of noise. True, there are other uses, such as listening to a news radio station for weather and traffic, but just having a radio on in the background is noise. Other sources of noise include television, iPods, smartphones, the web, and top sites like FaceBook, Google Plus, and the like. Right use of these tends to be going in and out for a task, even if the task lasts five hours, versus having noise as a drone in the background.

In terms of social appropriateness, there is such a

thing as politely handling something that is basically rude. For one example, I was visiting a friend's house and wanted to fix his printer, and apologetically said I was going to call my brother and called him to ask his opinion as a computer troubleshooter. I handled the call as something that was basically rude even though the express purpose was to help with something he had asked about and it was a short call. And it was handled politely because I handled it as something that is basically rude. And other people I know with good manners do sometimes make or receive a cell phone call when you otherwise have their attention, but they do so apologetically, which suggests that just ignoring the other person and making a phone call is rude. In other words, they politely handle the interruption by treating it as something that is basically rude, even if (as in the case I mentioned) the entire intention of the call was to help me help the friend I was visiting.

Something like this applies to our use of technology. There are things that are entirely appropriate if we handle them as something that is basically "rude." Or, perhaps, "*noisy*." The equivalent of making a long phone call when you are with someone, without offering any apology or otherwise treating it as basically rude, is laying the reins on the horse's neck and allowing technologies to function as a noise delivery system. And what we need is to unplug our intravenous drip of noise.

Silence can be uncomfortable if you are used to the ersatz companionship of noise. If you have been in a building and step outside into the sunlight at noon,

you may be dazzled. Most spiritual disciplines stretch us into something that is uncomfortable at first: the point is to be stretched more each time. The *Philokalia* talks about how people hold on to sin because they think it adorns them: to this may be added that after you repent and fear a shining part of you may be lost forever, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell." Silence is like this; we want a noise delivery system as a drone, and once we begin to get used to its absence, there is a deeper joy. It may take time; it takes something like a year for a recovering alcoholic's brain chemistry to reset. But once we have got rid of the drug, once we have repented and sought to bear fruit worthy of repentance, we may find ourselves (to adapt the title of a book) **blindsided by joy**.

Killing time

"You cannot kill time," the saying goes, "without injuring eternity."

At least one breakdown of mobile users has said that they fall into three groups: "Urgent now," people who have some degree of emergency and need directions, advice, contingency plans, and the like, "Repeat now," people who are monitoring information like whether or how their stocks are doing, and "Bored now," people who are caught and have some time to kill, and look for a diversion.

"Bored now" use of cell phones is simply not constructive spiritually; it offers a virtual escape for the here and now God has given us, and it is the exact

opposite of the saying, "Your cell [as a monk] will teach you everything you need to know."

The lead pencil

The lead pencil is a symbol of an alternative to an overly technologized world; one organization of people who have made a conscious decision to avoid the encroachment of technology chose the lead pencil as their emblem and formed the Lead Pencil Club.

But the lead pencil is a work of technology, and one that 99% of humans who ever lived have never seen any more than a cuneiform stylus or any other writing implement. And even such a seemingly humble technology comes about in an impressive fashion; one economist wrote a compelling case that only God knows how pencils are made.

Sitting down and writing letters is a valuable discipline, but the norm that has been lived by 99% of the human race is oral culture; anthropologists have increasingly realized that the opposite of "written" culture is not "illiterate" culture but "oral" culture. And the weapon that slides through the chink in oral culture's armor is the writing implement, such as the lead pencil. It is not the computer, but the lead pencil and its kin, that serve as a disease vector to destroy age-old orality of culture.

This is not to say that you can't try to use computer keyboards less and pens and pencils more. But understand that you're not turning the clock all the way back by writing handwritten letters, however commendable the love in handwritten letters may be.

The lead pencil is a technology and to those societies that embrace it, it is the death knell to an old way.

The long tail

The long tail can be your best friend, or an insidious enemy.

Let me briefly outline the long tail. A retail bookstore needs to sell one copy of a book in a year's time, or else it is losing them money: shelf space is an expensive commodity. And all of this leads to a form of implicit censorship, not because bookstores want to stamp out certain books, but because if it's not a quick seller or a safe bet it's a liability.

By contrast, Amazon has large volumes of shelf space; their warehouses might comfortably store a city. And it costs them some money to acquire books, but the price of keeping books available is insignificant compared to a brick-and-mortar bookstore. And what that means, and not just on Amazon, that the economic censorship is lifted. People used to wonder who would be able to fill hundreds or more cable channels; now Youtube would be hard pressed to reduce itself down to a thousand channels. And so a much larger portion of Amazon's profits comes from having an enormous inventory of items that occasionally make a sale.

There is specialization implicit in the long tail; if you want to know how to make something, chances are pretty good that some blog explains how. And the proper ascetical use of technology, or Luddite if you prefer, uses things differently than the mainstream.

Nobody in a phone store is going to tell you that an intravenous drip of noise in terms of text messages that go on even when you are trying to sleep does not make you happier than if you use texting when there is a special need. Some of the best resources you will find for ascetical use of technology are to be found in the long tail.

But there is something else that comes with it. The temptation is to be off in our own customized worlds, with everything around our interests. And that is a form of spiritual poverty. Part of an age-old asceticism has been learning how to deal with the people who are around you, localist style, instead of pursuing your own nooks and crannies. The monoculture of retail stores in America was first a problem, not because it had no long tail effects, but because it supplanted at least an implicit localism. Local cultures gave way to plastic commercial culture.

And we can use the long tail to our profit, if we don't lay the reins on the horse's neck. Shopping on the Internet for things that won't be local stores is one thing; shopping on the Internet so you don't have to get out of your pyjamas is another.

The long tail can be a gold mine, but it is subject to the damned backswing.

Marketing proposition

There was one CIA official who said, being interviewed by a journalist, that he would never knowingly hire someone who was attracted by the romance of cloak and dagger work. Now this was quite

obviously someone who did want to hire people who would be a good fit, but someone who wants to join a cloak and dagger agency as a gateway to have life feel like a James Bond movie is off on the wrong foot.

I doubt if any major intelligence agency has promoted James Bond movies because they think it's a good way to draw the right recruits, but James Bond movies function as highly effective advertisements. They may not lead people to be able to stick out the daily grind and level of bureaucracy in a three-letter government agency, but they give a strong sense that spying is cool, and cool in a way that probably has only the most accidental resemblance to life in one of those bureaucratic organizations.

Cop shows likewise show police officers pulling their guns out much more than in real life; it is a frequent occurrence on the cop shows I've seen, while the last figure I heard was that real, live, flesh and blood police officers draw a gun on the job (apart from training) once every few years if even that.

Advertisement is produced as a service to the companies whose goods and services are being advertised, but the real message they sell is if anything further from the truth than the "accidental advertisement" of James Bond movies advertising a romantic version of bureaucratic intelligence agencies and cop shows making a dramaticization that effectively ignores the day-to-day work of police officers because it just doesn't make good drama. (What would happen to the ratings of a cop show if they accurately portrayed the proportion of time that police officers spend filling out paperwork?)

Advertising sells claims that are further out. Two examples discussed in a class showed a family that moved, and what was juxtaposed as cementing this bonding time was a vacuum cleaner. In another commercial, racial harmony was achieved by eating a hamburger. The commercials that stuck with me from childhood were in one case kids jumping around with rotating camera angles because they were wearing a particular brand of shoes: When I asked my parents for those shoes, they explained to me that the commercial was made to make me want them, and I took a marker and colored the patterns on the bottom of the shoes on the add on to my shoes. Another one showed a game of Laser Tag that was end to end acrobatics. Now I have never played Laser Tag, and I get the impression people like it, but I doubt that its gear confers the ability to do theatrically delivered acrobatics.

Marketing is usually more subtle and seductive than I have portrayed it here. The vacuum cleaner did not offer any words connecting the appliance with family connectedness; it's just that this family was going through a major experience and the vacuum cleaner appeared with perfect timing just at the center of that memory. The marketing message that is portrayed is seductive and false, and it is never the right basis to judge the product on. The product may be the right thing to buy and it may well be worth buying, but only after one has rejected the mystique so masterfully built up in the marketing proposition. If it is right for me to study ninjutsu, it will only be right after I have rejected the ninja mystique, something

which the nearest dojo does in fact do: they refer to the martial art they teach as "toshindo", nor "ninjutsu", even though they refer to essentially the same thing in Japanese.

I have said earlier, or rather repeated, the words, "Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need." They bear repeating, but is there anything else to add? I would add three things:

1. Reject sacramental shopping.
2. Reject the mystique advertising has sold you this product on.
3. Wait until your heart becomes clear about what is the best choice, and then make the best choice.

The best choice, in the third world, may be to buy a Mercedes-Benz instead of a Ford because you cannot afford to replace a Ford in six years.

But take care of the spiritual housecleaning first.

Martial arts

There have been two times in my life that I have studied martial arts, and both of them have been times of exceptional spiritual dryness. I have not felt any particular dryness when learning how to use a bow and arrow—or a .22—but there is something different about at least internal Asian martial arts. Practicing them, like Orthodoxy, is walking along a way. And it

would seem somewhat confused to try to pursue one of these ways along with the Orthodox way.

I am careful of declaring this in the absolute; the literature is ambivalent but there are soldiers who bear the cross of St. George, and many of them have training in Asian martial arts. That looks to me grey, as outlined in the timeless way of relating.

I am tempted to train in ninjutsu: partly for technique, partly because the whole of the training includes stealth, and partly for practical self-defense. But I am treating that desire as a temptation, on the understanding that God can impress things on my conscience if he wants me to enter training.

MMO's (Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games, like World of Warcraft)

"Do You Want to Date My Avatar?" was designed and created as a viral video, and something about it really stuck.

There are common threads between many of the things there, and an MMO is a cross between the MUDs I played in high school, and SecondLife. The MUDs were handled from pure text, leaving imagery in the player's imagination; MMO's provide their own imagery. Another form of escape.

Money and financial instruments

The Fathers commenting on St. Job also illustrate another principle of such wealth as existed then. St. Job is reported as having thousands of herd animals

and thousands of beasts of burden, the wealthiest of the men of the East. But there are somewhat pointed remarks that wealthy Job is not reported to possess gold or silver. His wealth was productive wealth, living wealth, not a vault of dead metal coins. In modern terms he did not live off an endowment of stocks and bonds, but owned and ran a productive business.

Endowments are a means of being independently wealthy, and this ultimately means "independent from God." Now the wealthiest are really as dependent on God as the poorest; let us remember the parable of the rich fool, in which a man congratulates himself for amassing everything he would need and that night the angels demanded his soul from him. The ending is much sadder than St. Job's story.

Those of us in the world usually possess some amount of money, but there is something that makes me uncomfortable about the stock market overall, even moreso for the more abstract financial instruments. What one attempts to do is gain the most money from one's existing money as much as possible, given the amount of risk you want and possibly including such outliers as ethical index funds which only index stocks deemed to meet an ethical standard. The question I have is, "What are we producing for what we get out of the stock market?" Working in a job delivers tangible value, or at least can. Investing in the stock market may be connected with helping businesses to function, but more and more abstract forms of wealth have the foul smell that heralds the coming of the damned backswing.

I would suggest as a right use of wealth acquiring

tools that help you work, and being generous even or especially if money is tight. And explicitly depending on God.

Movies

When movies had arrived on the scene and were starting to have a societal effect, at least one Luddite portrayed a character moving from one movie to another in escapism. The premise may seem quaint now, but a little bit of that keeps on happening with new technologies.

One fellow parishioner talked about how in Japan, anime shows aired with a certain animation technique, and all of the sudden emergency rooms were asking why they were being inundated with people having epileptic seizures. And when they saw the connection, Japan stopped cold in its use of that animation technique. He said that that underscored to him the power of television and movies.

I don't quite agree with him, any more than I would agree with using findings that extremely high levels of artificial light—fluorescent *or* incandescent—cause problems, and we should therefore be very wary of lighting. For most sedentary people, even with artificial light (fluorescent *or* incandescent), the level of exposure to light is materially lower than natural exposure to the sun, and people who spend their time indoors tend to see less light (*significantly* less light) than people living outdoors. I didn't accept his conclusion, but he followed with another insight that I can less easily

contest.

He asked if I saw movies infrequently (we had not discussed the topic, but he knew me well enough to guess where I might stand), and I told him that I usually don't watch movies. He asked me if I had ever observed that an hour after seeing a movie, I felt depressed. I had not made any connection of that sort, even if now it seems predictable from the pleasure-pain syndrome. And now I very rarely see movies, precisely because the special effects and other such tweaks are stronger than I am accustomed to seeing; they go like a stiff drink to the head of the teetotaler. And on this score I would rather not be the person who has a stiff drink every so often, and whose body tolerates alcohol better, but the person whose system hasn't had to make such an adjustment, an adjustment that includes losses. The little pleasures of life are lost on someone used to a rising standard of special effects, and the little pleasures of life are more wholesome than special effects.

Multitasking

As I discussed in "Religion And Science Is Not Just Intelligent Design Vs. Evolution," one of the forms of name-dropping in academic theology is to misuse "a term from science": the claim to represent "a term from science" is endemic in academic theology, but I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times I've read "a term from science" that was used correctly.

One book said it was going to introduce "a term

from computer science," *toggling*, which meant switching rapidly between several applications. The moral of this story was that we should switch rapidly between multiple activities in our daily lives.

What I would have said earlier is, "While that moral might be true, what it is not is a lesson from computer science." What I would say now is, "Never mind if that is a lesson from computer science. The moral is fundamentally flawed."

In the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 6:22, Christ says, "If your eye be," and then a word that doesn't come across in translation very well. It is rendered "healthy" (NIV), "clear" (NASB), "sound" (RSV), and "good" (NKJV, NLT), Only the King James Version properly renders the primary sense of *haplous* as "single." This may be a less user-friendly translation but it captures something the other translations miss. The context of the discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body is about choosing whether to have a single focus in serving God, or try to multitask between serving God and money. *Haplous* does have "healthy", "clear", "sound", and "good" as secondary meanings, but the primary meaning is the less accessible one that I have only found in the Greek and in the King James. If the eye is the lamp of the body, and it is important that the eye be *single*, then by extension the whole person is to be single, and as one aspect of this single eye, give a whole and single attention to one thing at a time. Now this is not necessarily a central, foreground focus in the Sermon on the Mount, but as its logic unfurls, even as spiritual silence unfurls, a single eye gives its whole and undivided attention to one thing at

a time. (And study after study has shown that increased productivity through multitasking is an illusion; divided attention is divided attention and hurts all manner of actions.)

Nutriceuticals

The term "nutriceuticals is itself an ambiguous and ambivalent term.

On the one hand, 'nutriceuticals' can refer to the diet advanced by the *Nourishing Traditions* school, and while nutrition should not be considered on its own without reference to the big picture of exercise, work, light, almsgiving, fasting, prayer, and the Holy Mysteries, there is something to the recipes and type of diet advocated in *Nourishing Traditions*.

There are also the different, and differently excellent, nutriceuticals of a company that combines absolutely top-notch supplements with a pushy, multi-lev—I mean, a unique opportunity to become CEO of your own company.

However, it seems that everybody selling certain things wants to be selling "nutriceuticals", and there are people selling "synthetic testosterone" as a "nutriceutical." Friends, I really hope that the offer of "synthetic testosterone" is false advertising, because if it is false advertising they are probably delivering a better product than if it's truth in advertising. Testosterone is a steroid, the chief of the anabolic steroids used to get muscles so big they gross girls out. Now testosterone does have legitimate medical uses, but using steroids to build disgustingly huge muscles

can use up to a hundred times what legitimate medical use prescribes, and it does really nasty things to body, mind, and soul.

I get the impression that most things sold as nutraceuticals are shady; to authorities, illegal nutraceuticals are probably like a water balloon, where you step on it one place and it just slides over a bit to the side. It used to be that there were perhaps a dozen major street drugs on the scene; now there is a vast bazaar where some "nutraceuticals" are squeaky-clean, and some "neutraceuticals" are similar in effect to illegal narcotics but not technically illegal, and some of them are selling testosterone without medical supervision or worse.

So buyer beware. There's some good stuff out there (I haven't talked about goji berries), but if you want a healthy diet to go with healthy living, read and cook from *Nourishing Traditions* and *The Paleo Solution*.

Old Technologies

There is a Foxtrot cartoon where the mother is standing outside with Jason and saying something like, "This is how you throw a frisbee."—"This is how you play catch."—"This is how you play tennis." And Jason answers, "Enough with the historical reenactments. I want to play some games!" (And there is another time when he and Marcus had been thrown out of the house and were looking at a frisbee and saying, "This is a scratch on the Linux RAID drive.")

Old technologies are usually things that caused

changes and moved people away from what might be called more natural forms of life. However, they represent a lower drug dose than newer technologies. The humble lead pencil may be historically be the kind of technology that converted cultures away from being oral; however, a handwritten letter to an old friend is profoundly different from a stream of texts. And in my technological soliloquoy above, two out of the three technologies I mentioned represent an old tradition. Being familiar with some of the best of older technologies may be helpful, and in general they do not have the layers on layers of fragile character that have been baked into new technologies. A Swiss Army Knife is still a portable toolchest if something messes up with the Internet. Bicycles are not a replacement for cars—you can't go as fast or as far, or stock up on groceries—but many people prefer bicycles when they are a live option, and a good bicycle has far fewer points of failure than a new car.

I noted when I was growing up that a power failure meant, "Office work stops." Now more recently an internet or network failure means, "Office work stops," and there is someone who said, "Systems integration is when your computer doesn't work because of a problem on a computer you never knew existed." Older technologies are in general not so fragile, and have more of a buffer zone before you get in to the damned backswing.

Online forums

Online forums are something of a mixed blessing.

They can allow discussion of obscure topics, and have many of the benefits of the the long tail. I happily referred someone who was learning Linux to unix.stackexchange.com. But the blessing is mixed, and when I talked with my priest about rough stuff on an Orthodox forum, he said, "People love to talk about Orthodoxy. The real challenge is to do it."

Online forums may be more wisely used to consult for information and knowhow, but maybe not the best place to find friends, or perhaps a good place to find friends, but not a good place to use for friendship.

Planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last

When I made one visit to the Dominican Republic, one thing that surprised me was that a substantial number of the vehicles I saw were Mercedes-Benz or other luxury brands by U.S. standards, while there were no or almost no U.S. cars. The reason I was given to this by my youth pastor is that you can keep a German engineered car up and running for 30 years if you take care of it; with a U.S. car you are doing well to have a car still running after 10 years. German cars, among others, are engineered and built to last; U.S. cars are engineered and built NOT to last. And in the Dominican Republic economy, buying a car that may well run for 30 years is something people can afford; buying a car that may only last 5-7 years is a luxury people cannot afford. An old but well-cared-for Mercedes Benz, Saab, Volvo, or BMW will probably last longer than a new car which is "imported from Detroit."

One of the features of an industrial economy is that the economy needs to have machines in production and people buying things. If we ask the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth," the decisive answer of industrial economy is, "Man was made for economic wealth." There are artificial measures taken to manipulate culture so as to maximize production and consumption of economic wealth, three of which are planned obsolescence, fashion, and being built NOT to last.

Planned obsolescence socially enforces repeat purchases by making goods that will have a better version available soon; in computers relatively little exploration is done to make a computer that will last a long time, because *computers usually only need to last until they're obsolete, and that level of quality is "good enough for government work."* I have an iPhone 4 and am glad not to be using my needlessly snail-like AT&T-serviced iPhone 1, but I am bombarded by advertisements telling me that I need an iPhone 4S, implying that my iPhone 4 just doesn't cut it any more. As a matter of fact, my iPhone 4 works quite nicely, and I ignored a link advertising a free port of the iPhone 4's distinctive feature Sila. I'm sure that if I forked out and bought an iPhone 4S, it would not be long before I saw advertisements breeding discontent about my spiffy iPhone 4S, and giving me a next hot feature to covet.

In the Middle Ages, fashion changed in clothing about once per generation. In our culture, we have shifting fashions that create a manufactured social

need to purchase new clothing frequently, more like once per year. People do not buy clothing nearly so often because it is worn out and too threadbare to keep using, but because fashion shifted and such-and-such is in. Now people may be spending less on fashion-driven purchases than before, but it is still not a mainstream practice to throw a garment out because further attempts to mend it will not really help.

And lastly, there is the factor of things being made to break down. There are exceptions; it is possible for things to be built to last. I kept one Swiss Army Knife for twenty years, with few repairs beyond WD-40 and the like—and at the end of those twenty years, I gave it as a fully functional hand-me-down to someone who appreciated it. There is a wide stripe of products where engineers tried to engineer something to last and last, and not just German engineers. However, this is an exception and not the rule in the U.S. economy. I was incredulous when a teacher told me that the engineering positions some of us would occupy would have an assignment to make something that would last for a while and then break down. But it's true. Clothing, for instance, can be built to last. However, if you buy expensive new clothing, it will probably wear out. Goodwill and other second-hand stores sometimes have things that are old enough to be built to last, but I haven't found things to be that much sturdier: your mileage may vary. And culturally speaking, at least before present economic difficulties, when an appliance breaks you do not *really* take it in for repairs. You replace it with a newer model.

All of these things keep purchases coming so the

gears of factories will continue. Dorothy Sayers' "The Other Six Deadly Sins" talks about how a craftsman will want to make as good an article as possible, while mechanized industry will want to make whatever will keep the machines' gears turning. And that means goods that are made to break down, even when it is technologically entirely feasible for factories to turn out things that are built to last.

All of these answer the question, "Was economic wealth made for man, or man for economic wealth?" with a resounding, "Man was made for economic wealth."

Porn and things connected to porn

There is a story about a philosopher who was standing in a river when someone came to him. The philosopher asked the visitor, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under the water for a little while, and asked him the second time, "What do you want?" The visitor answered, "Truth!" Then the philosopher held the visitor under water for what seemed an interminable time, and let him up and asked, "What do you want?" The visitor gasped and said, "Air!" The philosopher said, "When you want Truth the way you want air, you will find it."

The same thing goes for freedom from the ever-darker chain called pornography, along with masturbation and the use of "ED" drugs to heighten thrills (which can cause nasty street drug-like effects even in marriage). To quote the Sermon on the Mount

(RSV):

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

The Church Fathers are clear enough that this must not be taken literally; canon law forbids self-castration. But if you want to be free from addiction to pornography, if you want such freedom the way you want air, then you will do whatever it takes to remove the addiction.

What are your options? I'm not going to imitate the Dilbert strip's mentioning, "How to lose weight by eating less food," but there are some real and concrete steps you can take. If you shut off your internet service, and only check email and conduct internet business in public places with libraries, that might be the price for purity. If you are married, you might use one of many internet filters, set up with a password that is only known to your wife. You could join a men's sexual addiction support group: that may be the price

of freedom from porn, and it is entirely worth it. The general rule of thumb in confession is not to go into too much detail in confessing sexual sins, but going to confession (perhaps frequently, if your priest or spiritual father allows it) can have a powerful "I don't want to confess this sin" effect. Another way to use the Internet is only go to use it when you have a defined purpose, and avoid free association browsing which often goes downhill. You could ask prayers of the saints, especially St. Mary of Egypt and St. John the Long-Suffering of the Kiev Near Caves. You could read and pray "The Canon of Repentance to Our Lord Jesus Christ" in the Jordanville prayer book and St. Nectarios Press's *Prayers for Purity*, if your priest so blesses.

Lust is the disenchantment of the entire universe: first it drains wonder and beauty out of everything else, and then it drains wonder and beauty out of itself: the only goal of lust is more lust. It works like a street drug. St. Basil the Great compared lust to a dog licking a saw: the dog keeps licking it because it likes the taste it produces, but it does not know that it is tasting its own woundedness, and the longer it keeps up at this, the deeper the wounds become.

Furthermore, an account of fighting sexual sin is incomplete if we do not discuss gluttony. What is above the belt is very close to what is below the belt, and the Fathers saw a tight connection between gluttony and lust. **Gluttony is the gateway drug to lust.** "Sear your loins with fasting," the Fathers in the *Philokalia* tells us; the demon of lust goes out with prayer and fasting.

Sacramental shopping

I remember when I had one great struggle before surrendering, letting go of buying a computer for my studies, and then an instant later feeling compelled to buy it. The only difference was that one was sacramental shopping to get something I really needed, and the other was just getting what I needed with the "sacramental shopping" taken out.

In American culture and perhaps others, the whole advertising industry and the shape of the economy gives a great place to "sacramental shopping", or shopping as an ersatz sacrament that one purchases not because it is useful or any other legitimate concern, but because it delivers a sense of well-being. Like Starbucks, for instance. Some have argued that today's brand economy is doing the job of spiritual disciplines: hence a teacher asks students, "Imagine your future successful self. With what brands do you imagine yourself associating?" and getting no puzzled looks or other body language indicating that students found the question strange. I've mentioned brands I consume both prestigious and otherwise; perhaps this piece would be better if I omitted mention of brands. But even if one rejects the ersatz spirituality of brands, not all brands are created equal; my previous laptop was an IBM Thinkpad I used for years before it stopped working, and the one before that was an Acer that demonstrated "You get what you pay for." Investing in something good—paid for in cash, without incurring further debt—can be

appropriate. Buying for the mystique is spiritual junk food. (And in telling about my iPhone, I didn't mention that I tried migrating to a Droid, before realizing its user interface didn't stack up to the iPhone's.)

"Hang the fashions. Buy only what you need," is a rejection of brand economy as a spiritual discipline. Buy things on their merits and not because of the prestige of the brand. And learn to ignore the mystique that fuels a culture of discontent. Buy new clothes because your older clothing is wearing out, not because it is out of fashion. (It makes sense to buy classic rather than trendy.)

SecondLife

Most of the other technologies mentioned here are technologies I have dealt with myself, most often at some length. SecondLife by contrast is the one and only of the technologies on this list I haven't even installed due to overwhelming bad intuitions when I tried to convince myself it was something I should be doing.

It may be, some time later, that SecondLife is no longer called SecondWife, and it is a routine communication technology, used as an audio/visual successor to (purely audio) phone conversations. The web was once escape, one better than the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, and now it can be explored but it is quite often used for common nuts and bolts. *No technology is permanently exotic*: perhaps sometime the world of SecondLife will seem ordinary. But for

now at least, it is an escape into building an alternative reality, and almost might as well be occult, as the foundations of modern science, for the degree of creating a new alternate reality it involves.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktop computers

Jakob Nielsen made a distinction between computers that are *movable*, meaning laptops and netbooks which can be moved with far less difficulty and hassle than a desktop system, and *mobile*, meaning that they are the sort of thing a person can easily carry. Netbooks cross an important line compared to full-sized laptops; a regular laptop weighs enough on the shoulder that you are most likely to take a laptop in its carrying case for a reason, not just carry it like one more thing in a pocket. Netbooks, which weigh in at something like two pounds, are much lighter on the shoulder and they lend themselves more readily to keeping in a backpack, large purse, or bag of holding, without stopping to consider, "Do I really want to carry this extra weight?" Not that this is unique to netbooks; tablets are also light enough to just carry with you. Smartphones cross another important line: they are small enough to keep tucked in your pocket (or on your belt).

I was first astonished when I read that one iPhone user had completely displaced her use of the desktop computer. It surprised me for at least three reasons. First, the iPhone's screen is tiny compared to even a small desktop screen; one thing programmers tend to

learn is the more screen space they have, the better, and if they have any say in the matter, or if they have savvy management, programmers have two screens or one huge screen. Second, especially when I had an iPhone 1 that came with painfully slow and artificially limited bandwidth, the niche for it that I saw was as an emergency surrogate for a real computer that you use when, say, you're driving to meet someone and something goes wrong. A bandwidth-throttled iPhone 1 may be painfully slow, but it is much better than nothing. And lastly, for someone used to high-speed touch typing on a regular keyboard, the iPhone, as the original Droid commercials stomped on the sore spot, "iDon't have a real keyboard." You don't get better over time at *touch* typing an iPhone keyboard because the keyboard is one you have to look at; you cannot by *touch* move over two keys to the left to type your next letter. What I did not appreciate then was that you give the iPhone keyboard more focus and attention than touch typing a regular keyboard calls for; the "virtual keyboard" is amazing and it works well when you are looking at it and typing with both thumbs. And once that conceptual jolt is past, it works well.

But what I didn't appreciate when that woman said she had stopped using her computer was that the desktop computer is wherever you have to go to use the desktop computer, while the iPhone is in one's pocket or purse. And there is an incumbency advantage to the iPhone that is in one's pocket or purse. It's not just that you can only use your home computer when you are at home; if you are in one room and the computer is in another, it is less effort to

got a brief email from the phone than go to the other room and use the computer.

Laziness is a factor here; I have used my iPhone over my computer due to laziness. But more broadly a desktop or even laptop computer is in something of a sanctuary, with fewer distractions; the smartphone is wherever you are, and that may be a place with very few distractions, and it may be a place with many distractions.

Smartphones, tablets, netbooks, laptops, and desktops are all computers. The difference between them is how anchored or how portable they work out to be in practice. And the more mobile a computer is, the more effectively it will be as a noise delivery system. The ascetical challenge they represent, and the need to see that we and not the technologies hold the reins, is sharper for the newer and more mobile models.

Social networks (“Anti-Social Media”)

I personally tend not to get sucked in to Facebook; I will go to a social networking site for a very particular reason, and tend not to linger even if I want something to do. There is a reason for this; I had an inoculation. While in high school I served as a student system administrator, on a system whose primary function in actual use was a social network, with messages, chatting, forums, and so on and so forth. I drank my fill of that, so to speak, and while it was nowhere near so user-friendly as Facebook, it was a drug from the same family.

Having been through that, I would say that this is not what friendship is meant to be. It may be that friends who become physically separated will maintain correspondence, and in that case a thoughtful email is not much different from a handwritten letter. As I wrote in "Technonomicon: Technology, Nature, Ascesis:"

- "Social networking" is indeed about people, but there is something about social networking's promise that is like an ambitious program to provide a tofu "virtual chicken" in every pot: there is something unambiguously social about social media, but there is also something as different from what "social" has meant for well over 99% of people as a chunk of tofu is from real chicken's meat.
- There is a timeless way of relating to other people, and this timeless way is a large part of ascesis. This is a way of relating to people in which one learns to relate primarily to people one did not choose, in friendship had more permanency than many today now give marriage, in which one was dependent on others (that is, interdependent with others), in which people did not by choice say goodbye to everyone they knew at once, as one does by moving in America, and a social interaction was largely through giving

one's immediate presence.

- "Social networking" is a very different beast. You choose whom to relate to, and you can set the terms; it is both easy and common to block users, nor is this considered a drastic measure. Anonymity is possible and largely encouraged; relationships can be transactional, which is one step beyond disposable, and many people never meet others they communicate with face-to-face, and for that matter arranging such a meeting is special because of its exceptional character.
- Social networking can have a place. Tofu can have a place. However, we would do well to take a cue to attend to cultures that have found a proper traditional place for tofu. Asian cuisines may be unashamed about using tofu, but they consume it in moderation—and *never* use it to replace meat.
- We need traditional social "meat." The members of the youngest generation who have the most tofu in their diet may need meat the most.

"Teleporters"

I use the term "teleporters" because I do not know of a standard name, besides perhaps the name of one of the eight capital vices, for a class of technologies and other things that are in ways very different from each other but all have the same marketing proposition: *escape*. Not that one needs technologies to do this; metaphysics in the occult sense is another means to the same end. But all of them deliver escape.

A collection of swords is not usually amassed for defense: the owner may be delighted at the chance to learn how to handle a medieval sword, but even if the swords are "battle ready" the point is not self-defense. It's a little bit of something that transports us to another place. Same thing for movies and video games. Same thing for historical re-enactments. Same thing, for that matter, for romances that teach women to covet a relationship with a man that could never happen, and spurn men and possibilities where a genuinely happy marriage can happen. And, for that matter, ten thousand things.

There are many things whose marketing proposition is escape, and they all peter out and leave us coveting more. They are spiritual poison if they are used for escape. There may be other uses and legitimate reasons—iPhones are, besides being "avoid spiritual work" systems, incredibly useful—but the right use of these things is not found in the marketing proposition they offer you.

Television

Television has partly been ousted with Facebook;

TV is stickier than ever, but it still can't compete with the web's stickiest sites.

However, a couple of *Far Side* cartoons on television are worth pondering; if they were written today, they might mention more than TV.

In one cartoon, the caption reads, "In the days before television," and a whole family is staring blankly at a blank spot on a wall, curled around it as if it were a television. The irony, of course, is that this is not what things were like before television began sucking the life out of everything. The days before television were that much more dynamic and vibrant; Gary Larson's caption, with a cartoon that simply subtracts television from the eighties, is dripping with ironic clarity about precisely what the days before television were **not**.

In the other cartoon, an aboriginal tribesman stands at the edge of a chasm, a vine bridge having just been cut and fallen into the chasm and making the chasm impassible. On the other side were a group of angry middle-class suburbanites, and the tribesman was holding a television. The caption read, "And so Mbogo stood, the angry suburbanites standing on the other side of the chasm. Their idol was now his, as well as its curse."

Some years back, an advertising executive wrote, *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (one friend reacted, "The author could only think of four?"), and though the book is decades old it speaks today. All of the other technologies that have been stealing television's audiences do what television did, only more effectively and with more power.

I said at one point that the television is the most expensive appliance you can own. The reasoning was simple. For a toaster or a vacuum cleaner, if it doesn't break, it costs you the up front purchase price, along with electricity, gas, or any other utilities it uses. And beyond those two, there is no further cost as long as it works. But with television, there was the most powerful propaganda engine yet running, advertising that will leave you keeping up with the Joneses (or, as some have argued after comparing 1950's kitchen appliances with 1990's kitchen appliances, keeping up with the Trumps). In this ongoing stream, the programming is the packaging and the advertising is the real content. And the packaging is designed not to steal the show from the content. Today television rules less vast of a realm, but megasites deliver the same principle: the reason you go to the website is a bit of wrapping, and the product being sold is *you*.

Our economy is in a rough state, but welcome to keeping up with the Trumps version 2.0. The subscription fees for smartphones and tablets are just the beginning.

The timeless way of relating

Christopher Alexander saw that computers were going to be the next building, and he was the champion who introduced computer-aided design to the field of architecture. Then he came to a second realization, that computer-aided design may make some things easier and faster, but it does not automatically make a building better: computer aided

design makes it easier to architect good and bad buildings alike, and if you ask computers to make better buildings, you're barking up the wrong fire hydrant.

But this time his work, *A Timeless Way of Building*, fell on deaf ears in the architectural community... only to be picked up by software developers and be considered an important part of object-oriented software design. The overused term MVC ("model-view-controller"), which appears in job descriptions when people need a candidate who solves problems well whether or not that meant using MVC, is part of the outflow of object-oriented programming seeing something deep in patterns, and some programmers have taken a profound lesson from *A Timeless Way of Building* even if good programmers in an interview have to conceal an allergic reaction when MVC is presented as a core competency for almost *any* kind of project.

There really is *A Timeless Way of Building*, and Alexander finds it in some of ancient and recent architecture alike. And in the same vein there is a timeless way of relating. In part we may see it as one more piece of it is dismantled by one more technology migration. But there is a real and live timeless relating, and not just through rejecting technologies.

C.S. Lewis, in a passage in *That Hideous Strength* which has great romantic appeal if nothing else, talks about how everything is coming to a clearer and sharper point. Abraham was not wrong for his polygamy as we would be for polygamy, but there is some sense that he didn't profit from it. Merlin was

not something from the sixth century, but the last survival in the sixth century of something much older when the dividing line between matter and spirit was not so sharp as it is today. Things that have been gray, perhaps not beneficial even if they are not forbidden, are more starkly turning to black or white.

This is one of the least convincing passages for Lewis's effort to speak of "mere Christianity." I am inclined to think that something of the exact opposite is true, that things that have been black and white in ages past have more leniency, more grey. Not necessarily that leniency equals confusion; Orthodoxy has two seemingly antithetical but both necessary principles of *akgravia* (striving for strict excellence) and *oikonomia* (the principle of mercifully relaxing the letter of the law). We seem to live in a time of *oikonomia* from the custom which has the weight of canon law, where (for instance) the ancient upper class did far less physical exertion than the ancient lower class and slaves, but middle class fitness nuts today exercise less than the ancient upper class. Three hours of aerobic exercise is a lot. While we pride ourselves on abolishing legal slavery, we wear not only clothing from sweatshops made at the expense of preventable human misery, but large wardrobes and appliances and other consumer goods that bear a price tag in human misery. Many Orthodox have rejected the position of the Fathers on contraception from time immemorial, and the Church has been secularized enough for many to get their bearings from one article.

But two things are worth mentioning here. The first is that this is a time that invites prophets. Read

the Old Testament prophets: prophets, named "the called ones" in the Old Testament never come when things are going well to say "Keep it up. Carry on your good work!" They come in darker days.

Second, while we live in a time where mere gloom is called light and we rely on much more oikonomia than others, oikonomia is real Orthodoxy in proper working order, and in ways Orthodoxy with oikonomia is much greater than rigidly rejecting oikonomia. The people who call themselves "True Orthodox", or now that "True Orthodox" sounds fishy, rename the term "Genuine Orthodox" to avoid the troubles they have created for the name of "True Orthodox." And despite observing the letter of canons more scrupulously than even the most straight-laced of normal Orthodox, these people are people who don't *get* Orthodoxy, and would do well to receive the penance of eating a thick steak on a strict fast day.

And despite having so many slices taken out, the timeless way of relating is alive and well. It is present at a meal around table with friends. It is present when a man and wife remain together "til death do us part." It is present when Catholics adore the Eucharist, or Evangelicals don't miss a Sunday's church for years and keep up with their quiet times and Bible studies. "Conversation is like texting for adults," said our deacon, and the timeless way of relating is there when people use texting to arrange a face-to-face visit. *The timeless way of relating is always close at hand.*

Video games

I was introduced to the computer game rogue and while in school wanted to play rogue / UltraRogue for as long as I could. When I decided in grad school that I wanted to learn to program, I wrote a crufty and difficult-to-understand roguelike game implemented in 60,000 lines of C.

Those many hours I played in that fantasy land were my version of time lost in television. There are things I could have done that I didn't: create something, explore time outside, write letters. And as primitive and humble as rogue is, it stems from the same root as World of Warcraft. It is one of several technologies I have tasted in an egg: rogue, UltraRogue, The Minstrel's Song, and different MUDs; or a command-line computer doing the work of a social network. And on that score, see Children's toys on Baudelaire's "la Morale du Joujou". The newer games and social network may connect more dots and do some of your imagining for you. The core remains: you sit in front of a computer, transported to a fantasy land, and not exploring the here and now that you have been placed in in all its richness.

The Web

When I was a boy and when I was a youth, it was a sheer delight to go to Honey Rock Camp. I don't want to elaborate on all of my fond memories but I would like to point to one memory in particular: the web.

Resourceful people had taken a World War II surplus piece of netting, attached it to the edges of a simple building, and pulled the center up by a rope.

The result was everything a child wants from a waterbed, and I remember, for instance, kids gathering on the far side of the web, my climbing up the rope, and then letting go and dropping five or ten feet into the web, sending little children flying. And as with my other macho ways of connecting with children, if I did this once I was almost certainly asked to do it again. (The same goes, for some extent, with throwing children into the web.)

I speak of that web in the past tense, because after decades of being a cherished attraction, the web was falling apart and it was no longer a safe attraction. And the people in charge made every effort to replace it, and found to everyone's dismay that they couldn't. Nobody makes those nets; and apparently nobody has one of those nets available, or at least not for sale. And in that regard the web is a characteristic example of how technologies are handled in the U.S. ("*Out with the old, in with the new!*") Old things are discarded, so the easily available technologies are just the newer one.

Software is fragile; most technological advances in both software and hardware are more fragile than what they replace. Someone said, "If builders built buildings the way programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization." The web is a tremendous resource, but it will not last forever, and there are many pieces of technology stack that could limit or shut off the web. Don't assume that because the web is available today it will equally well be available indefinitely.

Conclusion

This work has involved, perhaps, too much opinion and too much of the word "I"; true Orthodox theology rarely speaks of me, "myself, and I," and in the rare case when it is really expedient to speak of oneself, the author usually refers to himself in the third person.

The reason I have referred to myself is that I am trying to make a map that many of us are trying to make sense of. In one sense there is a very simple answer given in monasticism, where renunciation of property includes technology even if obediences may include working with it, and the words Do not store up treasures on earth offer another simple answer, and those of us who live in the world are bound not to be attached to possessions even if they own them. *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* offers a paragraph addressed to married people and a book addressed to monastics, but it has been read with great profit by all manner of people, married as well as monastic.

Somewhere amidst these great landmarks I have tried to situate my writing. I do not say that it is one of these landmarks; it may be that the greatest gift is a work that will spur a much greater Orthodox to do a much better job.

My godfather offered me many valuable corrections when I entered the Orthodox Church, but there is one and only one I would take issue with. He spoke of the oddity of writing something like "the theology of the hammer"; and my own interest in different sources stemmed from reading technological determinist authors like Neil Postman, and even if a stopped clock is right twice a day, their Marxism is a toxic brew.

However, I write less from the seductive effects of those

books, my writing is not because they have written XYZ but because I have experienced certain things in mystical experience. I have a combined experience of decades helping run a Unix box that served as a social network, and playing MUDs, and sampling their newer counterparts. My experience in Orthodoxy has found great mystical truth and depth in the words, Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Part of that pruning has been *the involuntary removal of my skills as a mathematics student*; much of it has been in relation to technology. The Bible has enough to say about wealth and property as it existed millenia ago; it would be strange to say that Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth speaks to livestock and owning precious metals but has nothing to do with iPads.

One saint said that the end will come when one person no longer makes a path to visit another. Even with social media, we now have the technology to do that.

Let our technology be used ascetically, or not at all.

Revelation and Our Singularity

My seminary has Holy Trinity Monastery's (of what jurisdiction I do not know) Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament, five-star-reviewed on Amazon (a lone dissenter gave only four stars), and I decided in prayer to read the commentary on the Book of Revelation, which was translated by Fr. Seraphim and published by his St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood.

It helped, in part, to help me see why Fr. Seraphim is so respected in some quarters, and it does not strike me, as do other translations from the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, as being laced with an occult dimension or TMI that monks should normally flee from exposing to laity. It was, overall, a good and lucid translation of a classic commentary, but... I'm a little bit "not surprised" that the translation of Vladyka's commentary on Revelation was the one translation that appears to be Fr. Seraphim's doing. *It has certain fingerprints.* And at risk of irony as someone who dipped into the beginning of the commentary and then honed in on Revelation, it might gently be pointed out that Revelation is the one book of the New Testament that is

intentionally not read in Orthodox services.

Among the positive points that may be mentioned, in a text that Fr. Seraphim chose to translate and that bears the Brotherhood's imprint, are that Revelation needs to be interpreted with extreme caution, and that responsible interpretation is layered. For instance, without any pretension of a single, exhaustive exegesis, he notes,

9:7-10 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

This description of the monstrous locusts causes some commentators to think that these locusts are nothing else than an allegorical description of human passions. Each of such passions, when it reaches a certain limit, has all the signs of these monstrous locusts. In describing the coming day of the Lord, the holy prophet Joel describes also the appearance before it of destroyers who in part remind one of these locusts.

I suppose that by these locusts one should likely understand the evil demons who have prepared themselves for battle with us, and as signs of victory, wear crowns when we submit to them as having received an evil victory through pleasure. The hair of women [*in cultures where women covered their hair, out of modesty—CJSH*] testifies of the demons' love of pleasure and arousal to fornication; the teeth of lions indicate their hardheartedness; their tails, which are likened to those of scorpions indicate the

consequences of sins, which produce the death of the soul, for *sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death* (Jas 1:15). (St. Andrew, Chapter 26)

But then he goes on:

Contemporary commentators, not without a certain reasonableness, find a kinship of these locusts with airplanes and their bombing attack.

This notes a similarity with admitted caution; Fr. Seraphim's translation earlier quotes the reference to hail, and earlier says, without such restraint, "Does this not refer to an aerial bombardment with its destructive and incendiary bombs," and follows with "Some people see also in this frightful mounted army tanks which spurt forth fire."

What is at issue here? It has been said, "**Nothing is as dated as the future.**" And the text, should future scholars wish to date it, could date this text fairly closely by what technology it sees and what it has no hint of.

There is a counterbalance to "Nothing is as dated as the future." *Things fade in*. Prophecy collapses time without sharply distinguishing similar events that occur at different period, and at oca.org/saints, before the prophecies of St. Nilus, the party that posted St. Nilus's story wrote:

Saint Nilus has left a remarkably accurate prophecy concerning the state of the Church in the mid-twentieth century, and a description of the people of that time. Among the inventions he predicted are the telephone, airplane, and submarine. He also warned that people's minds would be clouded by carnal passions, "and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger." Men would not be distinguishable from women because of their "shamelessness of dress and style of hair." Saint Nilus

lamented that Christian pastors, bishops and priests, would become vain men, and that the morals and traditions of the Church would change. Few pious and God-fearing pastors would remain, and many people would stray from the right path because no one would instruct them.

The person who assessed the text as referring to the mid-twentieth century was in fact not quoting a timeline given by St. Nilus but giving a gloss by the presumably mid-twentieth century author of his life, and St. Nilus did not in fact give any timeline or date that my historical sensitivities could recognize. I have read his prophecies, the real ones that tell what the wording of the Mark of the Beast will be, a point I have never seen on the urban legend channel. But things are fading in. The original life posted referred to the “radio,” not the “telephone.” As far as men being indistinguishable from women, we have far eclipsed the summary of the prophecy above, which has no concept of widespread sex-change attempts. As far as passions go, we now have a sewer’s worth of Internet porn. The prophecy could apply as much to scuba diving even better than submarines, but the oca.org/saints wording has not been changed. The prophecies stated that wisdom would be found that would let men speak in one place and be heard across the world, a prediction which has faded in in the radio, then also the telephone, then also the Zoom chat. What next? As far as the morals and tradition of the Church, contraception has transformed into being broadly seen as a legitimate option to Orthodox. Examples could easily be multiplied, but I think it would be better to recognize the singularity we live in, a singularity that is unfolding on many dimensions (the gender rainbow, the river of blood from black-on-black murders ever since “Black Lives Matter” took to the forefront (could we please reverse course and go for “All Black Lives Matter?”), a singularity following a century that with artists like Picasso radically transforming artistic conventions that a historian should regard as being like an eyeblink. Now changes

are continuing to roll out, at an accelerating pace in a singularity. In a matter of weeks, models who were not half-starved began to be rolled out. Politically correct pictures of people usually did not show white people alone; they included a person of color. Now a further installment has been made: some pictures have a woman wearing Muslim hajibs, and increasingly common are wheelchairs to include people with disabilities (please note that most disabilities, including mine, do not have people using a wheelchair). And dominoes are falling: not only BLM, which seems to always and only be in reference to blacks needlessly killed by white police and by white police alone, but Islam's surge (with atheislam in which the West accepts under an iron yoke what it spurned under a yoke that is easy and a burden that is light), the cyber-quarantine, vaccines that will be socially mandated, transgender being in truth a prominent and well-integrated addition to what was once really just mostly "LGB", with schoolchildren being told "There's no right or wrong age to fall in love" (one archpriest called a spade a spade and said, "Putting the P in LGBTQP+"), and so on.

Furthermore, if I may offer what may seem an overly fine distinction, I think that matching up current events to details of Revelation is best avoided, but understanding that we are in a singularity and understanding that similarity may have value.

I had conversations with an adviser who really should have known better, who asked me, in asking if I was meeting basic duty, "Do you make allowances for greater ignorance in the past?" I answered:

I don't make allowances for greater ignorance in the past. Allowances for different ignorance in the past are more negotiable. And I would quote General Omar Bradley: "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount."

I don't want to give an uncritical endorsement of the "Nature

Connection” movement, as it seemed as I went through the eight shields thinking always, “This is overall good but I’m holding my nose at the spot we are in now,” and eventually “I *don’t* need Coyote as a totem.”

However, any serious attempt to hear out nature connection, even as literature one does not give more than a willing suspension of disbelief, is that we have lost things that were known to past generations, and that surviving hunter-gatherers have an incredible richness in sensitivity to their surroundings and layers of patterns suburbanites can miss. And the advisor, in my opinion, had read too many ancient texts, and in the original, to have legitimate innocence in seeing the difference in knowledge as ancient Aramaic texts fail to reflect the victories of the Scientific Revolution.

I might briefly comment on the singularity we are in:

Recorded history does not really date past ten thousand years. The non-Neanderthal subspecies all living humans belong to dates back to perhaps forty times that length, and our genus dates back to two or four hundred times that length. *Less than one percent of all humans who have ever lived have ever seen a written/printed word, let alone mass produced technology even on par with a pencil or knife.*

I might comment briefly, if perhaps only to Jerry Root and other C.S. Lewis fans, that C.S. Lewis raised an objection to standard evolution that was a form of what is called self-referential incoherence. If evolution is true, then it explains why we have good enough brains to find food, avoid being eaten, and produce offspring... but not why we would have good enough brains to put together a true theory of evolution. Knowledge of evolution is no more than a biochemical reaction as romantic love is no more than a biochemical reaction, and it reflects philosophical confusion of a major order to say it is even theoretically possible that our theory of evolution could be true. This has been answered in part with a suggestion that evolution would select for brains that could find things that were true, but

if that is the case, assuming evolution is true, it is an extremely parochial elite, less than 2% of the age of civilization and less than .0001% of the time people have been around that evolution has given anyone the kind of brains that evolution selects for. In my opinion that response to an objection shows serious philosophical muddle. And, incidentally, I believe that Fr. Seraphim was right, at least as regards popular culture, that evolution is not doing the job of a scientific theory, but the job of philosophy that allows atheism to account for what over 99% of humans have ever lived have seen as the work of some form of spirit.

Now before getting back to Fr. Seraphim, let me get back to my advisor. Elsewhere in our discussion, he hypothetically mentioned ancient prophecies of “mushroom clouds” that would “flatten cities,” and benighted ancients failing to understand a reference to nuclear warfare that is neither particularly like toadstools in a forest, nor something that would make a smooth, level surface out of a city. I think I thought of, but did not mention, a suggestion that “mushroom clouds” are not the only way an ancient prophecy could describe global thermonuclear war; “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places” (Rev 6:14) could be read as a surprisingly straightforward ancient prophetic description of conditions of nuclear war.

And there are other comparisons that could be drawn. I intentionally don't want to belabor where tempting comparisons could be made, but the Internet and the whole locus of electronic technology could be described as fire from Heaven in “great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,” (Rev 13:13), and “With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Rev. 17:5), where a basic utility, a socially mandated technology, includes an endless sewer of porn if you want it, and really at least soft porn if you try to research

innocent topics on YouTube. There is more I could belabor: SecondLife fascinates the public and has been called SecondWife, with stern moralists saying, “Fornicate using your OWN genitals!” And about Babylon being thrown into the sea, I believe that it will be at some point as easy to take down any technological Babylon as start a nuclear war, and that inadvertently. Read The Damned Backswing as written in fifteen feet high blinking neon about our stack of technologies.

(Fr. Seraphim quotes, “If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his share in the tree of life,” and the commentary underscores that Revelation ends with “a strict warning not to distort the words of the prophecy under threat of the application of the plagues that are written in this book.” I might suggest that it may be, if not exactly clear-cut wrong, at least in a gray area to add exact historical correspondences where fire and hail simply refer to aerial bombardment—or fire from Heaven (some people believe Elijah’s “fire from Heaven” as being lightning), simply as neither more nor less than the lightning-like electricity that powers electronic gadgets. There are some points of contact, but it is not clear to me that it is right to make such a simple and complete identification of one historic detail with one text in Revelation.)

However, I present these to illustrate a temptation. **Nothing is as dated as the future.** An archaeologist of the future, if the Lord tarries (a point on which I am unclear and perhaps must be unclear), who found this article as somehow surviving the Digital Dark Ages and/or World War III, could closely date this article based on the major technologies I call out and the major technologies I don’t show a hint of imagining. I wrote, Recognize that it will be easier to get the people out of the cyber-quarantine than to get the cyber-quarantine, our new home, out of the people. We have already with our Zoom chats laid practical foundations for George Orwell’s 1984.

(And I might briefly state that I believe the examples I gave, if there is far future history to assess this article, will be much more dated than Einstein's simple prediction: "I do not know what weapons World War III will be fought with, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones." That kind of statement tells scarcely less but is far less dated.)

And I would like to state now a cardinal point:

I would be very careful about recognizing prophecies fulfilled in Revelation, but I would be much faster to observe ways in which we live within a singularity, and that is a singularity on par with what is called a singularity in modern physics when a black hole is formed.

There was a classic set of AT&T ads, dated to 1993, with the classic AT&T Death Star logo, looking like a dark vintage science fiction movie:

[See tinyurl.com/you-will-and-the-company]

And on a humor newsgroup someone followed up with:

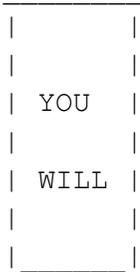
Have you ever received an automated sales pitch,
while you were still in your pajamas?

Have you ever had thousands of calls all over
the world charged to your stolen account number?

Have you ever had your paycheck deleted
by faceless intruders from across the globe?

Have you ever had an employer know more about your
whereabouts and activities than your spouse?

Have you ever been snuffed to dust by a
satellite laser while lying on the beach?



And the company that will bring this to you

is AT&T

There was one thing that AT&T wasn't straightforward about:

No technology is permanently exotic.

The AT&T commercial portrays a world of wonder. However, "YOU WILL" is not especially wondrous to those of us living in that dark science fiction reality. We do not wonder at electronic toll collection; we do not wonder at being able to access webpages on another continent. *No technology is permanently exotic*, and we can obtain momentary relief by upgrading to the newest and hottest gadget, but then, alcoholics can obtain momentary relief of the living Hell of alcoholism by getting really drunk. The short-term fix does not work in the long run, and is in fact counterproductive. **As far as (anti-)social media go, we have delivered the equivalent of a tofu virtual chicken in every pot.** And tofu does not just feel and taste gross; it is nutritionally an absolutely terrible surrogate for real, honest animal protein. And even the parody left out one point in retrospect: "*Have you ever been drained at compulsively checking your phone at least a hundred times a day?* YOU WILL, and the companies that will bring it to you include AT&T. *T."

A Bookshelf for Our Day

Let me give a few titles that I would strongly recommend reading, preferably in paper (kids, go ask your great-grandparents):

Francis Oakley, *The Medieval Experience: Foundations of Western Cultural Singularity*

I'm going to open this list with a dud. I am, or at least have been, a medievalist at heart; one of my books is a take on Arthurian legend, *The Sign of the Grail*, although I have since done something that is overdue. I have backed away from Arthurian legend as however enchanting it may seem if you don't know it, not being particularly edifying or profitable to explore.

It has been said that the singularity we live in now is the fruit of what developed in the Middle Ages. However, *The Medieval Experience* left me completely underwhelmed, and furthermore the more background knowledge I had of an area, the more hollow a failure to walk in another person's shoes the text appeared to be.

In the last real chapter, about precursors to feminism, the author quotes a non-medievalist Ibsen in words I wish to repeat in gory detail:

HELMER: To forsake your home, your husband, and your children! And you don't consider what the world will say.

NORA: I can pay no heed to that. I only know that I must do it.

HELMER: This is monstrous! Can you forsake your holiest duties in this way?

NORA: What do you consider my holiest duties?

HELMER: Do I need to tell you that? Your duties to your husband and your children.

NORA: I have other duties equally sacred.

HELMER: Impossible! What duties do you mean?

NORA: My duties towards myself.

HELMER: Before all else you are a wife and a mother.

NORA: That I no longer believe. I believe that before all else I am a human being, just as much as you are—or at least that I should try to become one.

It is a sign of feminism's hegemony that at least some women, despite every effort to want a career, ask "*What is wrong with me?*" because after all feminist direction they have received, they still can't dislodge a fundamental desire to get married and have kids. This last major chapter in *The Medieval Experience* falls squarely in the "She shall be saved *from* childbearing" camp, and all accounts of the good and/or improving state of women in the Middle Ages describes precursors to feminism's desire that a woman not be a homemaker. It doesn't just say that a woman should have other options besides being homemakers; it is that precursors to the good estate of women are always in terms of dislodging women from the role of wife and mother no matter how much women should want to be homemakers. And on this count, not a word of the book's account of proto-feminist tendencies shows the slightest acknowledgment and respect for some women wanting to be wives and mothers.

This book represents to me a missed opportunity. And

for a book copyrighted in 1974, it doesn't seem to show the empathic understanding for today's singularity that it might, alongside failing to walk in a medieval mom's shoes. The original copyright year is the same year as Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television*, and Mander's title remains salient several decades later and after profound increases in technology, but *The Medieval Experience* is as a whole forgettable and gives remarkably little insight into the medieval experience as foundations of Western cultural singularity.

C.S. Lewis, *That Hideous Strength*

This book is a little bit more of a near miss.

I do not count it as a strike against this book that it takes some effort to appreciate; I am more than willing to recommend a book that will challenge its readers. But nonetheless, I see one or two major strikes against the book. Quite simply, it leads the reader to covet magic and many of its most tantalizing passages tantalize with magic from Atlantis. Furthermore, the character of Merlin is singularly riveting. One definition that has been used to describe the difference between a flat and a rounded character is, "A rounded character believably surprises the reader." Merlin comes awfully close to delivering nothing but believable surprises. And even if Ransom sharply limits Merlin's initiative, Merlin's presence is a problem. And I say that as someone who bore the nickname "Merlin" in high school.

However, this book is valuable in offering a sort of literary "YOU WILL" commercials, which admittedly did not portray how we are glued to mobile devices. The heroes are a delight to read about; the villains are more of a chore to read about, and the banality of evil comes through loud and clear. *Furthermore*, it is a description of a singularity,

and on that point it is the closest work of fiction I know to a fictionalized telling of the singularity we are in.

On that score, *That Hideous Strength* is well worth the effort to appreciate.

Philip Sherrard, *The Rape of Man and Nature: An Enquiry into the Origins and Consequences of Modern Science*

A couple of comments about the author of this book. First, he is an important figure in the history of English-speaking Orthodoxy and did major work rendering the *Philokalia* in English. Second, he is a hypocrite and an old rogue. He has blasted the Western musical tradition, which an Orthodox might legitimately do, but one friend came to visit him and found him blasting out Wagner's opera, and that's Wagner's opera as in "Wagner's opera is not as bad as it sounds." I would also comment on how he writes.

The Rape of Man and Nature deals in caricatures and not the written equivalent of photorealism. However, this has usefulness if it is taken as caricatures and not a literal account of facts. It is a finding in psychology that people recognize someone more readily from a caricature than from a photograph, and the caricature artist's job is to take the most striking and salient features in e.g. someone's face, and then portray them in exaggeration that yields a striking clarity. And if Sherrard is a caricature artist in *The Rape of Man and Nature*, he is an excellent caricature artist.

This book really is a close "near miss," and I would readily recommend it for people who want a little bit of a feel of what was lost in the Scientific Revolution, and of what developments contributing to our ongoing singularity lost alongside scientific and technical gains.

Jean-Claude Larchet, *The New Media Epidemic: The*

Undermining of Society, Family, and Our Own Soul

I've mentioned other titles as near misses. This one doesn't just score a basket; it is nothing but net. (In more ways than one.)

I'm not going to try to list everything that is worth reading in this title. Buy it and read it yesterday.

C.J.S. Hayward, *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*

I'm not going to write at length about why I believe my work is relevant, but my suspicion is that this book and not the overlapping *The Best of Jonathan's Corner* will be my most lasting contribution, if (of course) the Lord tarries.

At the time of its writing, it has two stars on Amazon, two reviews, and no customer ratings. I would ask the interested reader to read what the *Midwest Book Review* has to say about it.

Looking back at C.S. Lewis

"These days of final apostasy" is not a new phrase; St. John Chrysostom in fact said that the world was breaking apart and coming to an end, but while antiquity ended, the world has continued.

The world has continued, and C.S. Lewis, on the eve of World War II, famously addressed students, "Life has never been normal. Humanity has always been on a precipice," although it may be that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night because the end of the world has been so insistently predicted over the ages that no one takes the message seriously.

I think it is worth understanding to what extent we live in a singularity, and we have multiple things that could be apocalyptic events: apart from the obvious threat of global thermonuclear war in a world where each city and each major university has a

hydrogen bomb aimed at it, the Internet could collapse like an increasingly brittle house of cards, and take the economy down with it. Or things could continue to change and new societal vulnerabilities could develop. The pace of change has been accelerating, and it might well continue accelerating until there is a step that is *sui generis*, on par with C.S. Lewis in the nonfiction fraternal twin to *That Hideous Strength: The Abolition of Man*, in which Lewis describes the final step in “man’s victory over nature:”

The wresting of powers *from* Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature...

Man’s conquest of Nature, if the dreams of some scientific planners are realized, means the rule of a few hundreds of men over billions upon billions of men. There neither is nor can be any simple increase of power on Man’s side. Each new power won *by* man is a power *over* man as well. Each advance leaves him weaker as well as stronger. In every victory, besides being the general who triumphs, he is also the prisoner who follows the triumphal car...

Man’s conquest of Nature turns out, in the moment of its consummation, to be Nature’s conquest of Man. Every victory we seemed to win has led us, step by step, to this conclusion. All Nature’s apparent reverses have been but tactical withdrawals. We thought we were beating her back when she was luring us on. What looked to us like hands held up in surrender was really the opening of arms to enfold us for ever.

I do not know how the world will end, or whether the apocalypse will turn out to be anything like any of the possibilities I mentioned. There has already passed a moment when a nuclear power ordered a military officer to launch global

thermonuclear war. That was during the Cuban missile crisis, and all of us are alive today only in the wake of a soldier who refused to obey an unconditional order. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ says, "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" God provided a way out of global thermonuclear war then, and he may shelter us, at least for a time, from a meltdown of the Internet. We live and die as God allows, and he may sustain us still. He may give us more to repent. Since Christ's First Coming, his Second Coming has always been imminent, and part of what I omitted from C.S. Lewis's passage above is a reality that has not literally been fulfilled even when That Hideous Strength's Pragmatometer is live in what is fed to us by the Internet:

The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself.

It is my own opinion that "a perfect applied psychology" is by definition a pipe dream, a materialist's explanation of spiritual phenomena such as is discussed in *How to Think About Psychology: An Orthodox Look at a Secular Religion*. But it is possible that Nature's final conquest of Man as described above will come without needing all-powerful eugenics, prenatal conditioning, or a perfect applied psychology. Pipe dreams have already become real. And one world government is an increasingly real possibility on more grounds than technology.

Conclusion

I have begun with an Orthodox Fr. Seraphim of Plantina and ended with a Protestant C.S. Lewis. The turn is not expected of an Orthodox author, but I have generally had an easier time with

C.S. Lewis fans than those of Fr. Seraphim.

All the same, I hope to have shed some light in the process, and introduced a useful distinction between donning X-Ray goggles that let you infallibly identify historic details cryptically referred to by the details of Revelation, and recognizing and understanding that we live in a singularity very different from that of over 99.9% of humans who have ever lived.

Much Love,
Christos

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

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

Truth to tell, I've always had something of a soft spot for the Archbishop. He's liberally daffy but more amusingly candid than most of that persuasion. Of course he has a very high opinion of himself, but he's never tried to hide it. I particularly liked his public statement that he would have made a great Bishop of Salzburg in the time of Mozart but ended up as Bishop of Milwaukee in the time of rock and roll. There's something perversely refreshing about a bishop who doesn't mind saying that he's too good for the people he's called to serve.

If I had been meant to live in Salzburg at Mozart's time,

God would have done that. If I had been meant to live in the Middle Ages, in the desire that underpinned my second novel, God would have done that. And if I if I had been made to live in the age of many Church Fathers, God would have done that too. As it is, God's providence has placed me here and now... and God may make of me a Church Father anyway, without a time machine. To nostalgic Romans, it may be a sadness that the door to the Middle Ages is closed, but to Orthodox living at the corner of east and now, the door to being patristic remains ever open, and I may die (or be subtilized by the returning Christ) a Church Father anyway. As things are, God has given me a whole lot of being in the right place in the right time, and put me in the days of... *C.J.S. Hayward!* I got onto the web by accident (or rather by providence that I did not see as significant) and I have multiple major websites and a big bookshelf on Amazon.

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

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

And in all this, I am *grateful*. St. John Chrysostom's final words were, "Glory be to God for all things!" and I echo them. I have food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and really quite a lot of things that I do not need and I am not entitled to. I only need to be faithful today with what I have

today. God will bring tomorrow, and not knowing what tomorrow may bring is much less important if you know Who will bring tomorrow.

And my death is, basically, non-negotiable. God, in his great mercy, does not let us know ahead of time when we die, because we would put off repentance and be incorrigible sinners in the hour of death. A few saints know ahead when they will die. They are so secure spiritually that they will not be less faithful for knowing. For the rest of us, it is mercy that we do not know. I could, possibly, die within days. I could for that matter die sooner: when I got my first COVID injection, a blood clot formed in my leg and dislodged to make trouble in my lungs, and the doctor said I was lucky I got to the hospital when I did, because it could have killed me. I think COVID injections are the greatest breakthrough in human health since DDT, but I digress. I could die an old man, like my grandfather who lived to be 95. I could live to see the returning Christ. And which of these, or other possibilities, hold, is not my concern. Each day has enough trouble of its own—and I have found solving a life's problems on a day's resources to be an entirely preventable ticket to despair.

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

This makes what we choose in this life incredibly important. We can only “save for retirement” between birth and death. We can only repent between birth and death. After death, improving the lot we have eternally chosen in this life will be impossible. I wish to live in repentance for

the rest of my life, but I have not gotten to monasticism yet, but if death cuts short my attempts, that matters less than you might think. God treats an active intent as if the person had done what is intended; I do not see I can rightly stop seeking monastic repentance, but if I am faithful and fail, I am in the same position as martyrs said to be “baptized in their own blood” because they were martyred before they could even reach *baptism*.

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

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

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

As to the question of why God did not create Narnia and bring me to it, I reply that every excellence is incomparably excelled in what “eye has not seen, ear has

not heard, nor any heart imagined what God has prepared for those who love him." I can't get to a real Narnia, but I'm trying to get to a real "better than Narnia," a "better than Narnia that begins on earth, as I discuss in A Pilgrimage from Narnia:

A Pilgrimage from Narnia

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

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

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

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,

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

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

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

But our active engagement with the here and now,
And in this here and now we move,
Further up and further in!

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

Spake a man who suffered sorely:
For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time,
Are not worthy to be compared with the glory which
shall be revealed in us, and:
Know ye not that we shall judge angels?
For the way of humility and tribulation we are
beckoned to walk,
Is the path of greatest glory.

We do not live in the best of all possible worlds,
 But we have the best of all possible Gods,
 And live in a world ruled by the him,
 And the most painful of his commands,
 Are the very means to greatest glory,
 Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,
 To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,
 An instant of earthly apprenticeship,
 To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:
 He saved others, himself he cannot save,
 Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:
 But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,
 Turned to gold,
 And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:
 Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:
 Further up and further in!

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

Verily, verily, I say to thee,
 When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself,
 And walkedst whither thou 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!

And for our world, I would quote C.S. Lewis in saying that “humanity has always been on a precipice.” Such study as I have had of Byzantine history leads me not to wonder that Constantinople fell, but that over a millennium after Constantine, after many times the Empire should have resolved, it took modern *cannons* to break through Constantinople's walls and subdue the great city. “Humanity has always been on a precipice”—and it seems to be increasingly more of a precipice.

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

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

find certain underlying themes in many world religions that are threatened in the modern way of life and are sympathetic to Hindus who would see a Kali-yuga:

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

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

A student of World War II may be able to pinpoint a linchpin in German manufacturing. There was a single point of failure in a ball bearing factory. If that factory had been taken out, it would all but destroyed Nazi Germany's capability to produce cars, trucks, tanks, and airplanes. Or in other words, it would have crushed their balls. Now let me ask: where is the lynchpin in our technological society? *Trick question!* There are so many that no one knows how

many there are. One of the most Luddite statements I've read is from a computer programmer: "If builders built buildings the way computer programmers write programs, the first woodpecker that came along would destroy civilization."

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

To put things in miniature, like almost any at least half-serious website I have switched from sending unencrypted HTTP to confidential HTTPS. This was a right decision, I believe. However, to do that I need to get a stream of certificates, and if someone by any means shut down my ability to obtain certificates, my website would practically be dead in the water. Search engines would now be linking to security error pages; even bookmarks wouldn't work. I might be able to get the word out that my website was served via HTTP, if I wasn't blocked from social media by that time, but my use of the recommended practice of serving webpages confidentially via HTTPS introduces one more single point of failure. (That's why I'm revamping and

roughly doubling my “Complete Works” collections in paperback. Amazon believes it has a total right to delete anything from a Kindle any time.) We are going from fragile to more and more and more fragile, to an effect like that in “The Damned Backswing.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We live in an **exciting** time.

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

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

The Consolation of Theology

Song I.

The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,
When one saint stopped his ears,
And said, '*Good God!*
That thou hast allowed me,
To live at such a time.'
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:
Atheislam welcometh captors;
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things
Christian,
The dragon next to whom,
Arius, father of heretics,
Is but a fangless worm.
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,
From, '*God and the Son of God,*

*Became Man and the Son of Man,
That men and the sons of men,
Might become Gods and the Sons of God,'*
By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.
The wonder of holy marriage,
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,
In progressive installments old and new,
Technology a secular occult is made,
Well I wrote a volume,
The Luddite's Guide to Technology,
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,
Is taught a 'theology,'
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.
And of my own life; what of it?
A monk still I try to be;
Many things have I tried in life,
And betimes met spectacular success,
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.
Even in work in technology,
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,
And not only in the Church's teaching,
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,
Of "The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab."
And why I must now accomplish so little,
To pale next to glorious days,
When a-fighting cancer,
I switched discipline to theology,
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,
Wished to form priests,
But a wish that never came true?

I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Partiarth were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **X**, and **A**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, 'Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?':

A novice said to a master, "I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people's minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?"

The master said, "Inside your heart."

He spoke again. 'Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, "Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?" Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?

"Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my "Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?" How the three children, my son,

in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and

heresy and give not a day's tribute to the professorial 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 boggling 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 wareth 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 counselor 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 ranked in 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 – I placed you precisely in the “school” where they teach this lesson. Your environment, and those who are around you, are performing My will. Do you have financial difficulties and can just barely survive? Know that This was from Me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

have given you these difficulties and as the Lord God I will bless all your works, in all your paths. In everything I, your Lord, will be your guide and teacher. Remember always that every difficulty you come across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written

“Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret,” and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

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

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

Song IV.

Virtue Unconquerable.

I know that my Redeemer liveth,
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,
But what a painful road it has been,
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?
I only think so in moments of pride,
With my grandeur only in repentance.
And the circumstances around me,
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to

best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the *Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the *Philokalia*: the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

Flow, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso's entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

'It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but

freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall “novices’ obediences”, it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

‘And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

‘But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk’s *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and ’tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of the *Philokalia* is *The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers*. If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured

marriage too, in force now that the Philokalia hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of

argument, or if thou preferrest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society’s *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

‘Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

‘Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have

suffering that could be compared to that of one's own poor, miserable demographic.

'But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled "Love Without Boundaries," and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it—on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father's love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

'And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

'It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named "psychology", the name were oafishly or treacherously

applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of ανθρωπος (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point

identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from

Buddhism's Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton's observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology's claim of secularity at face value. The *Philokalia* is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

'And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, "The Trouble with TED," for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

'She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a

monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What *is* the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go

out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensauple of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

Song V.

O Holy Mother!

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?
 Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?
 For I have written much,
 And spent much care,
 In *The Luddite’s Guide to Technology*,
 And looked all the whilst,
 Down the wrong end,
 Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.
 I have written of man and creation defiled,
 Yet for all my concerns,
 Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’
 Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’
 Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,
 Of our embodied state,
 Where better to seek healing,
 For an occult-free simulation,
 Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,
 Than in the perfect creaturely response,

'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.
Be it unto me according to thy word.'
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,
Whom Christ told the Disciple,
'Behold thy Mother!'
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,
And She is the Friend and Comfort,
Of the outcast, and the poor:
My money, my property, I stand to lose:
But no man can take from me,
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;
Perhaps I would do well,
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading
humanity,
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,
And give Her a trust in the great Story,
Diminished not one whit,
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:
And such it is also,
With illuminèd teachers,
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,
And are in travail,
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

V.

He said, 'But let us return to the pursuit of happiness,

which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest a Fluxx deck to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed the game of Fluxx, though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he

to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son's head against the ceiling. The boy's mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

'Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of "Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?" Just being polite were off the table.

'And this is not even only true for the royal race of men. Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home, and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

'Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than

receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount, and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

‘The word translated, “blessed,” *μακαριος* (*makarios*), hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which

render the word as “happy,” including *Young's Literal Translation*:

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness' sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the *Amplified Bible* naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate

words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was εὐδαιμονία, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of

them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

“Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to

the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

Song VI.

Crossing the Great Threshold.

The tale were told,
 Of a child starkly scant of mind,
 Who received a glittering package, a gift,
 And kept the glittering package,
 Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,
 And after long time,
 When the disposable wrapping paper,
 Were well battered and now dingy,
 An adult asked,
 ‘Aren’t you going to open the package?’
 The child exclaimed with joy,
 Once the toy emerged from the tatters,
 And squealed with joy, saying,
 “Oh, there’s *another* present!”
 My Lord and my God!
 Perhaps I will never open,
 The Sermon on the Mount.

VI.

I said myself then, ‘O John! O glorious Saint John!
 Canst thou lead me on a path into the the Sermon on the
 Mount? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well
 nigh destroyed me.’

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are "poor in spirit," beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

'In the Sermon on the Mount, poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth

the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not only by force, but even with words, showing

the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than "Christian." And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond "Good riddance!" The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: "I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!"

"Thou readedst a church sign saying, "Who is rich? The person who is content." And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.'

Song VII.

I Sing a Song to my Apple.

Betimes my salad days were right begun,
 I programmed an Apple][,
 In gradeschool adventure games and a 4D maze,
 Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.

My father a computer scientist,
Who shared with me his joy,
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.
My family got, and still hath the carcass,
Of one original 'fat Mac',
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of
RAM.

My calculator in high school,
On which I programmed computer-generated art,
And a simple video game, had as much.
Ere my salad days were dwindled,
I remained a Unix programmer,
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.
Later I had iPhones,
And for the first time in my life,
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,
My desire increased as I read about it,
And vanished when I learned it were,
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.
I gave it to my brother,
Who later gave it back before it broke.
I sing a song to my Apple,
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,
Which through minor design flaw,
Burned through video cards oft enough,
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without
frequent \$500 repairs.
And along the way,
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,
Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of

Unix.

When I asked about one cardinally important open source project,

I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,

That the project needed to run,

But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,

Was the command line equivalent of point and click.

It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.

I sing a song to Apple's technical support,

For when I asked a question,

About command-line-driven Apache configuration,

It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,

Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.

I purchased a computer meant to last many years.

I sing a song to my late iPhone,

Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,

Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,

Booted my laptop into Windows and found,

That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.

I went to see an Apple Store,

And received a followup call,

Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,

And found out also that Macs were as useless,

As my computer booted into Windows,

To Find My iPhone.

Once I had one from each four,

Offerings for Apple computers:

A laptop one, an iPad one,

An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;

And ere I were negotiating,

For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,
I said that there were many Android devices within my
budget,
And whilst in bed realized,
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.
But even if one may argue, legitimately,
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,
I was not poisoned by technical merits.
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,
That all but killed my prospects,
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained
completely,
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,
I went to voicemail immediately:
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;
Screaming and abusive,
To employees he had every reason to cherish,
And after a technical fumble,
Publicly fired an Apple technician,
At an employee motivational event.
And I believed it.
More disturbed I was,
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,
As opening the mind to listen,

And draw the milk of dragons.
Technology does things for us,
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices
with children,
Squabble and squabble ensued.
Technology does things for us,
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,
Even wert they to try.
The power of devils is real but limited:
Such teaches the *Philokalia*,
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,
Than aught else that I have read.
And one thing it sayeth,
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,
Where men have free will, still,
The devils cannot read minds,
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,
And behold, they speak and art deceived,
That devils can read people's minds.
Devilish predictions are called guesses,
Which are sometimes wrong,
The devils see a man walking to journey,
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.
St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,
But we may not yet be in the clear.
And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under

surveillance,”

Where No Such Agency has received every email,
 It is now clear and open knowledge,
 To those that will reflect,
 That among most most Americans,
 ‘Every breath and step Americans take,’
 Is monitored by Big Brother,
 But perhaps it is not just human agencies,
 That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*? It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets, Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze, And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, ‘I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas’s famous 55 maxims:

55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by

discipline.

4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.

16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.
29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.

31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.

45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.

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

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on

darkness, temptation and sin.

Song VIII.

A Hymn to Arrogance.

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,
 ‘There be no war in Heaven,
 Not now, at very least,
 And not ere were created,
 The royal race of mankind.
 Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,
 And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.
 There were war in Heaven but ever brief,
 The Archangel Saint Michael,
 Commander of the bodiless hosts,
 Said but his name, “Michael,”
 Which is, being interpreted,
 “Who is like God?”
 With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,
 Sore losers one and all.
 They remain to sharpen the faithful,
 God useth them to train and make strength.
 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?
 Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?
 As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,
 Or as if the staff should lift up itself,
 As if it were no wood.
 Therefore be not dismayed,
 If one book of Holy Scripture state,
 That the Devil incited King David to a census,
 And another sayeth that God did so,

For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,
And God gave to David a second opportunity,
In the holy words of Joab.
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,
To know that God is greater than can be thought,
And hath neither equal nor opposite,
The Devil is if anything the opposite,
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,
Though truth be told,
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,
The Devil fared him not well.
The dragon wert as a little boy,
Standing outside an Emperor's palace,
Shooting spitwads with a peashooter,
Because that wert the greatest harm,
That he saweth how to do.
The Orthodox Church knoweth well enough,
'The feeble audacity of the demons.'
Read thou well how the Devil crowned St. Job,
The Devil and the devils aren't much,
Without the divine permission,
And truth be told,
Ain't much with it either:
God alloweth temptations to strengthen;
St. Job the Much-Suffering emerged in triumph.
A novice told of an odd clatter in a courtyard,
Asked the Abbot what he should do:
"It is just the demons.
Pay it no mind," came the answer.
Every devil is on a leash,

And the devout are immune to magic.
 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder:
 The young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under
 feet.
 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.
 Wherefore be thou not arrogant towards men,
 But be ever more arrogant towards devils and the Devil
 himself:
 “Blow, and spit on him.”

VIII.

I told St. John, ‘I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.’

He said, ‘Doth that surprise thee?’

I said, ‘Perhaps it should not. But the *Philokalia* describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.’

He said, ‘How readest thou that parable?’

I said, ‘In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, “I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse.” Which were, “You can’t take it with you,” save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. (’Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some

suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.'

The Saint told me, 'Thou hast read part of *Prayers by the Lake*, in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

'Rememberest thou also that in the *Philokalia* we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope 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 paten and chalice glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal

eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I'd been in my life.

Conclusion

An illustration from physics

In the physics behind gravity, objects are like balls rolling around on a rubber sheet. Everything distorts the sheet around it, a little, and objects roll towards other things that distort the sheet enough, and that is gravity. You are pulled towards other objects in the room, but only the earth's gravitational pull is enough to easily recognize as 'gravity': other things pull you by much less than the weight of a mosquito. The only gravitational pull that really matters is the one downward to the earth.

If something is superlatively heavy, it keeps warping the sheet around it more and more until it becomes a singularity, and something different happens, like the rubber sheet collapses in on itself or rips. It becomes a "gravitationally completely collapsed object", a gravitational *singularity* or more commonly a *black hole*: something so dense that not even light can escape its pull—something so different has happened to the sheet that the feature is

different from the "rest" of the sheet altogether.

It is my suggestion that we are in a *singularity* in this world today, and one of its dimensions is technology in its social aspects, though the singularity includes political, economic, and other dimensions. All of these pieces are about *how* we live in a singularity, with attention to technology, and connected spirituality, as its dimensions. And it is also about how to live in such a singularity, and what right spirituality looks like. The blows of this singularity might be the Antichrist knocking at our world's door.

It might be flippant to call this the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Singularity*, but it is a guide to navigating one dimension of the singularity, that of technology. Other dimensions are in genuine continuity.

A personal note

This collection could be my only lasting contribution to the conversation. It is not a collection of all my best work; *The Best of Jonathan's Corner* is that, and it collects several times more work than this title. But the best of what it says, by design, has been said before. "A Pet Owner's Rules" speaks well, but better has been said by the saint who penned "A Treatise to Prove That No One Can Harm the Man Who Does Not Injure Himself." This collection is a little different, and it says something about technology, faith, and the singularity that is crystallized in "Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy, that has perhaps not been said in the same form.

In looking back over my life, and what I have accomplished and what I have not succeeded at, it may be

that the trajectory that shone as a mathlete at the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, that came to work when I intended to earn a PhD, invest money, and then think about problems in society, may have come true by any route. I have not succeeded at earning a PhD in any sense, and there have been some doors slammed shut in that area. And at any rate thinking about society's issues from an Orthodox understanding takes a back seat to praying about them, which in turn takes a back seat to praying and repenting of my own private sewer of failings. But what study of math turned into computers (MS Math/CSE, UIUC), and study of theology (MPhil Theology, Cambridge) have come to is that I have been able to write what is encapsulated in this book. But more broadly, I encourage you to read *The Best of Jonathan's Corner*; it is loosely the best 10% of the slightly more than two Bibles' length of material I have posted on the web. And perhaps more than I think in that volume will be lasting. But as I look at the winding path of my life so far, I have come to a point of being able to write the works enclosed in this volume.

Perhaps that is enough.

And I would add last comment. I have tried to write a good treatment of technology for Orthodox, but my ideal goal is not to establish any *last* word in discussion, but to establish a good **first** word in discussion that may contribute to Orthodoxy clarifying Herself with regards to the things one can own today, as She has already done for the things one might own in ages past.

I hope this helps!

Very Cordially Yours,
CJS Hayward

Appendix A:
**Orthodox Theology and
Technology:
A Profoundly Gifted
Autobiography**

O Lord, I know not what to ask of Thee. Thou alone knowest what are my true needs. Thou lovest me more than I myself know how to love. Help me to see my real needs which are concealed from me. I do not dare to ask either a cross or a consolation. I can only wait on Thee. My heart is open to Thee. Visit and help me, for the sake of Thy great mercy. Strike me and heal me; cast me down and raise me up. I worship in silence Thy holy will and Thine unsearchable ways. I offer myself as a sacrifice to Thee. I have no other desire than to fulfill Thy will. Teach me to pray. Pray Thou Thyself in me. Amen.

St. Philaret of Moscow, a high rank of bishop, unusually named after a layman, St. Philaret the Merciful.

It is not particularly unusual for a teenager to lie awake in bed and wonder about the biggest questions: “Who are we?”, “Where did we come from?”, “Where will we go?”

What is unusual in my case, as I wondered and tried to answer questions like, “Is there an external world?”, “Can there be a perpetual motion machine?”—”If so, how can it get started?” “What does it mean to be “Jonathan Hayward?””, “Am I a being of the same class as those I observe about me?”, is that I was not a teenager. I was a little boy, too young to think about any of those questions in words. and so I worked out my idiosyncratic and even solipsistic metaphysics by thinking in pictures, and this is in fact my earliest memory.

People (some agree, some don't) say that a person's earliest memory can be illuminating, and it has been commented that this is an unusual first memory. I have read a number of people's earliest memory stories, and not one that I have read is like this. The one that jumps to memory is a girl saying she remembered her Mom holding her and then passing her to another woman, and asking, “Who is this?” and being told, “That's your grandmother.” An earliest memory is normally a story, not to mention simple and concrete. I was a bit of an outlier.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

I was born in 1975, a firstborn son to John and Linda Hayward, when my father was a grad student. My father studied physics, and my mother would go on to study the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. I was

born almost three weeks overdue. A botch by my Mom's obstetrician meant that at my birth both my mother and I were fighting a deadly infection. I spoke in complete sentences before my first birthday, and at the age of two fell down stairs and hit my head on a concrete basement floor. My eyes rolled back and I did not respond to stimuli. I survived, but spoke slowly, spoke very little, and stuttered. My Mom prayed over me and the stuttering was taken away. When my father had graduated and I was one, my parents moved to Macomb, Illinois, where my father taught at Illinois State University (their homepage shows a young woman wearing goggles that are simply inappropriate for the work she is doing, a common syndrome when photographers try to make a model look scientific). A major goal in their move was to be able to raise me outside of smog. When I was three, my family moved again, to the house where I have my earliest memory, and where my father began teaching at Wheaton College, where he worked until retirement. He had studied physics, but worked in computer science, and served both as a professor and a high-level in-house consultant at Wheaton. He introduced me to puzzles and questions relating to what we found most interesting in computer science (e.g. a question about the foundational 'pigeon hole principle:' "You are in a dark room and cannot see at all, and have a drawer full of mixed black and white socks. What is the minimum number of socks you can take to be sure you have a matched pair?"), and Unix computer games, which I dialed into by modem.

Schooling from kindergarten on

I have fond memories of Lowell Elementary School,

where I entered in kindergarten, sometimes dressed up as a cowboy with chaps or in a suit, and attended until third grade, when school and my parents sensed that I would do better at a specifically gifted school, and I entered Avery Coonley School in fourth grade, where the headmaster bent a number of rules and awarded me 25% of the total financial aid awarded by the school for that year so my parents could afford to send me. I was initially placed in the less advanced of two math groups (one year ahead instead of two), and in eighth grade ranked 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition, programmed a four dimensional maze, conducted an independent study of calculus, and (re)invented recursion in programming and iterated integration in calculus.

After a brief class in modern algebra for math whizzes at the the University of Chicago which I didn't really get, I skipped a freshman year at a local school to enter the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, where I continued to get high ranks in math contests, ran a Unix server that did the work of a local and hard-to-use social network. and actively participated in discussions, and programmed a video game on my calculator. Someone commented later that this was the first video game they'd heard of where you *lose* points for shooting things, although I wasn't trying to be original. (I was trying to implement a game I'd envisioned in gradeschool.) In order to justify a decision, my high school asked me to take an IQ test, and the psychologist scoring the test almost fell off her chair.

The summer after my junior year of high school I trained as an Emergency Medical Technician at College of DuPage because I was frustrated at the shallowness of what I had taken in first aid class. I was also unsatisfied with the

Emergency Medical Technician training, as it seemed to me then to only teach enough medicine to package patients up and ship them to the local emergency room, but there have been a few times I've used my training: once two summers later, in Malaysia, where I helped provide some faint parody of suspected spinal injury management in helping a motorcycle accident victim, who had evidence of serious internal injury, get to the emergency room when he was loaded into a nearby van instead of an ambulance. I also used knowledge about heat, years after that, to get an elderly dog to stop shivering after she was taken outside for a potty break and made a lethargic beeline to the place in the yard where the wind was least bitter, and stood there, shivering, until I picked her up and carried her back inside and did what I could to raise her body temperature. (I do not think she would have survived for more than a few hours more if I had not had that prior medical knowledge.)

I mentioned that two summers later I was in Malaysia. It was wonderful and I didn't want to leave. The rest of my family went there for a calendar year; I chose to stay in the U.S. for my freshman year of college, but joined my family for the summer. It awakened a lifelong interest in culture and the many ways time can be experienced, but beyond that I would refer to a book on writing college admissions essays which talked about avoiding clichés that college admissions officers are tired of reading, which included pet death and The Travel Experience, which runs something like, "In my trip to _____, I met new people and new ways of doing things. _____ challenged assumptions I didn't even know I had, and has changed me forever. [*And so on and so forth about life in _____.*]" Please note that this description is entirely ambiguous

about what continent, island, or space station “_____” was located on. Living in Malaysia was a life-changing experience, an eye-opener, and a delight, however I try to be careful to avoid stretching social patience in talking about my cherished travel experiences. Those who have already had a travel experience know what it is like; those who haven't don't want to hear me gush on and on.

I entered Wheaton College as a National Merit Scholar, but ran aground on a particular community requirement which, like others before and after me, some Christians are not comfortable with. When I stopped running from my conscience, I took the unprecedented step of appealing to the Board of Trustees to give a conscientious exemption to this requirement (no lesser figure had the necessary authority), they did not pay me the courtesy of letting the item be put on the agenda for consideration (they thought the voluntary nature of Wheaton made my concerns “evaporate”). The requirement, that Wheaton students don't drink and dance, has variously and inconsistently been defended by Wheaton leadership as “just social mores,” “like vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity,” and a strict requirement of Wheaton's conscience. I lay on bed at night, wondering, “If this is how Christians act, do I want to be a Christian?”

I transferred to Calvin with a broken heart. I ended up being able to take all of the highest-level math classes offered at Wheaton and also at Calvin, in total a major and a half's worth of them. I spent a semester in Paris at the Sorbonne, where I imagined the cultures of my own fantasy world, “Espiriticthus,” a fusion of the beauty I saw in Malaysia and France. I met my first Luddite, a man who commented simply that he would look into the window to

the computer lab and observe that everybody seemed to be angry as they were typing. On a larger scale, I also had a painful relationship with a girl named Rebecca. In that troubled relationship, I am not interested in stating what she did wrong. I am interested, however, in stating what *I* did wrong. I approached that relationship, like life itself, as a department of mathematics. Meaning, as time passed, I did not relate to Rebecca as especially human, and I did not relate to myself as especially human either. *Our relationship was mercifully broken off.*

I spent a summer as a camp counselor and entered as a graduate student at UIUC, where I managed to get a master's in applied mathematics, with a thesis accomplishing one thing usually associated with a PhD: carving out a niche where I knew more than anyone else in the world, in this case opening a new subbranch of "point-set topology" whose implications included a straightforward but rigorous way to handle infinitesimals such as bedeviled the foundation of calculus, in an academic discipline where it was hard to find something new to prove. Nonetheless, my advisor, the department chair, told me in one prolific summer that he regarded my many emails (see a later writeup of one topic covered) as "mathematics fiction" by analogy with "science fiction," and he did not regard my math awards as indicating in any way that I was adequate in mathematics. He and one other professor approved my thesis without reading the second half.

Entering the work world, or trying to

My first job out of college, at an anonymous company,

told me when I was hired that I had gotten the highest score on one test of any applicant yet, and I had gotten a perfect score on the linear logic test, and I submitted the best code sample they'd seen ("reads like plain English"). Then things turned a little odd. I believe the reasons were complex, but they boasted about the computers they gave employees then gave me what was apparently a hand-me-down, and more seriously when, in the interview process, I asked if I would be able to program in what was then the darling language in IT, I was told I would program in a language they compared to a Formula One racecar, but once hired, I was told I would program in a language that had a terrible reputation (one computer science great said that its use "...cripples the mind. Its teaching should therefore be regarded as a criminal offense;" lesser wits had compared it with a sexually transmitted disease in that "those who have it tend not to admit it in polite company"). I complained, believing in good faith that its use would be harmful for me. In retrospect I do not believe they made an *intentional* bait and switch, but there was some ineptitude in advertising what they advertised I would work with and then assigning what I was assigned to work with. Also, I think that is the main area where I earned my "not a team player" badge.

I was brainsized my third day on the job (they refused to tell me why...), and I was later told that fellow alumni of the company blocked me from getting jobs at other companies.

A few months later, I developed a terrible manic episode and my life was again in danger. However, the manic episode is less significant in its aftermath, where I was prescribed a year-long drug overdose that destroyed my abilities of mathematician. I spent a year of my life at my

parents' house (where I am still), lying on my bed, staring at the light bulb, with nary a thought running through my mind beyond, "This is worse than watching television." When I saw my psychiatrist, I would inevitably ask, "When am I going to get my abilities back?" and with an edge of anger in his voice my psychiatrist would answer, "I don't know. You've had a major manic episode, and it can take a long time to recover from a manic episode." After about a year of this, my Mom dragged me against my will to a patient advocate group meeting on Wheaton College's campus where a fellow patient, without medical credentials that I know of, listened to my complaints, asked about my medication, and said, "That's *not* an effect of your manic episode. *It's your medication.*"

I have incidentally complained about the provider's preferred counselor to work with a complaint I could have directed at the psychiatrist equally well: trying to get anything done better was "*like a magic spell*, where you have to say just the right words, and say them just right, or else it's all for nothing." (It wasn't, for instance, enough for me to tell him, and have other medical personnel he was working with to observe, that I was throwing up half my medication most days for a year. I had to make a request in *just the right words*, and *just the right way*, for him to prescribe the other form of the same medication which had all of the benefits of what he prescribed me, and no added drawbacks, but would not induce vomiting on a frequent basis.)

The hardest intellectual achievement I had made in my life was not some discovery; it was, after spending six months away from mathematics (including my semester studying French at the Sorbonne), regaining competency. I

was never in my life to regain competency in research mathematics. Computer programming came back, but with difficulty and imperfectly. Humanities work, which I had always been interested in, came back almost immediately.

Picking up the pieces

After being on a less destructive dose, I took stock and tried to decide what I wanted to do with my life. I had had some rough times outside of academia; I would later hold one post for over a year, but I was fired after I reported a senior manager for harassment. I asked my pastor, who was also a professor at Wheaton College and one of the most charismatic people around, advice on how to get an interdisciplinary humanities degree, and was strongly advised to pick a single field and get a doctorate in that specific field: "American Studies" PhD's from a department he taught at, who had studied an interdisciplinary fusion of American literature and history, were incredibly hard to place. History departments wanted a straight history PhD; literature departments wanted a straight literature PhD. I applied to several schools, and Cambridge University accepted me.

In the time between employment and Cambridge, I had joined a group of Wheaton students and some alumni, close friends, meeting every Tuesday night at 9:58 PM for a reader's theatre reading of classic children's literature, and it was lore that students from that group would enter a tailspin after leaving England (and it seemed almost every member of the group found a way to England at some point). However, I thought that that simply did not apply to me. It was not exactly arrogance on my part; past

experience had been that I simply did not experience culture shock on cue. I had experienced culture shock, but not when I was expected to, and when culture shock was predicted, I experienced nothing particularly like culture shock. I had, furthermore, already lived abroad, so this wouldn't be my first time outside the U.S.

New directions at, and after, Cambridge

There was a major crescendo of trial and providence involved in my getting to England; there were several distractions, and after six months of red tape and difficulties getting student loans, they fell into place one business day before I left. My college told me not to come into residence. Additionally, I had a growing lump by my collarbone and was very sleepy very often. Cambridge had admitted me for a diploma, not yet a master's, and after I arrived on faith and things started working out, I was diagnosed and treated for lymphoma. And despite all this, I succeeded. After further difficulties and prayer, I was admitted to the master's program, where at the beginning of the year I said I wanted to study the holy kiss, meaning a doctrinal study of ideas, and after reclassifying my intent as a sociological study of kissing that was not particularly edifying, I was told two thirds of the way through the year that my announced thesis topic did not fit my philosophy of religion seminar, and I would therefore have to change topic completely. (There was also some hideous confusion where it took all but two weeks to meet with my professor and fix the topic for my second compulsory essay, which was a two month project.) I pulled out the stops, wrote a

still not particularly edifying thesis in *AI as an Arena for Magical Thinking Among Skeptics*, and succeeded at earning a master's in theology as well, albeit with not quite high enough marks to enter a doctorate. *I went home and had my tailspin.*

Now there were several things that happened along the way; the biggest one being, during my time at Cambridge, my reception into the Orthodox Church. And I would like to tell a bit about one particular nuance.

There is a tradition in Orthodoxy for people of sufficient age to choose a patron saint, and take that saint's name. It is believed that not only does the catechumen choose the saint, but that the saint chooses the disciple from Heaven. I wanted to be called "John Adam:" "John" after John the Theologian, and "Adam" as bearing Sources of the Self's burden of pioneering a new way of life for others to follow. I knew at some level that this was wrong, and I should have recognized I was choosing those names out of pride. A significant struggle occurred when I was wrestling with my guilty conscience, and after long resistance on my part, I repented. This just happened to be when a priest was reading the names of people commemorated in prayer. The next name I heard was "Christos," and my surrender was complete.

The name has had some salutary side benefits I did not even think of. One thing I have found is that whether clergy are quick to dress me down for taking Christ as my patron gives me a highly effective early warning system for how well we will end up getting along. (It seems to reflect whether I am judged for obvious pride in choosing One above all Saints, versus perhaps seeing no legitimate way I might have been right in that choice, but still refraining

from judging.) Now at my cathedral clergy are not happy about my name, but that came later, after I kept bringing horrible things to confession. I give no complaint about them. But social response has offered me a powerful and useful social cue.

As an author, I have usually given my name as “C.J.S. Hayward”, and on Facebook, which is not terribly friendly to such use of initials written out my name as “Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward,” which I thought would condense to “CJSH” when people spoke of me. I have been told that on Facebook it has instead condensed to “CSH,” meaning “C.S. Hayward.” Did I mention that I’ve read every well-known work by C.S. Lewis and most of his obscurities, and he formed me as a writer?

I might also mention that there is more besides the number of times my life has been in danger and I’ve survived (I seem to have more than a cat’s nine lives, though I have rarely been accused of being catlike.) I’ve had an awful lot of being in the right place at the right time in ways I do not that I can rightly take credit for. For instance, I built my first website within a year or two of the web’s creation, although it would be over a year between when I first built a website and I ever used a graphical browser. I used Lynx, a command line tool that displays text alone. It is still a good way to check if a site appears pornographic before loading graphical view; not the reason why I made a nasty parody site called “Revenge of the Hydra,” optimized for Internet Explorer, which if you load it, nine popup windows appear, and for each popup window you close, two more appear. (People on the Megalist wanted to ride me out on a rail for that one.) My main site, started in the early nineties, would grow to be a fixture of the web; when

Google still published its PageRanks, my website had a PageRank of 5, a respectable PageRank for a medium to large sized organization, and was the top site in its category in directory.google.com. (I've won dozens of math awards, and hundreds of web awards.) It's grown since then, and in some people's opinions, it has only gotten better. Now I have worked long and hard to make my website a good site, but there was from the beginning a great deal of being in the right time and choosing decisions that would prove helpful for reasons I could not have imagined. I also published on the web when the tried and true advice was to pursue traditional publication. Now I am a traditionally published author; I've published two books with Packt, and they've been very good to me and I would heartily recommend contacting an acquisition editor for IT professionals who want to write a book. (Note to such professionals: the pay you receive directly from an IT publisher is a social courtesy; Packt pays more than many publishers but hardly enough to live on. For an IT professional to publish a technical book should be seen as a marketing move that will qualify you as a domain expert who can charge over \$100 per hour for expert work.) However, while Packt is built to give structure to unformed authors, traditional publishing tripped me up, and my traditionally published titles are far from excellent and lower in Amazon ratings than those I've self-published. The core reason is that I do my best work when I am writing out of my heart, but working with editorial requests for major overhaul has been necessarily out of my head; I cannot summon or control my inspiration or *awen* at will. Even this work, alongside works I consider some of my best, is not the work I set out to write, though that is grace.

I wrote in another blog post that I believed I had experienced what I would call “fame lite.” Leonard Nimoy, in *I am Spock* talks about how Hollywood has teachers for all kinds of skills they would need to portray that skill in movies: musical instruments, riding a horse, and so on and so forth. However, there was something that no teachers were to be found in Hollywood: dealing with fame. Nimoy learned, for instance, how to enter a restaurant through the kitchen because there would be a public commotion if Spock walked in through the front door. And on that count, I do not obviously suffer the consequences of real fame. I’ve been asked for my autograph, *once*. I’ve had someone call out publicly, before I entered Orthodoxy, “*That’s Jonathan Hayward!*”, *once*. I have repeatedly had pleasant meetings with people who know me through my website. And since then, the only new tarnish to my claim of undeserved “fame lite” is in recent years when a job opportunity was really a cloak for attempted seduction. If that was because of my website or reputation; I am not sure it was.

My thorn in the flesh: *harassment*

However, there is another shoe to drop, a scorpion in the ointment: *harassment*. To take one example, whenever I made a new post to my website, an acquaintance from IMSA wrote extended and intense criticism that delivered pain, took me down quite a few notches, and elevating himself even more notches socially. No matter what genre, length, or really quality I posted, he would, he would deliver trenchant criticism that covered those bases.

At one point, when I explained why his twisting my words into an *actual* alleged assertion that rape **is** the

victim's fault, followed by the most belittling lecture in my life, I explained where rape had come close to home and I found that the most offensive thing he'd said yet. He responded with another hefty serving of criticism. I asked him not to send any further criticisms on my writing. He responded with another hefty dollop of criticism of me personally. I asked him not to send any further unsolicited criticisms on any topic. He wrote, "Ok, I will not send any unsolicited criticisms, but I will take emails from you as solicitation for response," and responded by another king-sized industrial strength dose of brutal, judgmental criticism.

A forceful "No" cc'ed to helpdesk@imsa.edu stopped his criticisms cold, or rather I think that the help desk explained to the great liberal what the word "No" means.

I have not heard from him since apart from one request to list him as a trusted contact on LinkedIn.

I also can't say that I missed him.

This sort of thing has happened dozens of times, and not just with people who post a fantasy of their alter ego luring a boy into a car and being finished with him in under five minutes. As far as social dynamics go, in the Bible King Saul wanted St. David dead and sent St. David on a suicide mission that would require killing two hundred Philistines. St. David succeeded in his quest. Then women were singing in the streets, "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands," which was about the worst thing they could have done for St. David's welfare. It really would have been better for St. David's political stock if the woman had chanted a cultural equivalent of, "David smells bad and his mother dresses him funny."

That was the point where Saul went from wanting St.

David dead to making him Public Enemy #1 and engaging in extended manhunts after his first outright attempt at direct murder failed.

My giftedness is not simply from my genes, even if my parents are both at the top of their game. It is actually common for profoundly gifted individuals to have birth trauma or early childhood brain injury; such insults to the brain usually push a person towards intellectual disability, but once in a blue moon they overclock the brain and cause an intensification of overgrowth. I've had both routes, and however astonishingly bright my parents are, um...

I had higher SAT scores in 7th grade than my father had as a high school senior, and when I took the Modern Languages Aptitude test, the UIUC linguist who scored it said,

...and here's where it gets interesting. I've never seen someone complete this section before...

Your mother scored in the mid 150's, which is considered a very, very high score. You scored 172. I don't know what to make of it. I've been scoring this test for thirty years, and I've never seen a score this high...

I was looking to avoid mentioning this, but my parents, especially in my childhood, surprisingly often dealt with me in anger.

In a moment of "I have no mouth and I must scream" after other unrelated situations of harassment and hostility from several other people, I gave my scream in The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab.

My quality of life improved remarkably when I

learned that a "CEASE AND DESIST" letter Cc'ed to abuse@gmail.com or other authority figure can stop harassment cold.

Schooling: Another attempt

Returning to education, in 2005 I entered Fordham's PhD program. What I think I'd like to say about that was that it was a golden illustration of St. John Chrysostom's "A Treatise to Prove That Nothing Can Injure The Man Who Does Not Harm Himself." During that time, there were occasions where my conscience was extraordinarily clear and I ignored it. Furthermore, while external things may have been inappropriate, it was my own sins that gave them real sting. That a doctor took me off a medication I needed was not my choice. That I worried to the point of uninterrupted waking nausea about whether I would be able to find employment given that my work in the business world had been clumsy and my PhD "union card" to teach in academia was jeopardized, worriedly asking, "Will there be a place for me?" was my decision. Stoic philosopher Seneca the Younger quoted in the NFL said, "We suffer more in imagination than in reality," and I suffered much more in imagination than in reality then—*that was my decision, and not the decision of even the most hostile member of the university*. Possibly I could have completed my degree if I had not ignored a conscience at full "jumping up and down" intensity when I didn't see a reason for what my conscience was telling me, and possibly I am guilty for failing to accept tacitly offered help. I washed out of the program in 2007. Perhaps the other thing really worth mentioning is what I intended to be my doctoral

dissertation, which I wrote up in non-scholarly prose that one Roman reader called “the most intelligent and erudite” thing he’d ever read: “‘Religion and Science’ Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution.”

The birth of a unique area of attention

Now I’d like to shift gears a little bit and talk about something else that has slowly developed over the years, incrementally and mostly imperceptibly to me.

Like others before me, I’ve bristled at the concept of “an idea whose time has come.” My main use of it, as a programmer who poked fun at tools he did not like and tools he did like, was to quote a fake advertisement for Unix’s “X Windows:” “An idea whose time has come. And gone.” When at Fordham I read Vatican II’s almost incessant anxiety to pay attention to “the signs of the times,” meaning in practice to pay attention to whatever 1960’s fads were in the *Zeitgeist* and take marching orders from them, I pointed out that in searching the 38 volume Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers collections, I could only find three or four references to discerning the signs of the times, and never a slavish imitation of *Zeitgeist*; one of them simply meant being on guard against lust.

Nonetheless, there is a sense in which *Zeitgeist* is real. It is a well-known phenomenon among mathematicians that a major problem will remain unsolved for ages and then be independently solved at almost the same time by several researchers: hence mathematicians are advised that if they discover something major, they should write it up

and publish it as soon as possible, because if they don't, someone else will get the credit for first discovery. *And this is in what is possibly the least Zeitgeist-like academic discipline.*

Gandhi has been popularly misquoted as saying "First, they ignore you. Then, they laugh at you. Then, they fight you. Then, you win!" and while researchers have traced a legitimate Gandhi quotation about how victory will develop if you apply Gandhi's satyagraha or nonviolence in dealing with people hostile to you, this did not sound much like Gandhi to me. Nonetheless, it has some grain of truth.

When I wanted to do research on the holy kiss, at first I was bluntly ridiculed by my then current Cambridge advisor; he responded by asking cutesie questions about whether we could find reasons to only kiss the members of a congregation who were the prettiest, notwithstanding that in England there is a well-established social kiss and "Greet one another with a holy kiss" does not come across as a shorthand for all inapplicable ancient nonsense in the Bible as it might in the U.S. midwest, where hugs between friends are within standard cultural boundaries but kisses ordinarily are not.

Furthermore, when I tried to write a dissertation on it, every professor that sought to guide me took my intended *doctrinal* study, and reclassified it as a study of a physical detail of Biblical culture, to be studied alongside other *Realia* like, "When St. Paul said to put on the whole armor of God and used a Roman soldier's weapon and armor as a basis for the analogy, what kind of physical weapon and armor would have been in his imagination?" which overlooks that the "breastplate of righteousness" and the "helmet of salvation" are the armor that God Himself wears

in Isaiah. I drew a line in the sand and told my second advisor that I wanted to do a *doctrinal* study. He immediately pushed past that line and said, “The best way to do that is to do a cultural study, and let any doctrines arise.”

To my knowledge I am the first person who observed that the holy kiss is the only act that the entire Bible calls holy (excluding one reference to a “holy convocation” in the Old Testament where a different Hebrew word is translated “holy”), and it is called holy three or four times. This is one of the highlights that I condensed into a homily, “The Eightj Sacrament.” But then a few years later, I suddenly had people contacting me to tell me about the holy kiss, and people asked if I knew more than I had stated in the homily (yes, I did; the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* and *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* collections contain something like a hundred references to a holy kiss, many of them boilerplate repetitions of “Greet one another with a holy kiss,” in festal epistles by St. John Chrysostom). Earlier I was rudely enough ridiculed by allies; then I was contacted in response to my website to inform me about the holy kiss by complete strangers.

At the moment I would downplay the importance of the holy kiss for active study. It is practiced in the Orthodox Church; I have said everything I want to say; I do not seek a kiss where none is offered. I have moved on to other concerns, one other concern as I am letting go as Fr. Seraphim of Plantina is in the process of canonization (one of my books, the one that’s gotten by far the most scathing reviews, is *The Seraphinians: “Blessed Seraphim Rose” and His Axe-Wielding Western Converts*).

I would like to say that The Best of Jonathan’s Corner is

what I consider my overall best collection across my works and leave things at that, but I am rather suspecting another case of “Man proposes, God disposes.” The most important collection I leave behind (if any) may well be *The Luddite's Guide to Technology*. The topic is loosely “religion and science,” but it is very different in character. “Religion and science” as I have met it, with one stellar exception, is about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths of Christian doctrine with the present state of flux in scientific speculation. Science is, or at least was, characterized by a system of educated guesses held accountable to experiment. Orthodox gnosis (understanding of knowledge) should find this to be very, very different from how true Orthodox theology works.

With one exception, none of the Orthodox authors I hold dear know particularly much about science. The one exception is patrologist Jean-Claude Larchet, who raises some of the same concerns I do about technology, and does some of them better. Everyone else (for instance, Vladimir Lossky) shows little engagement with science that I know of. And if I may refer to the *Karate Kid* movie that was popular in my childhood, the sensei tells the boy, “Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe! Don't know karate, safe! In the middle, squash like a grape.” The “religion and science” I've seen has a lot of “in the middle, squash like a grape,” by theologians who want to be scientific (and perhaps make what I have called the “physics envy declaration:” theologians-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-the-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics), but who almost never bother to get letters after their name in the sciences, which are genuinely hard. My own formation, in mathematics, engineering,

technology, and science, affords me the position of the blackbelt who declares, “*Don’t know karate, safe!*” Perhaps one blackbelt saying such things is needed!

Furthermore, my main concern from mathematics, engineering, technology, and science (all of which I was formed in, even if I’ve lost much of it) is not too much about *science*, but specifically about *technology*. I’ve experienced technology early; my life story and could largely be seen as a preparation for commenting on technology. And I have background in both studying theology academically and living it in practice.

Another dimension to profound giftedness

One reader who has studied giftedness at length commented to me that profoundly gifted individuals are often “very, very conservative, or at least populist.” I had thought earlier that my conservatism and my giftedness were two separate things. They are not, or at least there is a direct relationship.

The basic way I understand it is this. Possibly I had a contrarian spine built by requesting a conscientious exemption from Wheaton College’s requirements and leaving Wheaton College after it was not even put on the agenda. I have certainly had as much exposure to liberal recruiting, or more, than most liberals. But standard methods of recruiting gifted are less successful in dealing profoundly gifted. The university system has very effective ways of drawing in the gifted, and up to a point the more gifted someone is the better it works—but recruiting tools fall flat with some of the profoundly gifted. Much of the

gifted range ends up liberal. It has been pointed out that the math department tends to be one of the most liberal, or the most liberal, department on campus, even though the author pointing this out (and I) have never experienced mathematicians trying to recruit to liberalism. I believe, apart from natural bents, that mathematics shapes the mind in a way that inclines towards liberalism. I stopped really trying to learn chess after I found myself at the Cathedral looking at my quarantine-dictated socially distanced space with regard to other parishioners in terms of what I could threaten to capture in a knight's move. That may be superficial, and it may fade into the background with deeper study. However, mathematics does shape the character, in the direction of what Orthodox have called "hypertrophied dianoia, darkened nous," i.e. "overgrown head and impoverished, darkened heart," and mathematics may do this in a more concentrated form than humanities which promote the same. I certainly do not see that my successes in relating to my ex-girlfriend (there are some) were due to my bent to take a mathematician's approach to relating.

Something that never happened in my formation in mathematics was that my advisor at Cambridge consistently tried to recruit me to Biblical Egalitarianism (he was a plenary speaker at at least one conference), for instance, by asking, "But what about Biblical Egalitarians, who believe that 'In Christ there is no... male nor female?'" and I would dismantle the live grenade, for instance by saying that "who believe that" in English-speaking idiom means "whose non-shared distinguishing quality is that," and second by saying that he was snuggling into the back door that "no male nor female" be cast along at least quasi-feminist lines, as

opposed to recognizing that some conservatives (St. Maximus Confessor, for instance) hold that in Christ there really is no male nor female, but read it along profoundly non-feminist lines. (I think after a certain number of attempts my advisor gave up and accepted that I would not listen to reason.)

Yonder, which is a collection of works intended to answer and challenge feminism, might have been provocative when it was first published. Now there is much more than than the men's movement, which I consider opening men to feminist-style protest. It is mainstream for women to dissociate themselves from feminism and "Like" texts that challenge it. When the U.S. Supreme Court came out in rainbow colors, I posted a response echoing First Things in the discussion at StackExchange, whose CEO is an adamant gay activist, saying, "The question is not whether gay marriage is possible in the U.S., but whether anything else is possible. It has been established that marriage has no particular roles, is dissolvable, need not be open to bearing children, and so forth. Why suddenly draw a line in the sand about marriage involving a man and a woman?" It was censored, with a comment of "Not even close!" However, in the time since then, I have seen comments not censored about the whole policy violation of turning the StackOverflow logo rainbow colors for a time and flipping it to veer in the opposite direction, and so on and so forth, was in fact not StackOverflow's best moment.

C.S. Lewis has a tantalizingly brief remark in "The Allegory of Love", in reference to Spencer who alone receives almost undiluted praise in a book that is exacting of other authors, about how figures who turn out to be what some people call "ahead of their time" seem an odd

throwback to the vintage past, when they first appear. Even Bach was respected in his life as a performing organist but not taken too seriously as a composer, because he composed in an area of music that had simply fallen out of fashion. I don't want to compare myself to the famous people who populate the most obvious examples, but in regard to what Lewis said, it seems that **some of my portfolio has matured.**

My critiques of feminism may still not be mainstream, but they are no longer so far off the beaten path. As far as raising concerns about technology goes, we have gone past the point where one very bright friend tweeted a link to Paul Graham's *The Acceleration of Addictiveness* and commented in only three words: "SOMEBODY UNDERSTANDS ME!" For that matter, we have gotten past the point where the cover of *Time Magazine* presents the Facebook "Like" button as a major part of our conundrum. Things that I said that were way off the beaten path when I said them remain of particular interest, but are far less provocative to say now.

When I tried to do a literature search before or during my writing of "Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy, I searched Amazon in regards to Orthodoxy and technology and was dismayed to find... my writing and nothing else so far as I could tell. Prior books that had influenced me such as Neil Postman's 1985 *Amusing Ourselves to Death* and Jerry Mander's 1974 *Four Arguments for the **Elimination** of Television* (one Protestant friend answered my mentioning the title in mock puzzlement: "The author could only think of *four*?"), were available and remain available today. However, an encompassing theological argument that takes into account

today's singularity were simply not to be found.

Since then, times have changed, *and I am not a lone author any more*. I've learned a good deal from **patrologist Jean-Claude Larchet**, and what I've read from him on the topic is eminently worthy of study. I asked Ancient Faith to read "Social Antibodies" Needed: A Request of Orthodox Clergy, not exactly as a candidate for their imprint to publish, but to send to other authors to answer on the record. The response I got back was not detailed, but they said that they had forwarded the questions I raised for other of their authors to answer.

Two other comments before I drop this topic.

First of all, one thing that I can agree with one devotee of Fr. Seraphim of Plantina on is a quote that Fr. Seraphim tried to tell people he was a sinner and he was put on a pedestal anyway. I've been wary of being on a pedestal when I realized that I already am on a pedestal; God has just shielded me from some of the downsides. Apart from harassment, I have benefited from what appears to be "fame lite." Possibly I may get put on a bigger pedestal, but I am neither more nor less in God's hands if God provides that.

The second one, perhaps a tangent, is that I am not mainly writing for success in my lifetime. Certainly I am not looking for writing to be lucrative; my revenues on Amazon, possibly due to Amazon's ongoing repositioning and reinterpretation of its contracts, has gone from about US\$150-200 per month to less than US\$10 per month over a time frame when more and more people have discovered my writing. I am trying to write works built to last, and I have released my books under CCo licensing ("no rights reserved," meaning that anybody can republish it). This is

an aspect of a long haul strategy.

Now to move on.

More wonders in Heaven and earth...

I have enlisted at the Orthodox Pastoral School, about which I have only glowing things to say. After health issues compounded by provider issues, I have asked to withdraw for the rest of the semester and re-enroll next semester when I believe I have good reason to hope I will be stronger. What they say I do not know, and I am not specifically counting on the measure of grace they have already extended to me. However, one possibility that is off the agenda is that God will stop blessing me because of what they decide. I would like to continue on with them, but if God has something else in store for me, I will just try and thank them for what they have already done.

The second thing is that I have prayed for years:

Prayer from St. Symeon for a Spiritual Father

O Lord, who desirest not the death of a sinner but that he should turn and live, Thou who didst come down to earth in order to restore life to those lying dead to sin and in order to make them worthy of seeing Thee the true Light as far as that is possible to man, send me a man who knoweth Thee, so that in serving him and subjecting myself to him with all my strength, as to Thee, and in doing Thy will in his, I may please Thee the only true God, and so that even I,

a sinner, may be worthy of Thy Kingdom.

I am not praying that now.

Within the past month of my writing, I sent a polite email to a nearby priest and said that I was going to ask a blessing to visit the parish, when I realized that was not then an option due to the quarantine, and then I thought of asking permission to visit him face-to-face, when I realized that would not be an option for the same reason. But, I said, I wished in gesture to visit.

He responded even more graciously, and offered spiritual direction.

I asked a blessing of my confessor, and have begun receiving spiritual direction.

I have also been seeking for years to enter a monastery. That hasn't happened yet, but I have a live conversation with a monastery now. It apparently won't work out for me to visit again in 2020, but I have hopes of ending 2021 as a novice, possibly a "rassophore monk," also called a "robe-wearing novice."

A last measure in negotiations

The next thing is that in dealing with others, especially as regards difficulties with medical providers, the last measure of resistance I have offered is to let the other party have it their way and then let them decide if they like the consequences.

Earlier I came to the practice I am seen at on double the standard limit of one medication, and they decided to let me have my eccentric ways, at least for a time. But then they decided to relentlessly pursue strict standard dosing,

and after a year or two's power struggle, I let them have their way and I was in rapidly declining health. I can still remember the sad expression on my provider's face when she realized what situation I was in: she was not in any sense happy that it looked like I would be dead within a year, but standard dosing was simply not conceivable as something negotiable, or a decision that was less important than my life. After three hospitalizations in about two months, insurance advised me to work with a doctor rather than a nurse practitioner, and the doctor found room in her heart to let me have maximum doses of two similar medications, plus another medication that would help. I returned to the even keel I had when I entered their care.

Experience has been that sometimes the only card I can play is to submit to being keel-hauled, and when I come up torn and bleeding on the other side, the other party figures out things it had not been able to connect the dots on before.

I went through that last measure again with the department recently.

I have been on a medication whose known effects include kidney damage and eventual death to kidney failure. I have been experiencing precursors to kidney failure, although not yet real quality of life issues; however, every time previously my providers tried to soften the blow to my organs by reducing my dose of that medication by one quarter, it seemed a cure worse than the disease. Kidney failure can kill me within a decade or two; the effects I was experiencing would likely kill me within a year. Every time previously, my provider did not like what my medicine was doing, but they chose maintaining my dose above causing my death in the short term.

This time, my provider decided to wean me off the medication already, which was having destabilizing effects, and furthermore to forbid me to even take a related over-the-counter medication that is dosed much lower than the prescription analogue, and furthermore does not damage internal organs, period. And I decided to offer the last measure of resistance: to submit to being keel-hauled and follow all of her changes to the letter.

After two days of feeling worse than drunk, I felt sober for the first time in ages, and have been writing prolifically.

More wonders

Before that happened, my writing experienced what I can only term a death, a religious experience I have forgotten, and a resurrection. My writing was growing scantier and worse; there was something morally corrupt. Now I am still not writing perfectly, but I feel younger. Decades younger.

I have also been involved with Toastmasters, to learn to better communicate with my neighbor. I participated, albeit didn't rise above local level, in the 2019 Toastmasters World Championship of Public Speaking, and it is widely considered that the experience and preparation are worth it even if you do not place particularly highly, as I did not. I completed the Competent Communicator curriculum and have started on the Presentation Mastery path.

One of the things my spiritual father said in a first call or two is that we tend to think we have tried plan A (getting a doctorate in math from the University of Illinois and going from there), plan B (getting a doctorate in theology from Cambridge in theology and teaching, which would

have left me saddled with over twice the major student loans I graduated with), plan C (getting a doctorate “union card” at Fordham), and are “going down the alphabet” in faint hopes...

...but God is always on plan A.

I believe that if I had made better decisions I could have a degree from Fordham. However, I don't believe that God has withdrawn his care. If anything, he has given me a reminder that decisions have consequences, and a powerful reminder that placing reason above my conscience is not wise. At present I do not have the brand of PhD; I do have two master's degrees connected with Orthodox theology and technology from excellent institutions, and quite a story with them. I think I am the most blessed I have been in my life, and stand to receive greater blessings still. I would close with words offered from a friend:

“Life's Tapestry”

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

Wait as a Christian for that day to come
where your soul a-wing will rip through the air
and you shall see the embroidery of God
from the good side
and then... everything will seem to you to be a system

and order.

Signed,

~~Toastmaster, and possibly patrologist, **Christos Jonathan Seth Hayward**, Certificat Sémestriel, Niveau Supérieur I (semester certificate, advanced level 1) in French, Bachelor of Science in Pure Mathematics, Master of Science in Applied Mathematics with Computational Science and Engineering Option and the first person to graduate with a new Thesis Option, Diploma in Theology and Religious Studies, Master of Philosophy in Theology and Religious Studies, Competent Communicator, Presentation Mastery Level 2, and perhaps in substance a *philosophia doctor*~~

Unworthy Novice Christos