

# **A Pilgrimage from Narnia: The Story of One Man's Journey Into Orthodoxy**

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1. Orthodox Eastern Church—theology. 2. Orthodox Eastern Church—spirituality. 3. Anthologies

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# Preface

One thing people want to know about people who have converted to Orthodoxy is the story, what drew them.

Probably the best answer I have seen to that frequently asked question is that an accomplished monk said that the story of how he came to Orthodoxy was told to the priest who received him in confession before being made Orthodox, in the seal of confession, and he received absolution.

However, this book may follow a runner-up category. It does not have times and dates and it is not a direct narrative in the usual sense, but it is a view, as seen through my eyes, of things I have seen on my ongoing journey into Orthodoxy.

It is hoped that you, the reader, may find glimpses and glimmers that I saw in discovering Heaven on earth in Holy Orthodoxy.

# A Pilgrimage from Narnia

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But we have the best of all possible Gods,

And live in a world ruled by the him,

And the most painful of his commands,

Are the very means to greatest glory,

Exercise to the utmost is a preparation,

To strengthen us for an Olympic gold medal,

An instant of earthly apprenticeship,

To a life of Heaven that already begins on earth:

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

Remains no longer a taunt filled with blasphemy:

But a *definition* of the Kingdom of God,

Turned to gold,

And God sees his sons as more precious than gold:

Beauty is forged in the eye of the Beholder:

[Further up and further in!](#)

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

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

For if I have self-serving life in me,

What room is there for the divine life?

If I hold straw with a death grip,

How will God give me living gold?

[Further up and further in!](#)

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



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

# The Angelic Letters

*My dearly beloved son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

---

*My dear son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Watch after Mark, and hold him in prayer.

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

---

*My dear, dear Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

The Physician is at work!

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

---

*Dear blessed Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

In Light and Life and Love,  
Your Brother Angel

---

*My dear fellow-ministering angel;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

*Dear cherished, luminous son;*

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

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

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

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

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

With Deep Affection,  
Your Brother Angel

---

*My dearly beloved, cherished fellow angel Eukairos;*

Your charge Mark has been robbed.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

---

*My dear, esteemed son and fellow-angel Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

With an Eternal Love,  
Your Respectful Brother Angel

---

*My dear, scintillating son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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*My dear son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With Deepest Affection,  
Another Member of the Angel Choirs

---

*Dear fellow-warrior, defender, and son Eukairos;*

I wish to write to you concerning devils.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

*My dear, watchful son Eukairos;*

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

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

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

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

And hold him in your prayers.

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

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*My prayerful, prayerful Eukairos;*

Prayer is what Mark needs now more than ever.

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

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

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

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



BEFORE GOD IN PARADISE.

Ever draw Mark into deeper prayer.

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

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

Your charge has passed through his apprenticeship successfully.

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

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

Mark is no longer your charge.

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

Go in peace.

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

# God the Game Changer

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

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

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

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

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

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

## God the Game Changer at work: A story

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## More than a game change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When it encountered Thee in the lower regions.

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

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

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

To Him be glory and dominion  
Unto ages of ages.

Amen.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Christ is risen, His joy!*

# Treasure

## Treasure is not measured in dollars

I would like to begin by telling a story. I was in a medical waiting room for a medical test, when a mother came in, pulling along a little girl by the hand, and taking care of the paperwork. The child had, by the looks of it, slammed her thumb in a door or something similar: there was a dark purple bulge under her thumbnail. I remembered when that had happened to me, and I was **not** a happy camper. No wonder the little girl was bawling her eyes out!

She was sitting in a chair, and I thought things might be better if she were engaged in a conversation. So, gently and softly, I told her a joke: "What kind of musical instrument does a dog play?" and answered, "A trombone." She didn't get it. So I tried to talk about several other things, trying and failing to engage her in conversation. After a few minutes, I had still managed an absolute zero percent success rate at making age-appropriate conversation that would allow her to contribute her half of the conversation. But I realized something: she was looking at me, and she was not crying. I had obtained her rapt attention, and for the moment she had completely stopped crying.

I was called and politely took my leave; a few minutes later, after my blood draw, I came out and the mother was giving TLC and comforting her daughter. The mother said, "You have a very gentle way about you." I thanked her, shook the daughter's hand, and told her, "I have to leave now, but I'm glad I met you." The mother repeated, once or twice, "You

now, but I'm glad I met you. The mother repeated once or twice, "You have a very gentle way about you." And she caressed her little one.

This is a tale of treasure, and it arose in my heart, perhaps, because none of it is measured with dollars. My blood test cost money, of course, and the treatment of the child's thumb presumably also cost money, of course, but the treasure is not measured in dollars. If the treasure were of gold, or some other material item, one could equate treasure with a high dollar value, but for the mother to pay me money, or for me to ask for it, would have been a crass way of defacing a treasure. There was joy and a lesson in it for me, and pain relief and a pleasant meeting for the child, but this, this *treasure*, falls under the heading of "The best things in life are free."

By contrast, I would tell a joke:

I was trying to help a friend's son look into colleges, and yesterday he handed me the phone, really excited, and said, "You have got to speak with these guys." I fumbled the phone, picked it up, and heard, "—online. We offer perhaps the best-rounded of degrees, and from day one our students are equipped with a top-of-the-line Dell running up-to-the-minute Vista. We address back-end issues, giving students a grounding in Visual Basic .NET, striking the right balance between 'reach' and 'rich,' and a thorough groundings in Flash-based design and web design optimized for the latest version of Internet Explorer. Throw in an MCSE, and marketing-based communication instruction that harnesses the full power of PowerPoint and covers the most effective ways to make use of animated pop-ups, opt-in subscriber lists, and—"

I interrupted. "Excuse me, but what is your institution *called*?"

"The Aristocrats."

For those of you who have been spared the joke, there is a classic off-color joke where a group of performers approach a theatre owner or the like, are asked what they do and describe an X-rated show that is grosser than gross (bestiality, necrophilia, ...), and when asked what they are called, say, "The Aristocrats."

The fork off that joke above is that all of these mostly technological items, however expensive, are false treasure at best. The original "The Aristocrats" is plain in advertising anti-treasure; the latter take, in a Unix chauvinist's way, has things that appear to be treasure but are really false treasure, anti-treasure that calls for the grosser-than-gross punch line. [And perhaps more than one of those jokes is false treasure, but we won't go into that.](#)

My reason for mentioning treasure that is free, like the best things in life, and expensive anti-treasure, is to say that while many treasures may be worth money, and bigger treasures can be worth more money, real treasure is beyond money. [The best things in life are free,](#) as the saying goes.

## Living for treasure

I live to create treasure. Actually I live to contemplate God, and worship his glory, but there are a million concrete ways one can contemplate God, and one of them is creating treasure. [My website at cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com) is created to be a treasure, or a treasurehouse of treasures, and while there are pieces you could look at and say, "You botched this and that," my intent is still to create a treasure. There are other areas where I try to create treasure (a picturebook of loved ones for a hospitalized child), but the greatest success I receive is to finish something and find it has been a treasure to the person who has received it.

In [Doxology](#), God the Father is called,

The Treasure for whom all treasures are named,

And if ever there is treasure, he is God. Mankind and angels are treasures; there is a discussion in the Gospel where Christ is asked if it is lawful to pay a tax or not, asks to see the coin used to pay the tax, and asked whose image and superscription it was. "Give what is Caesar's to Caesar, and what is God's to God;" thus Jesus Christ appealed to a principle that whoever coins money has the authority to tax that money. Augustine picks up on this: "[Caesar seeketh his image; render it; God seeketh his image; render it. Let not Caesar lose from you his coin: let not God lose in you His coin.](#)" He explores it, and there is the suggestion at least that we are God's coins: first and foremost by being struck with his image, but it cannot be too far from mind that coins could be struck on precious metal, that a coin is treasure. Augustine attends to the minor point, that the mere earthly coin with Caesar's image is due to Caesar, but all the much more the coin imprinted in the image of God and nothing less, is due to God: a parish of faithful followers is much more a treasury than a room with chests of silver coins.

The Lord God Almighty and the Uncreated Light reigns over all; the Uncreated Light illumines the cherubim, seraphim, thrones, dominions, powers, authorities, principalities, archangels, and angels: the glory and



treasure of the Lord thunder through rank on rank of angel host. The Mother of God bore God in her womb and exchanged with her Son: she gave him his humanity, and he gave to her from his divinity, leaving her as a treasure eclipsing all the angels. The treasure unfurls and unfolds on earth: the sacramental priesthood and the spiritual priesthood, songs, liturgy, angels, and ten thousand other treasures. And treasure is close to the heart of the treasure of the Church: a Church saying says, "If you have two small coins, you use one to buy bread for the altar, and the other to buy flowers for the icons."

## Hard treasure

There are some hard lessons in [The Best Things In Life Are Free](#), and hard lessons in [Maximum Christ, Maximum Ambition, Maximum Repentance](#). But both of these give up false treasure for true treasure, true treasure for greater treasure. Christ commanded something great: "[Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.](#)" Some of us are to hold earthly treasure with detachment; others are to get rid of it altogether, but in any case we are called to reach far beyond earthly treasure for treasures in Heaven, such as good works, virtues, and graces. The call is a Narnian [Further up and further in!](#)

We live in a time where treasures seem to be evaporating, or at least money. Once a rising standard of living was taken for granted; now employment is not taken for granted. We are urged to sell gold for cash. But treasure is still here. [The best things in life are free](#), even now, [even if we are in an arena, a cosmic coliseum](#). False treasures abound; for treacherous technology, see [the Technonomicon](#). And there is a great deal in technologies that can be treacherous, [with a right grievous backswing](#). But that is not all.

The authors John Calvin and Thomas Hobbes were authors with a very pessimistic view of mankind. But in the comic strip named after them, *Calvin and Hobbes*, we meet a claim well worth heeding:

*There's treasure everywhere!*

# Repentance, Heaven's Best-Kept Secret

## Rewards that are not mercenary

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

C.S. Lewis, [The Weight of Glory](#) [PDF] ([purchase](#))

I would like to talk about repentance, which has rewards not just in the future but here and now. Repentance, often, or perhaps *always* for all I know, bears a hidden reward, but a reward that is invisible before it is given. Repentance lets go of something we think is essential to how we are to be—men hold on to sin because they think it adorns them, as the

[Philokalia](#) well knows. There may be final rewards, rewards in the next life, and it matters a great deal that we go to confession and unburden ourselves of sins, and walk away with "no further cares for the sins which you have confessed." But there is another reward that appears in the here and now, and it is nothing that is real to you until you have undergone that repentance. It is like looking forward to washing with fear, wondering if you will be scraped up in getting mud off, and in a very real sense suddenly recognizing that you had not in mind what it was like to be clean.

*Let me explain by giving some examples.*

## Discovering the treasure of humility

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

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

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

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

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

Now let me ask a question: who benefitted most from his respect at work (and, I can scarcely doubt, his respect outside of work)? Is it the ambitious leader, the low-level permanent employee, the timid intern? Certainly all these people benefitted, and though it was not so flamboyantly expressed, there is a thread of deep respect running through the whole organization, and some things work smoother than

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

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

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

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

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

### **The Crystal Globe**

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

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

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

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

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

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

After a time, he made a motion for me to leave, and I gladly got up, thinking that the memory of such beauty would be well worth the loss of my tongue. Imagine my surprise when, when each person would unwittingly pass into my globe, I would see his beauty too.

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

Plants and animals command respect, and not just in the sense articulated by green advocates. Empty space itself is itself interesting. *How?* It is empty space that is much of the study of quantum physics and superstring theory. A great many physicists have earned PhD's, and continue to research, based on the physical properties of empty space. And, more importantly, the whole of God is wholly present in any and

every empty space. In that sense, empty space in Orthodox Christianity is more pregnant, more dignified, than what an atheist would consider to be everything that exists. So empty space is worth respecting. But more than that, inanimate things, rocks and such, exist on the level of empty space but fill the space: "Blessed be the Rock" lets an inanimate thing represent God. It exists; it is something rather than nothing, and for that reason it is worth respecting. Plants exist on one more layer than mere existence; they have the motion, the fire, of life inside them. And animals exist on these layers but exist more fully; they are aware of their surroundings and act. And you and I, and every person you have trouble respecting, exist on all of these layers and more: we are made in the image of God, the royal and divine image, with the potential of the angelic image and of theosis, and are all of us making an eternal choice between Heaven and Hell. Those who choose Hell represent a tragedy; but even then there is the dignity of making an eternal choice; Hitler and Stalin represent the dignity of eternal agency and making a choice between Heaven and Hell, and sadly using that choice to become an abomination that will ever abide in Hell. But they still tragically represent the grandeur of those who exist on several layers and use their free and eternal choice to eternally choose Hell. Some saint has said, "Be kind to each person you meet. Each person you meet is going through a great struggle," and all mankind, including those one struggles to respect, exist on several profound levels and are making an eternal choice of who they will permanently become. And respect is appropriate to all of us who bear the image of God, and have all of the grandeur of God-pregnant empty space, physical things, plants, animals, and a rational and spiritual and *royal* human existence, even if there is nothing *else* we can see in them to respect. Being appropriate to treat with respect is not something that begins when we find something good or interesting about a person: it begins long before that.



## Returning from drunkennes to sobriety

In [A Pet Owner's Rules](#), I wrote,

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

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

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

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

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

## **Returning from covetousness to contentment**

Advertising, in stimulating covetousness, stimulates and builds discontent. Covetousness may well enough say, "If I only get \_\_\_\_\_, then I'll be content." But that is fundamental confusion. Getting whatever \_\_\_\_\_ may be may bring momentary satisfaction, but the same spiritual muscles twisted to be discontent with what you had before, will make you become discontent with the \_\_\_\_\_ that you now think will make you happy.

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

The virtue is the reward.

## **Returning from lust to chastity**

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

## Returning from contraception to how God built marriages to work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The benefit of repenting of contraception is not that God preserves pleasure-seeking. The benefit of repenting of contraception is that you grow to transcend yourself, and marriage reaches its full stature just as obedience to a spiritual physician helps monastics reach full human stature. Marriage and monasticism are different in many ways, and today I think marriage should be recognizing as having some of the status traditionally seen in monasticism. But the point of being an adult is to grow up, to grow by a crown of thorns, to transcend oneself, whether by marriage or by monasticism. The means may be very different, but the goal is self-transcendence, and the marketing proposition of contraception is to short-circuit that hard lesson and allow the adult to

remain a sexually active pleasure seeker who does not grow any higher. And this is part of why I wince when I find people I know telling of their contraception; it is something of a missed opportunity, where people have marriage but do not use it to their full stature, opting instead for an "à la carte" version of marriage that is the equivalent of a "monasticism" that allows veto over obedience.

## Returning from Gnosticism and escape to the here and now

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

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

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

The reward for repenting and accepting virtue is that one steps out of  
escape and accepts virtue: the virtue is its own reward.



## Moving on from grudges to forgiveness

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

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

## ***...and being blindsided by reward***

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Open

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

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

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

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

# "Religion and Science" Is Not Just Intelligent Design vs. Evolution

## A rude awakening

Early in one systematic theology PhD course at Fordham, the text assigned as theology opened by saying, "Theologians are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Not content with this striking claim, the author announced that she was going to use "a term from science," *thought experiment*, which was never used to mean a *Gedanken* experiment as in physics, but instead meant: if we have an idea for how a society should run, we have to experimentally try out this thought and live with it for a while, because if we don't, we will never know what would have happened. ("*Stick your neck out! What have you got to lose?*"—"Your head?") The clumsiness in this use of "a term from science" was on par with saying that you are going to use "an expression from American English", namely *rabbit food*, and subsequently use "rabbit food" as obviously a term meaning food made with rabbit meat.

In this one article were already two things that were fingernails on a chalkboard to my ears. Empirical sciences are today's prestige disciplines, like philosophy / theology / law in bygone eras, and the claim to be a science seems to inevitably be *how to mediate prestige to oneself and one's own discipline*. When I had earlier run into claims of, "Anthropologists are scientists, and they are every bit as much scientists

as people in the so-called 'hard sciences,' like physics," I had winced because the claim struck me as not only annoying and untrue, but self-demeaning. But it simply had not occurred to me that theologians would make such a claim, and when they did, I was not only shocked but embarrassed: why should theology, once acclaimed the queen of scholarly disciplines, now seek prestige by parroting the claim to be every-bit-as-much-a-science-as-the-so-called-"hard-sciences"-like-physics (where "so-called" seemed to always be part of the claim, along with the scare quotes around "hard sciences")? To make my point clearer, I drew what was meant to be a shocking analogy: the claim that theologians are "scientists, and every bit as much as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics" was like trying to defend the dignity of being a woman by saying, "Women are male, and they are just as much male as people who can sire a child."

This "physics envy" looks particularly strange next to the medieval Great Chain of Being as it moved from the highest to the lowest: "God, Angels, Man, Animals, Plants, Rocks, Nothing". Theology is the study of God and Man; no discipline is given a more noble field. And however much other disciplines may have "physics envy", no other discipline looks lower than physics, the science that studies Rocks and Nothing. There may be something pathetic about an anthropologist trying to step up on the pecking order by claiming to be "just as much scientists as people in the so-called 'hard sciences' like physics." Yet on the lips of a theologian, it bears a faint hint of a CEO absurdly saying, "CEOs are janitors, and they are every bit as much janitors as the people responsible for cleaning wastebaskets."

Furthermore, the endemic claim I saw to introduce a "term from science" was, so far as I could remember:

- *Rarely if ever used in any correct fashion.*

The *one* exception I can remember being Wolfhart Pannenberg's illustration of a point by talking about fields such as one finds in the study of electricity and magnetism: the non-scientist theologians in the room said they were having real trouble understanding the illustration conceptually, which would make it seem somewhat

dubious as an *illustration* to help get a point across.

- *Always reflect an effort to claim some of science's prestige.*

I remember the "you're being quaint" smiles I got when I suggested that a point that Pannenberg was trying to make by comparing something to a field as defined in physics, seemed in fact to be a point that could have been much better made by a comparison to the Force from *Star Wars*.

Why the patronizing smiles? The job of the example from physics was to mediate prestige as well as to illustrate a concept that could have been better explained without involving a particularly slippery concept from physics.

## A first response

Examples of this kind of "science" abounded, and I was perhaps not wise enough to realize that my clumsy attempts to clarify various misrepresentations of science were perhaps not well received because I was stepping on the Dark and Shameful Secret of Not Being Scientific Enough, and reminding them of an inferiority they were trying hard to dodge. And my attempts to explain "Not being a scientist does not make you inferior" seemed to have no soil in which to grow. In an attempt to start an online discussion, I wrote a piece called "Rumor Science":

I really wish the theology students I knew would either know a lot more about science, or a lot less, and I really wouldn't consider "a lot less" to be disappointing.

Let me explain why. When I was working on my master's in math, there was one passage in particular that struck me from Ann Wilson Schaef's *Women's Reality: An Emerging Female System*. Perhaps predictably given my being a mathematician in training, it was a remark about numbers, or rather about how people interact with numbers.

The author broke people down into more or less three groups of people. The first—she mentioned artists—was people that can't count to twenty without taking off their shoes. She didn't quite say **that**, but she emphasized artists and other people where math and numbers simply aren't part of their consciousness. They don't buy into the mystique. And they can say, and sincerely mean, that numbers don't measure everything. They aren't seriously tempted to believe otherwise.

The second group—she mentioned business people—consists of people for whom math works. Even if they're not mathematicians, math works for them and does useful things, and they may say that numbers don't measure anything, but it is well nigh impossible to believe—saying and meaning that numbers don't measure everything is like saying that cars are nice but they can't get you places.



And the third group in the progression? She mentioned scientists, but what she said was that they know math in and out and know it so well that they know its limitations and therefore they can say and mean that numbers don't measure everything. And in the end, even though the "scientist" and the "artist" represent opposite extremes of mathematical competence, they both know there are things numbers can't measure while the second, middle group for mathematical competence are in a position where they expect numbers to do things that numbers can't do.

I was flattered, but I really think it stuck with me for more reasons than just the fact that she included me in one of the "good" groups. There is a sort of *Karate Kid* observation—"Karate is like a road. Know karate, safe. Don't know karate, safe. In the middle, *squash*, like a grape!"—that is relevant to theology and science. It has to do with, among other things, Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the question of evolution, and the like (perhaps I should mention the second law of thermodynamics). My point in this is not that there is an obligation to "know karate", that theologians need to earn degrees in the sciences before they are qualified to work as theologians, but that there is something perfectly respectable about "don't know karate."

I'd like to start by talking about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Now a lot of people have heard about Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem. Not many major mathematical theorems have had a Pulitzer prize-winning book written around them (and by the way, *Gödel, Escher, Bach* has been one of my favorite books). Nor do many theorems get summarized in Newsweek as an important theorem which demonstrates that mathematical "proofs" are not certain, but mathematical knowledge is as relative as any other knowledge.

Which is a crass error. The theological equivalent would be to say that Karl Barth's unflattering remarks about "religion" are anti-Christian, or that liberation theology's preferential option for the

poor means that special concern for the poor is optional and to be dealt with according to personal preference. And saying that about liberation theology is a theological "squash like a grape," because it is better to not know liberation theology and know you don't know than believe that you understand liberation theology and "know" that the word "option" implies "optional." **It's not what you don't know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so.**

For the record, what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem means is that for a certain branch of mathematics, there are things that can be neither proven nor disproven—which made his theorem a shocker when there was a Tower of Babel effort to prove or disprove pretty much anything. It proves that some things can never be proven within certain systems. And it has other implications. But it does *not* mean that things that are proven in mathematics are uncertain, or that mathematical knowledge is relative. It says you can't prove everything a mathematician would want to prove. But there are still lots and lots and lots of interesting things that can be proven, and Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem does not touch these proofs, nor does it mean that mathematical knowledge is merely relative in humanities fashion.

And I'd like to mention what happens when I mention Gödel's **Completeness** Theorem:

Dead silence.

The same great mathematical logician proved another theorem, which does not have a Pulitzer prize winning book, which says that in one other branch of mathematics, besides the branch that Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem speaks to, you can have pretty much what Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem says you can't have in the other branch. In other words, you can—mechanically, for that matter, which is a big mathematical achievement—either prove or disprove every single statement. I'm not sure it's as important as Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, but it's a major theorem from the same mathematician and no one's heard of it.

There would seem to be obvious non-mathematical reasons for why people would want to be informed about the first theorem and not want to mention the second. I consider it telling (about non-mathematical culture). I know it may be considered a mark of sophistication to mention Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem and share how it's informed your epistemology. But it hasn't informed my epistemology and I really can't tell how my theology would be different if I hadn't heard of it. And my understanding is that other mathematicians tend not to have the highest view of people who are trying to take account of scientific discoveries that an educated person "should" know. There are other reasons for this, including goofy apologetics that make the famous theorem a proof for God. But I at least would rather talk with someone who simply hadn't heard of the theorem than a theologian who had tried to make a "responsible" effort to learn from the discovery.

And my main example is one I'm less sure how to comment on, and not only because I know less biology than math. There was one almost flippant moment in England when the curate asked if anybody had questions about the upcoming Student Evolution conference that everybody was being urged to attend. I asked, "Is this 'Student Evolution' more of a gradual process, or more a matter of 'punk eek'?" (That question brought down the house.)

Punctuated equilibrium, irreverently abbreviated 'punk eek', is a very interesting modification of Darwinian theory. Darwinian *evolution* in its early forms posits and implies a gradual process of very slow changes—almost constant over very long ("geological") time frames. And that is a beautiful theory that flatly contracts almost all known data.

As explained by my Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy biology teacher, "Evolution is like baseball. It has long stretches of boring time interrupted by brief periods of intense excitement." That's punk eek in a nutshell, and what interests me most is that it's the mirror image of saying "God created the world—through evolution!" It says, "Evolution occurred—through punctuated equilibrium!"

That's not the only problem; evolution appears to be, in Kuhnian terms (Structure of Scientific Revolutions), a theory "in crisis", which is the Kuhnian term for when a scientific theory is having serious difficulties accounting for currently given data and may well be on its way out the door. There are several ways people are trying to cope with this—preserving some semblance of a materialist explanation; there was the same kind of resistance going on before science acknowledged the Big Bang, because scientists who want a universe without cause and without beginning or creator heard something that sounded too much like "Let there be light!" They're very interesting, and intellectually dishonest.

Now I need to clarify; people seem to think you have to either be a young earth creationist or else admit evolution of some stripe. I believe in 13 billion years as the rough age of the universe, not six thousand years; I also believe in natural selection and something called "micro-evolution." (By the way, JPII's "more than a hypothesis" was in the original French "*plus qu'un hypothèse*", alternately translatable as "more than one hypothesis", and the official Vatican translation takes this reading. One can say that micro-evolution is one of the hypothesis gathered under the heading of evolution.)

I wince when I see theologians trying their dutiful best to work out an obligation to take evolution into account as a proven fact: squash, like a grape. It's not just that science doesn't trade in proof and evolution is being treated like a revelation, as if a Pope had consulted the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences and canonized *The Origin of the Species* as a book of the Bible. Or maybe that's putting it too strongly. It would also be strong language to say that many theologians are adopting a carefully critical attitude to classic Church claims and part of their being critical means placing an embarrassingly blind faith in evolution. But that's truer than I'd want to admit.

What about the second law of thermodynamics?

I don't know what the first and third laws of thermodynamics

say, and I can't say that I'm missing anything. I don't feel obligated to make the second law, which I am familiar with, a feature of my theology, but if I did, I would try to understand the first and third laws of thermodynamics, and treat it as physics in which those three laws and presumably other things fit into a system that needs to be treated as a whole. I don't know how I would incorporate that in my theology, but I'm supposing for the sake of argument that I would. I would rather avoid treating it the way people usually seem to treat it when they treat that as one of the things that educated people "should" know.

I guess that my point in all of this is that some people think there's a duty to know science and be scientific in theology, but this is a duty better shirked. My theology is—or I would like it to be—closer to that of someone who doesn't understand science, period, than that of people who try to improve their theology by incorporating what they can grasp of difficult scientific concepts that the scientists themselves learned with difficulty.

Rumor science is worse than no science, and an ascientific theology is not a handicap. When I say that I would rather see theologians know either much more or much less science, I'm not hoping that theologians will therefore get scientific degrees. The chief merit for a theologian to know science is that it can be a source of liberation that frees people from thinking "We live in a scientific age so it would be better for theology to be scientific." I'm not sure I would be able to question that assumption if I knew much less science. *But what I believe that buys me is not a better theology than someone scientifically innocent but freedom from the perceived need to "take science into account" in my theology so I can do the same kind of theology as someone scientifically innocent.*

I'm not as sure what to say about ecological theology; I wrote [Hymn to the Creator of Heaven and Earth](#) at without scientific reference that I remember, and I believe there are other human ways of knowing Creation besides science. But an ecological theologian who draws on scientific studies is not trying to honor a duty to understand things an educated person should know, but pursuing

something materially relevant. Science has some place; religion and science boundary issues are legitimate, and I don't know I can dissuade people who think it's progressive to try to make a scientific theology—although I really wish people with that interest would get letters after their name from a science discipline, or some other form of genuinely proper scientific credentials appropriate to a genuinely scientific theology.

There are probably other exceptions, and science is interesting. But there is no obligation to go from safely on one side of the road to a position in the middle because it is "closer" to a proper understanding of science. Perhaps liberation theologians want people to understand their cause, but it is better not to pretend to know liberation theology than to approach it in a way that leaves you "knowing" that the preferential option is optional. *It isn't what you know that hurts you, but what you know that ain't so*—and rumor science, with its accepted list of important scientific knowledge that scholars need to take into account, is one way to learn from what ain't so.

Science is the prestige discipline(s) today; you see psychology wishing for its Newton to lead it into the promised land of being a science in the fullest sense of the term. You don't see psychology pining for a Shakespeare to lead it into the promised land of being a humanity in the fullest sense of the term. And the social disciplines—I intentionally do not say social **sciences** because they are legitimate academic disciplines but not sciences—are constantly insisting that their members are scientists, but *the claim that theologians are scientists annoys me as a scientist and almost offends me as a theologian*. It should be offensive for much the same reason that it should be offensive to insist on female dignity by claiming that women are really male, and that they are just as much male as people who can sire a child.

It would be an interesting theological work to analyze today's cultural assumptions surrounding science, which are quite important and not dictated by scientific knowledge itself, and then come to almost the same freedom as someone innocent of science.

"My theology," *ewwww*. (While I was at it, why didn't I discuss plans for my own private sun and moon? I'm *not* proud of proudly discussing "my theology".) I know the text has a wart or two.

But the piece contains a suggestion: "rumor science" may be a red flag to a real problem in the place we give science.

## Pondering Einstein, or at least dropping his name

That work left out the crowning jewel of scientific theories to ponder in "rumor science": Einstein's "theory of relativity." Some time later, in my science fiction short story / Socratic dialogue, [The Steel Orb](#), I wrote in fiction something that picked up what I had left out:

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

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

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

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

Art hesitated, and began to sit up.

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

Art shrunk slightly towards his chair.



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

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

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

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

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

"You might be interested to know that the differences predicted by Einstein's theory of relativity are so minute that decades passed

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

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

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

"Is this a trick question? Fifty pounds?"

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

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

"No. It's an underwhelming, *microscopic* difference for what relativity says when the rumor mill has it that Einstein taught us that hard sciences are as fuzzy as anything else... or that perhaps, in Star Wars terms, 'Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on your own point of view.' Under Einstein, you will in fact **not** find that many of the observations that we cling to, depend greatly on your own frame of reference. You have to be doing something pretty exotic to have relativity make any measurable difference from the older physics at all."

## "Rumor science": The tip of an iceberg?

But I would like to get on to something that is of far greater concern than "rumor science" as it treats Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, the second law of thermodynamics, relativity, evolution, and so on. If the only problem was making a bit of a hash of some scientific theories, that would be one thing. But "rumor science" may be the tip of an iceberg, a telling clue that something may be seriously amiss in how theology has been relating to science. There is another, far more serious boundary issue.

There is something about the nature of academic theology today that may become clearer if we ask questions about the nature of knowledge and line up academic theology with Orthodoxy on the one hand and modern science on the other. The table below lists a few questions connected with knowledge, and then a comparison between Orthodox Christianity, academic theology, and modern science in their own columns:

<b>Question</b>	<b>Orthodox Christianity</b>	<b>Academic Theology</b>	<b>Modern Science</b>
<i>What is knowledge like?</i>	"Adam knew Eve..." The primary word in the Old and New Testaments for sexual union is in fact 'know', and this is a significant clue about the intimate nature of knowledge. Knowledge is, at its core, the knowledge that drinks. It connects at a deepest level, and is cognate to how Orthodox say	Knowledge is <i>critical</i> , meaning <i>detached</i> : the privileged position is of the outsider who stands clear of a situation and looks into a window. The devout believer enjoys no real advantage in grasping his religion compared to the methodical	You can't know how stars age or the limitations of the ideal gas law from direct personal experience. Science stems from a rationalism cognate to the Enlightenment, and even if one rebels against the Enlightenment,

to how Orthodox say of the Holy Mysteries, "We have seen the true Light!": to receive the Eucharist is to know.

observer who remains detached —and the ordinary believer may be at a marked disadvantage.

it's awfully hard to know quarks and leptons solely by the intimacy of personal experience.

This may not be part of the standard Western picture, but the Orthodox, non-materialist

understanding of mind holds that there is a sort of "spiritual eye" which knows and which grasps spiritual realities as overflow to its central purpose of worshiping God.

The center of gravity for knowing is this spiritual eye, and it is the center of a whole and integrated person. Logical and other "discursive" reasoning may have a place, but the seat of this kind of reasoning is a moon next to the light of the sun which is the spiritual eye, the *nous*.

Good scholarship comes from putting all other aspects of the person in their place and enthroning the part of us that reasons logically and almost putting the logic bit on steroids.

Continental philosophy may rebel against this, but it rebels after starting from this point.

We have a slightly more rigorous use of primarily logical reasoning and a subject domain that allows this reasoning to shine.

*What aspect of yourself do you know with?*

They should train

They should train students to

*What should teachers cultivate in their students?* Teachers should induce students into *discipleship* and should be exemplary disciples themselves. students who will not be content with their teachers' interpretations but push past to their own takes on the matter. develop experiments and theories to carefully challenge the "present working picture" in their field.

*What is tradition, and how does your tradition relate to knowing?* One may be not so much *under Tradition as in Tradition*: Tradition is like one's culture or language, if a culture and language breathed on by the Holy Spirit of God. Though the matrix of Tradition need not be viewed with legalistic fundamentalism, it is missing something important to fail to love and revere Tradition as something of a Something of the attitude is captured in what followed the telling of an anecdote about a New Testament Greek class where the professor had difficulties telling how to read a short text, until a classics student looked and suggested that the difficulty would evaporate if the text were read with a different set of accents from what scholars traditionally assigned it. The Greek professor's response ("Accents are not inspired!") was presented by the academic theologian As Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman observed, "You get to be part of the establishment by blowing up part of the establishment."

mother.

theologian  
retelling this story

as full warrant to  
suggest that  
scholars should  
not view  
themselves as  
bound by *tradition*  
with its blind  
spots.

*How much  
emphasis  
do you  
place on  
creativity?*

It reflects some  
degree of  
fundamental  
confusion to  
measure the value of  
what someone says  
by how original it is.  
That which is true is  
not original, and that  
which is original is  
not true. Perhaps  
people may uncover  
new layers of  
meaning, but to  
measure someone by  
how many ideas he  
can claim as "mine"  
is a strange measure.

Publish something  
*original*, or perish.  
Better to say  
something original  
but not true than  
not have any ideas  
to claim as "mine."  
If need be,  
rehabilitate Arius  
or Nestorius. (Or,  
if you are  
Orthodox, meet  
current fashions  
halfway and show  
that St. Augustine  
need not be a  
whipping boy.)

Continue to push  
the envelope. Are  
you an  
experimental  
physicist? If you  
cannot observe  
anything new by  
the layman's  
means of  
observation,  
pioneer new  
equipment or a  
clever experiment  
to push the  
envelope of what  
can be observed.  
Publish  
something  
*original* or perish.

There is a very real  
sense of empiricism,  
albeit a sense that  
has very little  
directly to do with  
empirical science.  
Knowledge is what

~~Theologians are  
just as empirical as  
physicists whether~~

As much as  
theology's  
empiricism is the  
empiricism of a  
knowledge of the  
"spiritual eye" and  
the whole person,  
our empiricism is

*Where does your discipline place its empiricism?*

you know through the "spiritual eye" and it is a knowledge that can only be realized through direct participation. An "idle word" may be a word of that which you do not have this knowledge of, and this sin would appear to be foundational to the empiricism of science. We really do have an empiricism, but it might be better not to engender pointless confusion by claiming to be empirical when the empiricism known to the academy is pre-eminently that of empirical science, whether it is either actual or aspiring science.

~~physicists, whether or not they know basic statistics.~~ We have such quasi-scientific empiricism as can be had for the human and divine domain we cover; there is a great deal of diversity, and some of us do not place much emphasis on the empiricism of science, but some of us have enough of scientific empiricism to do history work that stands its ground when judged by secular history's standards.

an empiricism of detached, careful, methodical, reasoned investigation—the investigation of the reasoning faculty on steroids. Our science exhibits professionalism and a particular vision of intellectual virtue. Our empiricism corresponds to this vision, and no one has pushed this empiricism of the reasoning faculty further, and the unique technology founded on science is a testament to how far we have pushed this kind of empiricism.

When they are lined up, academic theology appears to have a great many continuities with science and a real disconnect with Orthodox Christianity. Could academic theologians feel an inferiority complex about Not Being Scientific Enough? Absolutely. But the actual problem may be that they are entirely *too* scientific. I am less concerned that their theology is not sufficiently scientific than that it is not sufficiently *theological*.

## Origins questions: can we dig deeper?

It is along those lines that I have taken something of the track of "join the enemy's camp to show its weaknesses from within" in exposing the blind spots of Darwinism, for instance. In the theologically driven short story [The Commentary](#), the issue is not really whether Darwinism is correct at all. The question is not whether we should be content with Darwinian answers, but whether we should be content with Darwinian *questions*.

Martin stepped into his house and decided to have no more distractions. He wanted to begin reading commentary, now. He opened the book on the table and sat erect in his chair:

### **Genesis**

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

1:2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

1:3 And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The reader is now thinking about evolution. He is wondering whether Genesis 1 is right, and evolution is simply wrong, or whether evolution is right, and Genesis 1 is a myth that may be inspiring enough but does not actually tell how the world was created.

All of this is because of a culture phenomenally influenced by scientism and science. The theory of evolution is an attempt to map out, in terms appropriate to scientific dialogue, just what organisms occurred, when, and what mechanism led there to be new kinds of organisms that did not exist before. Therefore, nearly all Evangelicals assumed, Genesis 1 must be the Christian substitute for evolution. Its purpose must also be to map out what occurred when, to provide the same sort of mechanism. In



short, if Genesis 1 is true, then it must be trying to answer the same question as evolution, only answering it differently.

Darwinian evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" Evolution is on philosophical grounds *not* a true answer to that question, because it is not an answer to that question at all. Even if it is true, evolution is only an answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" If someone asks, "Why is there this life that we see?" and someone answers, "Evolution," it is like someone saying, "Why is the kitchen light on?" and someone else answering, "Because the switch is in the on position, thereby closing the electrical circuit and allowing current to flow through the bulb, which grows hot and produces light."

Where the reader only sees one question, an ancient reader saw at least two other questions that are invisible to the present reader. As well as the question of "How?" that evolution addresses, there is the question of "Why?" and "What function does it serve?" These two questions are very important, and are not even considered when people are only trying to work out the antagonism between creationism and evolutionism.

Martin took a deep breath. Was the text advocating a six-day creationism? That was hard to tell. He felt uncomfortable, in a much deeper way than if Bible-thumpers were preaching to him that evolutionists would burn in Hell.

There is a hint here of why some people who do not believe in a young earth are no less concerned about young earth creationism: the concern is not exactly that it is junk science, but precisely that it is *too* scientific, assuming many of evolutionary theory's blindnesses even as it asserts the full literal truth of the Bible in answering questions on the terms of what science asks of an origins theory.

There is an Dilbert strip which goes as follows:

**Pointy-haired boss:** I'm sending you to Elbonia to teach a

class on Cobol on Thursday.

**Dilbert:** But I don't know Cobol. Can't you ask Wally? He knows Cobol!

**Pointy-haired boss:** I already checked, and he's busy on Thursday.

**Dilbert:** Can't you reschedule?

**Pointy-haired boss:** Ok, are you free on Tuesday?

**Dilbert:** You're answering the wrong question!

Dilbert's mortified, "You're answering the wrong question!" has some slight relevance the issues of religion and science: in my homily, [Two Decisive Moments](#) I tried to ask people to look, and aim, *higher*:

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

There is a classic Monty Python "game show": the moderator asks one of the contestants the second question: "In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" The contestant looks at him with a blank stare, and then he opens the question up to the other contestants: "Anyone? In what year did Coventry City last win the English Cup?" And there is dead silence, until the moderator says, "Now, I'm not surprised that none of you got that. It is in fact a trick question. Coventry City has *never* won the English Cup."

I'd like to dig into another trick question: "When was the world created: 13.7 billion years ago, or about six thousand years ago?" The answer in fact is "Neither," but it takes some explaining to get to the point of realizing that the world was created 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD.

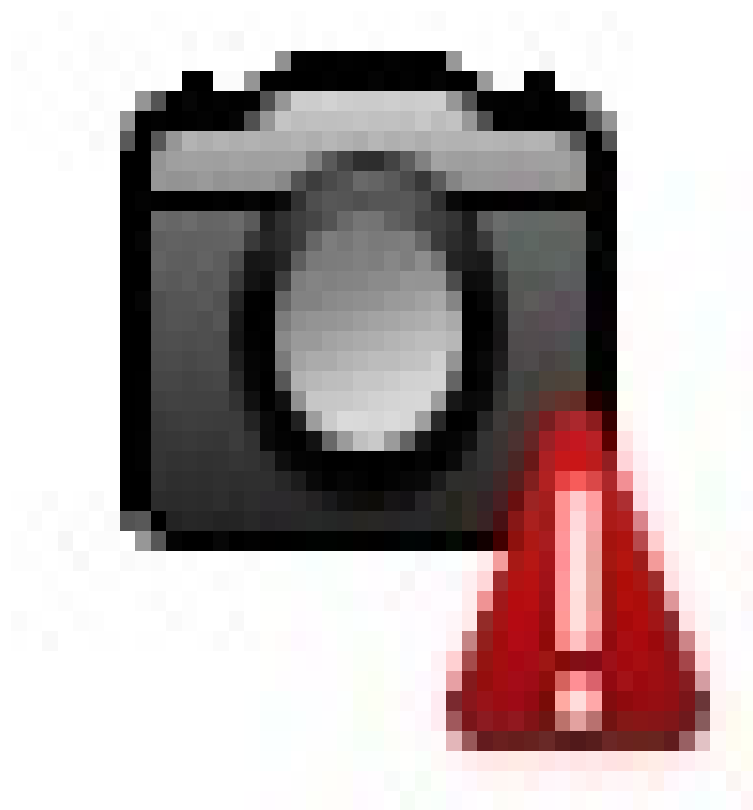
Adam fell and dragged down the whole realm of nature. God had and has every authority to repudiate Adam, to destroy him, but in fact God did something different. He called Noah, Abraham,

Moses, and Elijah, and in the fullness of time he didn't just call a prophet; he sent his Son to become a prophet and more.

It's possible to say something that means more than you realize. Caiaphas, the high priest, did this when he said, "It is better that one man be killed than that the whole nation perish." (John 11:50) This also happened when Pilate sent Christ out, flogged, clothed in a purple robe, and said, "*Behold the man!*"

What does this mean? It means more than Pilate could have possibly dreamed of, and "Adam" means "man": *Behold the man! Behold Adam, but not the Adam who sinned against God and dragged down the Creation in his rebellion, but the second Adam, the new Adam, the last Adam, who obeyed God and exalted the whole Creation in his rising. Behold the man, Adam as he was meant to be. Behold the New Adam who is even now transforming the Old Adam's failure into glory!*

*Behold the man! Behold the first-born of the dead. Behold, as in the icon of the Resurrection, the man who descends to reach Adam and Eve and raise them up in his ascent. Behold the man who will enter the realm of the dead and forever crush death's power to keep people down.*



An icon of the Resurrection.

*Behold the man and behold the firstborn of many brothers!* You may know the great chapter on faith, chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews, and it is with good reason one of the most-loved chapters in the Bible, but it is not the only thing in Hebrews. The book of Hebrews looks at things people were caught up in, from the glory of angels to sacrifices and the Mosaic Law, and underscores how much more the Son excels above them. A little before the passage we read above, we see, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'You are my son; today I have begotten you'?" (Hebrews 1:5) And yet in John's prologue we read, "To those who received him and believed in his name, he gave the authority to become the children of God." (John 1:9) We also read today, "To which of the angels did he ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I have made your enemies a footstool under your feet?'" (Hebrews 1:13) And yet Paul encourages us: "The God of

peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet," (Romans 16:20) and elsewhere asks bickering Christians, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (I Corinthians 6:3) *Behold the man! Behold the firstborn of many brothers, the Son of God who became a man so that men might become the Sons of God. Behold the One who became what we are that we might by grace become what he is. Behold the supreme exemplar of what it means to be Christian.*

*Behold the man and behold the first-born of all Creation, through whom and by whom all things were made! Behold the Uncreated Son of God who has entered the Creation and forever transformed what it means to be a creature! Behold the Saviour of the whole Creation, the Victor who will return to Heaven bearing as trophies not merely his transfigured saints but the whole Creation! Behold the One by whom and through whom all things were created! Behold the man!*

Pontius Pilate spoke words that were deeper than he could have **possibly** imagined. And Christ continued walking the fateful journey before him, continued walking to the place of the Skull, Golgotha, and finally struggled to breathe, his arms stretched out as far as love would go, and barely gasped out, "It is finished."

Then and there, the entire work of Creation, which we read about from Genesis onwards, was *complete*. There and no other place the world was created, at 3:00 PM, March 25, 28 AD. *Then* the world was created.

I wince at the idea that for theologians "boundary issues" are mostly about demonstrating the compatibility of timeless revealed truths to the day's state of flux in scientific speculation. I wince that theologians so often assume that the biggest contribution they can give to the dialogue between theology and science is the rubber stamp of perennially agreeing with science. I would decisively prefer that when theologians "approach religion and science boundary issues," we do so as boundaries are understood in pop psychology—and more specifically *bad* pop psychology—which is all about you cannot meaningfully say "Yes" until it is your practice to say "No" when you should say "No": what theology needs in its

boundaries with science is not primarily a question of what else we should seek to embrace, but of where theology has ingested things toxic to its constitution.

What gets lost when theology loses track (by which I do not mean primarily rumor science, but the three columns where theology seemed a colony of science that had lost touch with Orthodox faith) is that when theology assumes the character of science, it loses the character of theology.

The research for my diploma thesis at Cambridge had me read a lot of historical-critical commentary on a relevant passage; I read everything I could find on the topic in Tyndale House's specialized library, and something became painfully obvious. When a good Protestant sermon uses historical or cultural context to illuminate a passage from Scripture, the preacher has sifted through pearls amidst sand, and the impression that cultural context offers a motherlode of gold to enrich our understanding of the Bible is quite contrary to the historical-critical commentaries I read, which read almost like phone books in their records of details I'd have to stretch to use to illuminate the passage. The pastor's discussion of context in a sermon is something like an archivist who goes into a scholar's office, pulls an unexpected book, shows that it is surprisingly careworn and dog-eared, and discusses how the three longest underlined passage illuminate the scholar's output. But the historical-critical commentary itself is like an archivist who describes in excruciating detail the furniture and ornaments in the author's office and the statistics about the size and weight among books the scholar owned in reams of (largely uninterpreted) detail.

And what is lost in this careful scholarship? Perhaps what is lost is why we have Bible scholarship in the first place: it is a divinely given book and a support to life in Christ. If historical-critical scholarship is your (quasi-scientific) approach to theology, you won't seek in your scholarship what I sought in writing my (non-scientific) [Doxology](#):

How shall I praise thee, O Lord?  
For naught that I might say,  
Nor aught that I may do,

Compareth to thy worth.

Thou art the Father for whom every fatherhood in Heaven and on earth is named,

The Glory for whom all glory is named,

The Treasure for whom treasures are named,

The Light for whom all light is named,

The Love for whom all love is named,

The Eternal by whom all may glimpse eternity,

The Being by whom all beings exist,

יהוה,

Ο ΩΝ.

The King of Kings and Lord of Lords,

Who art eternally praised,

Who art all that thou canst be,

Greater than aught else that may be thought,

Greater than can be thought.

In thee is light,

In thee is honour,

In thee is mercy,

In thee is wisdom, and praise, and every good thing.

For good itself is named after thee,

God immeasurable, immortal, eternal, ever glorious, and humble.

What mighteth compare to thee?

What praise equalleth thee?

If I be fearfully and wonderfully made,

Only can it be,

Wherewith thou art fearful and wonderful,

And ten thousand things besides,

Thou who art One,

Eternally beyond time,

So wholly One,

That thou mayest be called infinite,

Timeless beyond time thou art,

The One who is greater than infinity art thou.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

The Three who are One,

No more bound by numbers than by word,

And yet the Son is called Ο ΛΟΓΟΣ,  
The Word,  
Divine ordering Reason,  
Eternal Light and Cosmic Word,  
Way pre-eminent of all things,  
Beyond all, and infinitesimally close,  
Thou transcendest transcendence itself,  
The Creator entered into his Creation,  
Sharing with us humble glory,  
Lowered by love,  
Raised to the highest,  
The Suffering Servant known,  
The King of Glory,  
Ο ΩΝ.

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

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



## Monty Python and Christian theology

I would like to start winding down with a less uplifting note. A few years back, I visited a friend who was a Christian and a big Monty Python fan and played for me a Monty Python clip:

**God:** Arthur! Arthur, King of the Britons! Oh, don't grovel! If there's one thing I can't stand, it's people groveling.

**Arthur:** Sorry—

**God:** And don't apologize. Every time I try to talk to someone it's 'sorry this' and 'forgive me that' and 'I'm not worthy'. What are you doing now!?

**Arthur:** I'm averting my eyes, O Lord.

**God:** Well, don't. It's like those miserable Psalms—they're so depressing. Now knock it off!

This is blasphemous, and I tried to keep my mouth shut about what my host had presented to me, I thought, for my rollicking laughter. But subsequent conversation showed I had misjudged his intent: he had not intended it to be shockingly funny.

He had, in fact, played the clip because it was something that he worried about: did God, in fact, want to give grumbling complaints about moments when my friend cried out to him in prayer? Does prayer annoy our Lord as an unwelcome intrusion from people who should have a little dignity and leave him alone or at least quit sniveling?

This is much more disturbing than merely playing the clip because you find it funny to imagine God bitterly kvetching when King Arthur tries to show him some respect. If it is actually taken as theology, Monty Python is really sad.

And it is not the best thing to be involved in Monty Python as theology

theology.

One can whimsically imagine an interlocutor encountering some of the theology I have seen and trying to generously receive it in the best of humor: "A book that promises scientific theology in its title and goes on for a thousand pages of trajectories for other people to follow before a conclusion that apologizes for not actually getting on to any theology? *You have a real sense of humor!* Try to avoid imposing Christianity on others and start from the common ground of what all traditions across the world have in common, that non-sectarian common ground being the Western tradition of analytic philosophy? *Roaringly funny!* Run a theological anthropology course that tells how liberationists, feminists, queer theorists, post-colonialists, and so on have to say to the Christian tradition and does not begin to investigate what the Christian tradition has to say to them? *You should have been a comedian!* Yoke St. Gregory of Nyssa together with a lesbian deconstructionist like Judith Butler to advance the feminist agenda of gender fluidity? *You're really giving Monty Python a run for their money!*" ... until it gradually dawns on our interlocutor that the lewd discussion of sexual theology is not in any sense meant as an attempt to eclipse Monty Python. (Would our interlocutor spend the night weeping for lost sheep without a shepherd?)

There are many more benign examples of academic theology; many of even the problems may be slightly less striking. But theology that gives the impression that it could be from Monty Python is a bit of a dead (coal miner's) canary.

Scientific theology does not appear to be blame for all of these, but it is not irrelevant. Problems that are not directly tied to (oxymoronic) scientific theology are usually a complication of (oxymoronic) secular theology, and scientific theology and secular theology are deeply enough intertwined.

The question of evolution is important, and it is no error that a figure like Philip Johnson gives neo-Darwinian evolution pride of place in assessing materialist attacks on religion. But it is not an adequate remedy to merely study intelligent design. Not enough by half.

If theology could, like bad pop psychology, conceive of its "boundary issues" not just in terms of saying "Yes" but of learning to stop saying "Yes" when it should say "No", this would be a great gain. So far as I have seen, the questions about boundaries with science are primarily not scientific ideas theology needs to assimilate, but ways theology has assimilated some very deep characteristics of science that are *not* to its advantage. The question is less about what more could be added, than what more could be taken away. And the best way to do this is less the Western cottage industry of worldview construction than a journey of repentance such as one still finds preached in Eastern Christianity and a good deal of Christianity in the West.

## A journey of repentance

Repentance is Heaven's best-kept secret. Repentance has been called unconditional surrender, and it has been called the ultimate experience to fear. But when you surrender what you thought was your ornament and joy, you realize, "I was holding on to a piece of Hell!" And with letting go comes hands that are free to grasp joy you never thought to ask. Forgiveness is letting go of the other person and finding it is yourself you have set free; repentance is being terrified of letting go and then finding you have let go of needless pain. Repentance is indeed Heaven's best-kept secret; it opens doors.

I have doubt whether academic theology will open the door of repentance; it is a beginner's error to be the student who rushes in to single-handedly sort out what a number of devout Christian theologians see no way to fix. But as for theologians, the door of repentance is ever ready to open, and with it everything that the discipline of theology seeks in vain here using theories from the humanities, there trying to mediate prestige to itself science. Academic theologians who are, or who become, theologians in a more ancient sense find tremendous doors of beauty and joy open to them. The wondrous poetry of St. Ephrem the Syrian is ever open; the liturgy of the Church is open; the deifying rays of divine grace shine ever down upon those open to receiving them and upon those not yet open. The Western understanding is that the door to the Middle Ages has long since been closed and the age of the Church Fathers was closed much earlier; but Orthodox will let you become a Church Father, here now. Faithful people today submit as best they are able to the Fathers before them, as St. Maximus Confessor did ages ago. There may be problems with academic theology today, but the door to theology in the classic sense is never closed, as in the maxim that has rumbled through the ages, "A theologian is one who prays, and one who prays is a theologian." Perhaps academic theology is not the best place to be equipped to be a giant like the saintly theologians of ages past. But that does not mean that one cannot become a saintly theologian as in ages past. God can still work with us, here now.

To quote St. Dionysius (pseudo-Dionysius) in [The Mystical Theology](#),

Trinity! Higher than any being,  
any divinity, any goodness!  
Guide of Christians  
in the wisdom of Heaven!  
Lead us up beyond unknowing light,  
up to the farthest, highest peak  
of mystic scripture,  
where the mysteries of God's Word  
lie simple, absolute and unchangeable  
in the brilliant darkness of a hidden silence.  
Amid the deepest shadow  
They pour overwhelming light  
on what is most manifest.  
Amid the wholly unsensed and unseen  
They completely fill our sightless minds  
with treasures beyond all beauty.

Let us ever seek the theology of living faith!

# "Physics"

I included [Aristotle's \*Physics\*](#) when I originally posted [An Orthodox Bookshelf](#), then read most of the text and decided that even if the Fathers' science was largely Aristotelian physics, reading the original source is here less helpful than it might appear. The Fathers believed in elements of earth, air, fire, and water, and these elements are mentioned in the Theophany Vespers, which are one of the primary Orthodox texts on how the cosmos is understood. However, even if these are found in Aristotelian physics, the signal to noise ratio for patristic understanding of science is dismal: [Aristotle's \*Physics\*](#) could be replaced with a text one tenth its length and still furnish everything the Fathers take from it.

I would like to take a moment to pause in looking at the word "physics." It is true enough that historically Aristotelian physics was replaced by Newton, who in turn gave way to Einstein, and then quantum physics entered the scene, and now we have superstring theory. And in that caricatured summary, "physics" seems to mean what it means for superstring theory. But I want to pause on the word "physics." Orthodox know that non-Orthodox who ask, "What are your passions?" may get a bit more of an earful than they bargained for. "Passions" is not a word Orthodox use among themselves for nice hobbies and interests they get excited about; it means a sinful habit that has carved out a niche for itself to become a spiritual disease. And "physics", as I use it, is not a competitor to superstring theory; etymologically it means, "of the nature of things," I would quote C.S. Lewis, [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#):

"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.*"

What is a star? I would answer by quoting an icon, of the creation of the stars. The text on the icon does not refer to Genesis at all, but [Job 38:7, "...when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"](#):

The stars in the icon are connected with the six-winged seraphim, the highest rank of angels. The Heavens are an icon of Heaven, and the icon says something very different than, "What are stars if we view them as reductionists do?"

And this article is not intended to compete with physics as it is now understood, or to defend patristic Aristotelian physics against its challengers, or to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with the present state of scientific speculation: words that I choose carefully, because theology is about divine revealed doctrine while science is the present state of speculation in a very careful system of educated guesses, and scientific theories will not stop being discarded for newer alternatives until science is dead. It is therefore somewhat of a strange matter to demonstrate the compatibility of theology with science, as conforming timeless revealed doctrines to the present best educated guess that is meant to be discarded.

## Of the nature of things

The central mystery in the nature of things is the divine nature. [No man can see God and live](#), and the divine essence is not knowable to any creature. The divine energies are available, and indeed can deify creation, but the central mystery around which all else revolves is God's unknowable essence and nature.

This is the central mystery around which everything else revolves, but the divine essence is not part of a larger system, even as its largest part. God lies beyond the created order, and perhaps the greatest failure of Aristotelian physics to understand the nature of things lies in its tendency towards materialism, its sense that you understand things by looking down. Some have said, in introducing [Michael Polanyi's theories of personal knowledge](#), that behavioralism in psychology does not teach, "There is no soul;" rather, it induces students into investigation in such a way that the possibility of a soul is never even considered. And Aristotelian physics started a trajectory that has lingered even when the specifics of Aristotelian physics were considered to be overturned: you understand the nature of things by looking at them materially. Aristotelian physics, in asking, "What is the nature of this?" leads the listener so as to never even consider an answer of, "Because that is how it functions as a satellite of God." And the entire *phusis* or nature of every created being is as a satellite of God: the atheist who says "The very notion of a God is incoherent," does so with the breath of God.



## Headship and harmony with nature

Many Westerners may identify the goal of harmony with nature with the East, but the concept as we have it is essentially Western in nature. Orthodox monasticism may look a lot like harmony with nature to the West: it often takes place in rustic surroundings, and animals are not afraid of monastics: deer will eat from a monk's hand. But there is a fundamental difference between this and the Western concept of harmony with nature: the harmony does not come from our taking our cue from plants and animals. Monks and nuns are to take their cue from God, and harmony with animals comes from how they take their cue from God.

All creation bears some resemblance to God, and God himself is called the Rock. For every creature there is a *logos* or idea in God's heart, that is what that creature should strive to be. But there is a distinction among creation. Some are given the image of God: men and angels, and we exist in a fuller and deeper sense than creatures that do not bear such an image. God exists in a unique and deepest sense, and if we say that God exists, we cannot say that we exist in the same sense, and if we say that we exist, we cannot say that God exists in the same sense. Those who are given the image, who have a human or angelic mind, are more fully nature than those creatures who have do not exist in the same way on the same level. And we who bear the royal image, even if liturgical asceticism removes barriers between us and the rest of Creation, are to take our cue from God our head.

## Getting past "the politics of envy"

The concept of headship is a difficult and perhaps touchy one, not least because the only place where people think it applies is the husband being the head of the wife. But it is written into the cosmos in larger letters. St. Maximus the Confessor spoke of five divisions that are to be transcended:

<b>Head Body</b>	
Man	Woman
Paradise	The inhabited world
Heaven	Earth
Spiritual creation	Tangible creation
God	Creation

All these differences are ultimately to be transcended, and many more not listed. But the project of transcending them assumes there are differences to start off with, which we do not transcend by closing our eyes and pretending they are not there. And this feature of creation runs aground what might be called "the politics of envy", whose central feature is an equality that boils down to saying, "*I don't want anybody to be better than me.*"

And this brings me to the point of inequality. Not only are the politics of envy toxic, but unequal treatment bears something that the politics of envy would never imagine. The kindest and most courteous acts are most often not those that treat the other as an equal, but those that treat the other as not equal. The man who buys six dozen roses for his wife does not treat her as an equal: the thought would not occur to him to buy six dozen roses for one of his fellow workmen. The mother who holds and comforts a child after a scrape extends a courtesy that would not be extended quite so far for an adult capable of managing moods and life's scrapes. The greatest courtesies are extended precisely at the point when someone in a position of headship treats someone else, not as an equal, but as the head's body as in the chart above. The same is

implied for authority, or some of the more painful social lessons having to do with profound giftedness. Perhaps people may say "Treat me as an equal" instead of "treat me well," but it has been my own experience that treating people as equals in an area where they request equality has given social explosions that I could have avoided if I were wise enough to realize that the point where I was asked, "Treat me as an equal," were precisely the situations which demanded the wisdom not to treat people as intellectual equals that could handle the full force of what I was thinking, but extend some of the most delicate courtesy and social graces. Exactly what is needed is hard to say, but precisely what is **not** needed is to say, "*Great, I've found someone gifted in exactly the same way I am,*" and launch into the full force of your deepest thought. God does not create two blades of grass alike. He has never created two humans who are equal, but after each, he broke the mould.

## **Microcosm and mediator**

Mankind was created to be a microcosm, summarizing both the spiritual and tangible creation, and a mediator. All the Orthodox faithful participate in a spiritual priesthood, and its sigil is the sacramental priesthood that a few identify. We are called to mediate and help transcend the differences above. Our worship of the God who is Light, and ourselves being the light of the world, is as the vanguard of Creation returning to the Creator, the firstfruits of a world created by and for God.

## Symbols

I would like to close on an understanding of symbol. Men are symbols of God; that is what it means to be made in the image of God. The material world is best understood, not as things operating under mathematical laws, but as having a symbolic dimension that ultimately points back to God. The theory of evolution is not a true answer to the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" because it does not address the question, "Why is there life as we know it?" If it is true, it is a true answer to the question, "*How* is there life as we know it?" The sciences answer questions of "How," not questions of "Why," and the world is best understood as having a symbolic dimension where the question of "Why?" refers to God and overshadows the question of "How?"

Even if physics answers its questions with accuracy, it does not answer the deepest questions, and a deeper level has three kinds of causation, all of them personal. Things are caused by God, or by humans, or by devils. When we pray, it is not usually for an exception to the laws of physics, but that nature, governed by personal causes on a deeper level, may work out in a particular way under God's governance. And the regular operations of physics do not stop this.

## Miracles

Miracles are very rare, if we use the term strictly and not for the genuine miracle of God providing for us every day. But the readings for the Theophany Vespers repeat miracles with nature, and they present, if you will, nature at its most essential. Most of the matter in the universe is not part of icons of Christ, his Mother, and his Saints, and yet even outside of men icons are a vanguard, a firstfruit of a creation that will be glorified. Mankind is at its most essential in Christ himself, and the natural world is at its most essential as an arena for God's power to be displayed. And God's display of power is not strictly a rarity; it plays out when bread comes out of the earth, when [The Heavens declare the glory of God / And the firmament sheweth his handywork. / Day unto day uttereth speech / And night unto night sheweth knowledge.](#)

## Sweet Lord, You Play Me False

All of this may be true, but there is an odor of falsity built in its very foundations, to provide an Orthodox "physics" (or study of "the nature of things") analogous to Aristotle's original "physics." Anselm famously wrote the "Monologion" (in which Anselm explores various arguments for God's existence) and the "Proslogion" (in which Anselm seeks a single and decisive proof of God's existence). Once I told an Anselm scholar that there had been a newly discovered "Monophagion," in which Anselm tries to discern whether reasoning can ever bring someone to recognize the imperative of eating, and "Prospagation," in which Anselm gets hungry and has a bite to eat. For those of you not familiar with Greek, "prospagation" means "a little smackerel of something."

This work is, in a sense, an exploration about whether philosophy can bring a person to recognize the necessity of eating. But that's not where the proof of the pudding lies. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating, in the live liturgical life that culminates in the Eucharist, the fulcrum for the transformation and ultimate deification of the cosmos. The proof of the pudding lies not in the philosophizing, but in the eating.

# **An Orthodox Looks at a Calvinist Looking at Orthodoxy**

Jack Kinneer, an Orthodox Presbyterian minister and a D.Min. graduate of an Eastern Orthodox seminary, wrote a series of dense responses to his time at that seminary. The responses are generally concise, clear, and make the kind of observations that I like to make. My suspicion is that if Dr. Kinneer is looking at things this way, there are a lot of other people who are looking at things the same way—but may not be able to put their finger on it. And he may have given voice to some things that Orthodox may wish to respond to.

Orthodoxy is difficult to understand, and I wrote a list of responses to some (not all) of the points he raises. I asked New Horizons, which printed his article, and they offered gracious permission to post with attribution, which is much appreciated. I believe that Dr. Kinneer's words open a good conversation, and I am trying to worthily follow up on his lead.



# A Calvinist Looks at Orthodoxy

Jack D. Kinneer

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During my studies at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, I was often asked by students, "Are you Orthodox?" It always felt awkward to be asked such a question. I thought of myself as doctrinally orthodox. I was a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. So I thought I could claim the word *orthodox*.

But I did not belong to the communion of churches often called Eastern Orthodox, but more properly called simply Orthodox. I was not Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, or Antiochian Orthodox. As far as the Orthodox at St. Vladimir's were concerned, I was not Orthodox, regardless of my agreement with them on various doctrines.

My studies at St. Vladimir's allowed me to become acquainted with Orthodoxy and to become friends with a number of Orthodox professors, priests, and seminarians. My diploma was even signed by Metropolitan Theodosius, the head of the Orthodox Church in America. From the Metropolitan to the seminarians, I was received kindly and treated with respect and friendliness.

I am not the only Calvinist to have become acquainted with Orthodoxy in recent years. Sadly, a number have not only made the acquaintance, but also left the Reformed faith for Orthodoxy. What is Orthodoxy and what is its appeal to some in the Reformed churches?

## The Appeal of Orthodoxy

Since the days of the apostles, there have been Christian communities in such ancient cities as Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch in Syria, and Corinth in Greece. In such places, the Christian church grew, endured the tribulation of Roman persecution, and ultimately prevailed when the Roman Empire was officially converted to

prevailed when the Roman Empire was officially converted to Christianity. But, unlike Christians in the western half of the Roman Empire, the eastern Christians did not submit to the claims of the bishop of Rome to be the earthly head of the entire church. And why should they have done so? The centers of Orthodox Christianity were as old as, or even older than, the church in Rome. All the great ecumenical councils took place in the East and were attended overwhelmingly by Christian leaders from the East, with only a smattering of representatives from the West. Indeed, most of the great theologians and writers of the ancient church (commonly called the Church Fathers) were Greek-speaking Christians in the East.

The Orthodox churches have descended in an unbroken succession of generations from these ancient roots. As the Orthodox see it, the Western church followed the bishop of Rome into schism (in part by adding a phrase to the Nicene Creed). So, from their perspective, we Protestants are the product of a schism off a schism. The Orthodox believe that they have continued unbroken the churches founded by the apostles. They allow that we Reformed may be Christians, but our churches are not part of the true church, our ordinations are not valid, and our sacraments are no sacraments at all.

The apparently apostolic roots of Orthodoxy provide much of its appeal for some evangelical Protestants. Furthermore, it is not burdened with such later Roman Catholic developments as the Papacy, purgatory, indulgences, the immaculate conception of Mary, and her assumption into heaven. Orthodoxy is ancient; it is unified in a way that Protestantism is not; it lacks most of the medieval doctrines and practices that gave rise to the Reformation. This gives it for many a fascinating appeal.

Part of that appeal is the rich liturgical heritage of Orthodoxy, with its elaborate liturgies, its glorious garbing of the clergy, and its gestures, symbols, and icons. If it is true that the distinctive mark of Reformed worship is simplicity, then even more so is glory the distinctive mark of Orthodox worship. Another appealing aspect of Orthodox worship is its otherness. It is mysterious, sensual, and as

Orthodox worship is its otherness. It is mysterious, sensual, and, as the Orthodox see it, heavenly. Orthodox worship at its best makes you feel like you have been transported into one of the worship scenes in the book of Revelation. Of course, if the priest chants off-key or the choir sings poorly, it is not quite so wonderful.

There are many other things that could be mentioned, but I've mentioned the things that have particularly struck me. These are also the things that converts from Protestantism say attracted them.

## **The Shortcomings of Orthodoxy**

So then, is this Orthodox Presbyterian about to drop the "Presbyterian" and become simply Orthodox? No! In my estimation, the shortcomings of Orthodoxy outweigh its many fascinations. A comparison of the Reformed faith with the Orthodox faith would be a massive undertaking, made all the more difficult because Orthodoxy has no doctrinal statement comparable to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Orthodoxy is the consensus of faith arising from the ancient Fathers and the ecumenical councils. This includes the forty-nine volumes of the Ante- and Post-Nicene Fathers, plus the writings of the hermits and monastics known collectively as the Desert Fathers! It would take an entire issue of *New Horizons* just to outline the topics to be covered in a comparison of Orthodoxy and Reformed Christianity. So the following comments are selective rather than systematic.

First, in my experience, the Orthodox do not understand justification by faith. Some reject it. Others tolerate it, but no one I met or read seemed to really understand it. Just as Protestants can make justification the whole (rather than the beginning) of the gospel, so the Orthodox tend to make sanctification (which they call "theosis" or deification) the whole gospel. In my estimation, this is a serious defect. It weakens the Orthodox understanding of the nature of saving faith.

Orthodoxy also has a real problem with nominal members. Many Orthodox Christians have a very inadequate understanding of the gospel as Orthodoxy understands it. Their religion is often so

the gospel as Orthodoxy understands it. Their religion is often so intertwined with their ethnicity that being Russian or Greek becomes almost synonymous with being Orthodox. This is, by the way, a critique I heard from the lips of Orthodox leaders themselves. This is not nearly as serious a problem in Reformed churches because our preaching continually stresses the necessity for a personal, intimate trusting, receiving, and resting upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Such an emphasis is blurred among the Orthodox.

Second, the Orthodox have a very inadequate understanding of sovereign grace. It is not fair to say that they are Pelagians. (Pelagius was a Western Christian who denied original sin and taught that man's will is free to choose good.) But they are definitely not Augustinians (Calvinists) on sin and grace. In a conversation with professors and doctoral students about the nature of salvation, I quoted Ezekiel 36:26-27 as showing that there is a grace of God that precedes faith and enables that human response. One professor said in response, "I never thought of that verse in that way before." The Orthodox have not thought a lot about sin, regeneration, election, and so forth. Their view of original sin (a term which they avoid) falls far short of the teaching of Paul. Correspondingly, their understanding of Christ's atonement and God's calling is weak as well. Their views could best be described as undeveloped. If you want to see this for yourself, read Chrysostom on John 6:44-45, and then read Calvin on the same passage.

Third, the Orthodox are passionately committed to the use of icons (flat images of Christ, Mary, or a saint) in worship. Indeed, the annual Feast of Orthodoxy celebrates the restoration of icons to the churches at the end of the Iconoclast controversy (in a.d. 843). For the Orthodox, the making and venerating of icons is the mark of Orthodoxy—showing that one really believes that God the Son, who is consubstantial with the Father, became also truly human. Since I did not venerate icons, I was repeatedly asked whether or not I really believed in the Incarnation. The Orthodox are deeply offended at the suggestion that their veneration of icons is a violation of the second commandment. But after listening patiently to their justifications, I am convinced that whatever their intentions may be, their practice is not biblical. However, our dialogue on the subject went back to

not biblical. However, our dialogue on the subject sent me back to the Bible to study the issue in a way that I had not done before. The critique I would offer now is considerably different than the traditional Reformed critique of the practice.

Finally, many of the Orthodox tend to have a lower view of the Bible than the ancient Fathers had. At least at St. Vladimir's, Orthodox scholars have been significantly influenced by higher-critical views of Scripture, especially as such views have developed in contemporary Roman Catholic scholarship. This is, however, a point of controversy among the Orthodox, just as it is among Catholics and Protestants. Orthodoxy also has its divisions between liberals and conservatives. But even those who are untainted by higher-critical views rarely accord to Scripture the authority that it claims for itself or which was accorded to it by the Fathers. The voice of Scripture is largely limited to the interpretations of Scripture found in the Fathers.

There is much else to be said. Orthodoxy is passionately committed to monasticism. Its liturgy includes prayers to Mary. And the Divine Liturgy, for all its antiquity, is the product of a long historical process. If you want to follow the "liturgy" that is unquestionably apostolic, then partake of the Lord's Supper, pray the Lord's Prayer, sing "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," and say "amen," "hallelujah," and "maranatha." Almost everything else in any liturgy is a later adaptation and development.

## **A Concluding Assessment**

But these criticisms do not mean that we have nothing to learn from Orthodoxy. Just as the Orthodox have not thought a lot about matters that have consumed us (such as justification, the nature of Scripture, sovereign grace, and Christ's work on the cross), so we have not thought a lot about what have been their consuming passions: the Incarnation, the meaning of worship, the soul's perfection in the communicable attributes of God (which they call the energies of God), and the disciplines by which we grow in grace. Let us have the maturity to keep the faith as we know it, and to learn

from others where we need to learn.

Orthodoxy in many ways fascinates me, but it does not claim my heart nor stir my soul as does the Reformed faith. My firsthand exposure to Orthodoxy has left me all the more convinced that on the essential matters of human sin, divine forgiveness, and Christ's atoning sacrifice, the Reformed faith is the biblical faith. I would love to see my Orthodox friends embrace a more biblical understanding of these matters. And I am grieved when Reformed friends sacrifice this greater good for the considerable but lesser goods of Orthodox liturgy and piety.

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*Dr. Kinneer is the director of Echo Hill Christian Study Center in Indian Head, Pa.*

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**I wrote the following reply:**

Dear Dr. Kinneer;

**First**, on an Orthodox mailing list, I saw a copy of your "A Calvinist Looks at Orthodoxy." I would like to write a somewhat measured response that you might find of interest; please quote me if you like, preferably with attribution and a link to my website ([cjshayward.com](http://cjshayward.com)). I am a convert Orthodox and a graduate of [Calvin College](http://www.calvin.edu), for which I have fond memories, although I was never a Calvinist, merely a non-Calvinist Evangelical welcomed in the warm embrace of the community. I am presently a Ph.D. student in theology and went to church for some time at [St. Vladimir's Seminary](http://www.stvladimir.edu) and have friends there. I hope that you may find something of interest in my comments here.

**Second**, you talk about discussion of being Eastern Orthodox

versus being orthodox. I would take this as a linguistically confusing matter of the English language, where even in spoken English the context clarifies whether (o)rthodox or (O)rthodox is the meaning intended by the speaker.

**Third**, I will be focusing mostly on matters I where I would at least suggest some further nuance, but your summary headed "The Appeal of Orthodoxy," among other things in the article, is a good sort of thing and the sort of thing I might find convenient to quote.

**Fourth**, the Orthodox consensus of faith is not a much longer and less manageable collection of texts than the [Ante-Nicene Fathers and Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers](#), combined with the even more massive *Patrologia Graecae*, and other patristic sources. [I have said elsewhere](#) that Western and particularly Protestant and Evangelical culture are at their core written cultures, and Orthodoxy is at its core an oral culture that makes use of writing—I could suggest that it was precisely the Reformation that is at the root of what we now know as literate culture. This means that Orthodoxy does not have, as its closest equivalent to the Westminster Confession, a backbreaking load of books that even patristics scholars can't read cover to cover; it means that *the closest Orthodox equivalent to Westminster Confession is not anything printed but something alive in the life and culture of the community*. (At very least this is true if you exclude the Nicene Creed, which is often considered "what Orthodox are supposed to believe.")

**Fifth**, regarding the words, "First, in my experience, the Orthodox do not understand justification by faith:" are you contending that former Evangelicals, who had an Evangelical understanding of justification by faith, were probably fairly devout Evangelicals, and are well-represented at [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#), do not understand justification by faith?

There seems to be something going on here that is a mirror image of what you say below about icons: there, you complain about people assuming that if you don't hold the Orthodox position on icons, you don't understand the Christian doctrine of the incarnation; here, you seem in a mirror image to assume that if people don't have a Reformation-compatible understanding of justification by faith, you don't understand

the Biblical teaching.

I wrote, for a novella I'm working on, [The Sign of the Grail](#), a passage where the main character, an Evangelical, goes to an Orthodox liturgy, hears amidst the mysterious-sounding phrases a reading including "The just shall walk by faith," before the homily:

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

One of the surprises in the Divine Comedy—to a few people at least—is that the Pope is in Hell. Or at least it's a surprise to people who know Dante was a devoted Catholic but don't recognize how good Patriarch John Paul and Patriarch Benedict have been; there have been some moments Catholics aren't proud of, and while Luther doesn't speak for Catholics today, he did put his finger on a lot of things that bothered people then. Now I remember an exasperated Catholic friend asking, "Don't some Protestants know anything else about the Catholic Church *besides* the problems we had in the sixteenth century?" And when Luther made a centerpiece out of what the Bible said about "The righteous shall walk by faith," which was in the Bible's readings today, he changed it, chiefly by using it as a battle axe to attack his opponents and even things he didn't like in Scripture.

It's a little hard to see how Luther changed Paul, since in Paul the words are also a battle axe against legalistic opponents. Or at least it's hard to see directly. Paul, too, is quoting, and I'd like to say exactly what Paul is quoting.

In one of the minor prophets, Habakkuk, the prophet calls out to the Lord and decries the wickedness of those who should be worshiping the Lord. The Lord's response is to say that he's sending in the Babylonians to conquer, and if you want to see some really gruesome archaeological findings, look up what it meant for the Babylonians or Chaldeans to conquer a people. I'm not saying what they did to the people they conquered because I don't want to leave people here trying to get disturbing images out of people's minds, but this was a terrible doomsday prophecy



this was a terrible doomsday prophecy.

The prophet answered the Lord in anguish and asked how a God whose eyes were too pure to look on evil could possibly punish his wicked people by the much more wicked Babylonians. And the Lord's response is very mysterious: "The righteous shall walk by faith."

Let me ask you a question: How is this an answer to what the prophet asked the Lord? Answer: It isn't. It's a refusal to answer. The same thing could have been said by saying, "I AM the Lord, and my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways. I AM WHO I AM and *I will do what I will do*, and I am sovereign in this. I choose not to tell you how, in my righteousness, I choose to let my wicked children be punished by the gruesomely wicked Babylonians. Only know this: even in these conditions, the righteous shall walk by faith."

The words "The righteous shall walk by faith" are an enigma, a shroud, and a protecting veil. To use them as Paul did is a legitimate use of authority, an authority that can only be understood from the inside, but these words remain a protecting veil even as they take on a more active role in the New Testament. The New Testament assumes the Old Testament even as the New Testament unlocks the Old Testament.

Paul does not say, "The righteous will walk by sight," even as he invokes the words, "The righteous shall walk by faith."

Here's something to ponder: The righteous shall walk by faith even in their understanding of the words, "The righteous shall walk by faith."

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

When I showed this to one Reformation scholar to check my treatment of the Reformation, he said that I didn't explain what "The righteous shall walk by faith," but my entire point was to show what the Old Testament quotation could mean *besides* a shibboleth that one is

sanctified in entirety in response to faith without one iota being earned by good works. The Reformation teaching, as I understand it, reflects a subtle adaptation of the Pauline usage—and here I might underscore that Paul and Luther had different opponents—and a profound adaptation of the Old Testament usage. And it may be possible to properly understand the Biblical text without interpreting it along Reformation lines.

**Sixth**, you write that Orthodox tend to have a poor understanding of sovereign grace. I remember how offended my spiritual Father was when I shared that a self-proclaimed non-ordained Reformed minister—the one person who harassed me when I became Orthodox—said that Orthodox didn't believe in grace. He wasn't offended at me, but I cannot ever recall seeing him be more offended. (Note: that harassment was a bitter experience, but I'd really like to think I'm not bitter towards Calvinists; I have a lot of fond memories from my time at Calvin and some excellent memories of friends who tended to be born and bred Calvinists.)

I would suggest that if you can say that Orthodox do not understand sovereign grace shortly after talking about a heavy emphasis on theosis, you are thinking about Orthodox doctrine through a Western grid and are missing partly some details and partly the big picture of how things fit together.

**Seventh**, I am slightly surprised that you describe original sin as simply being in the Bible and something Orthodox do not teach. Rom 5:12 as translated in the Vulgate ("...in quo omnes peccaverunt") has a Greek ambiguity translated out, so that a Greek text that could quite justifiably be rendered that death came into the world "because all sinned" (NIV) is unambiguously rendered as saying about Adam, "in whom all have sinned," which in turn fed into Augustine's shaping of the Western doctrine of original sin. It's a little surprising to me that you present this reading of an ambiguity as simply being what the Bible says, so that the Orthodox are deficiently presenting the Bible by not sharing the reading.

**Eighth**, I too was puzzled by the belief that the Incarnation immediately justifies icons, and I find it less puzzling to hold a more

nuanced understanding of the Orthodox teaching that if you understand the Incarnation on patristic terms—instead of by a Reformation definition—its inner logic flows out to the point of an embrace of creation that has room for icons. I won't develop proof-texts here; what I will say is that the kind of logical inference that is made is similar to a kind of logical inference I see in your report, i.e. that "The righteous shall walk by faith" means the Reformation doctrine that we are justified by faith alone and not by works.

I believe that this kind of reasoning is neither automatically right nor automatically wrong, but something that needs to be judged in each case.

**Ninth**, you write, "Finally, many of the Orthodox tend to have a lower view of the Bible than the ancient Fathers had." When I was about to be received into the Orthodox Church, I told my father that I had been devoted in my reading of the Bible and I would switch to being devoted in my reading of the Fathers. My spiritual father, who is a graduate of [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#), emphatically asked me to back up a bit, saying that the Bible was the core text and the Fathers were a commentary. He's said that he would consider himself very fortunate if his parishioners would spend half an hour a day reading the Bible. On an Orthodox mailing list, one cradle Orthodox believer among mostly converts quoted as emphatic an Orthodox clergyman saying, "If you don't read your Bible each day, you're not a Christian." Which I would take as exaggeration, perhaps, but exaggeration as a means of emphasizing something important.

**Tenth**, regarding higher-critical views at [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#): I agree that it is a problem, but I would remind you of how [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#) and [St. Tikhon's Seminary](#) compare. [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#) is more liberal, and it is an excellent academic environment that gives degrees including an Orthodox M.Min. [St. Tikhon's Seminary](#) is academically much looser but it is considered an excellent preparation for ministry. If you saw some degree of liberal academic theology at [St. Vladimir's](#), you are seeing the fruits of your (legitimate) selection. Not that [St. Vladimir's Seminary](#) is the only Orthodox seminary which is not completely perfect, but if you want to see preparation for pastoral ministry placed ahead of academic study at an Orthodox institution, [St. Tikhon's](#) might interest you.

**Eleventh**, after I was at [Calvin](#), I remembered one friend, tongue-in-cheek, talking about "the person who led me to Calvin." I also remember that when I was at [Calvin](#), I heard more talk about being "disciples of John Calvin" than being "disciples of Jesus Christ," and talk more about bearing the name of "Calvinist" than "Christian," although this time it wasn't tongue-in-cheek. I notice that you speak of how, "sadly," people "left the Reformed *faith* for Orthodoxy." One response might be one that Reformers like Calvin might share: "Was John Calvin crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of John Calvin?" (Cf I Cor. 1:13)

I left this out at first because it's not as "nice" as some of the others, but I would like to invite you to perhaps leave the "faith" (as you call it) that aims for John Calvin, and embrace the faith that Calvin was trying to re-create in response to abuses in the Western Church. It's still alive, and we still have an open door for you.

# A Postmodern-Influenced Conclusion

When I studied early modern era Orthodox Patriarch Cyril Lucaris, I compared the Eucharistic teaching in his profession of faith to the Eucharistic teaching in Calvin's [Institutes](#)...

...and concluded that Calvin was more Orthodox. Calvin, among other things, concerned himself with the question of what John Chrysostom taught.

I really don't think I was trying to be a pest. But what I did not develop is that Calvin tried to understand what the Greek Fathers taught, always as an answer to Protestant questions about what, in metaphysical terms, happens to the Holy Gifts. The Orthodox question is less about the transformation of the Holy Gifts than the transformation of those who receive it, and Calvin essentially let the Fathers say whatever they wanted... as long as they answered a question on terms set by the Reformation.

When I read Francis Schaeffer's [How Should We Then Live?](#), my immediate reaction was that I wished the book had been "expanded to six times its present length." I have some reservations about the fruitfulness of presuppositional apologetics now. What I do not have reservations about is saying that there is a valid insight in Schaeffer's approach, and more specifically there is distortion introduced by letting Orthodoxy say whatever it wants... as an answer to Calvinist questions.

To assert, without perceived need for justification, that the Orthodox have very little understanding of sovereign grace and follow this claim by saying that there is a preoccupation with divinization comes across to Orthodox much like saying, "\_\_\_\_\_ have very little concept of 'medicine' or 'health' and are always frequenting doctor's offices, pharmacies, and exercise clubs." It's a sign that Orthodox are allowed to fill in the details of sin, incarnation, justification, or (in this case) grace, but on condition that they are filling out the Reformation's unquestioned framework.

But the way to understand this is less analysis than worship.

# How Shall I Tell an Alchemist?

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

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

To an alchemist,  
And even nothingness itself?

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

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



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

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

How shall I tell an alchemist?

# *Refutatio Omnium Hæresium*

*Michael? (Who Is Like God?)*

# The Arena

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

crowning God's saints.

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

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

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

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

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

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

# Death

In the time of life,  
Prepare for death.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*For contemplation made were we*

FOR CONTEMPLATION MADE WERE WE.

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

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

... ..

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

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

# The Consolation of Theology

## Song I.

### The Author's Complaint.

The Gospel was new,  
When one saint stopped his ears,  
And said, '*Good God!*  
*That thou hast allowed me,*  
*To live at such a time.*'  
Jihadists act not in aught of vacuum:  
Atheislam welcometh captors;  
Founded by the greatest Christian heresiarch,  
Who tore Incarnation and icons away from all things Christian,  
The dragon next to whom,  
Arius, father of heretics,  
Is but a fangless worm.  
Their 'surrender' is practically furthest as could be,  
From, '*God and the Son of God,*  
*Became Man and the Son of Man,*  
*That men and the sons of men,*  
*Might become Gods and the Sons of God,*  
[By contrast, eviscerating the reality of man.](#)  
The wonder of holy marriage,  
Tortured and torn from limb to limb,  
In progressive installments old and new,

Technology a secular occult is made,  
Well I wrote a volume,  
[The Luddite's Guide to Technology](#),  
And in once-hallowed halls of learning,  
Is taught a 'theology,'  
Such as one would seek of Monty Python.  
And of my own life; what of it?  
A monk still I try to be;  
Many things have I tried in life,  
And betimes met spectacular success,  
And betimes found doors slammed in my face.  
Even in work in technology,  
Though the time be an economic boom for the work,  
Still the boom shut me out or knocked me out,  
And not only in the Church's teaching,  
In tale as ancient as Cain and Abel,  
Of [The Wagon, the Blackbird, and the Saab](#).  
And why I must now accomplish so little,  
To pale next to glorious days,  
When a-fighting cancer,  
I switched discipline to theology,  
And first at Cambridge then at Fordham,  
Wished to form priests,  
But a wish that never came true?



## I.

And ere I moped a man appeared, quite short of stature but looking great enough to touch a star. In ancient gold he was clad, yet the golden vestments of a Patriarch were infinitely eclipsed by his Golden Mouth, by a tongue of liquid, living gold. Emblazoned on his bosom were the Greek letters **Î§**, and **Î‘**. I crossed myself thrice, wary of devils, and he crossed himself thrice, and he looked at me with eyes aflame and said, ‘Child, hast thou not written, and then outside the bounds of Holy Orthodoxy, a koan?’:

A novice said to a master, ‘I am sick and tired of the immorality that is all around us. There is fornication everywhere, drunkenness and drugs in the inner city, relativism in people’s minds, and do you know where the worst of it is?’

The master said, ‘Inside your heart.’

He spoke again. ‘Child, repent of thine own multitude of grievous sins, not the sins of others. Knowest thou not the words, spoken by the great St. Isaac and taken up without the faintest interval by the great St. Seraphim, “Make peace with thyself and ten thousand around thee shall be saved?” Or that if everyone were to repent, Heaven would come to earth?’

‘Thou seemest on paper to live thy conviction that every human life is a life worth living, but lacking the true strength that is behind that position. Hast thou read my [Treatise to Prove that Nothing Can Injure the Man Who Does Not Harm Himself?](#) How the three children, my son, in a pagan court, with every lechery around them, were graced not to defile themselves in what they ate, but won the moral victory of not bowing to an idol beyond monstrous stature? And the angel bedewed them in external victory after they let all else go in *internal* and eternal triumph?’

‘It is possible at all times and every place to find salvation. Now thou

knowest that marriage or monasticism is needful; and out of that knowledge you went out to monasteries, to the grand monastery of Holy Cross Hermitage, to Mount Athos itself, and thou couldst not stay. What of it? Before God thou art *already* a monk. Keep on seeking monasticism, without end, and whether thou crossest the threshold of death a layman or a monk, if thou hast sought monasticism for the rest of thy days, and seekest such repentance as thou canst, who knows if thou mightest appear a monk in lifelong repentance when thou answerest before the Dread Judgement-Throne of Christ?

‘Perhaps it is that God has given thee such good things as were lawful for God to give but unlawful and immature for thou to seek for thyself. Thou hast acquired a scholar’s knowledge of academic theology, and a heresiologist’s formation, but thou writest for the common man. Canst not thou imagine that this may excel such narrow writing, read by so few, in the confines of scholarship? And that as thou hast been graced to walk the long narrow road of affliction, thou art free now to sit in thy parents’ splendid house, given a roof when thou art homeless before the law whilst thou seekest monasticism, and writest for as long as thou art able? That wert wrong and immature to seek, sitting under your parents’ roof and writing as much as it were wrong and immature to seek years’ training in academic theology and heresy and give not a day’s tribute to the professorial asceticism of pride and vainglory (thou hadst enough of thine own). Though this be not an issue of morality apart from asceticism, thou knewest the settled judgement that real publication is traditional publication and vanity press is what self-publication is. Yet without knowing, without choosing, without even guessing, thou wert again & time again in the right place, at the right time, amongst the manifold shifts of technology, and now, though thou profitest not in great measure from thy books, yet have ye written many more creative works than thou couldst bogging with editors. Thou knowest far better to say, “Wisdom is justified by her children,” of thyself in stead of saying such of God, but none the less thou hadst impact. Yet God hath granted thee the three, unsought and unwanted though thou mayest have found them.’

I stood in silence, all abashed.

## **Song II.**

## **His Despondency.**

The Saint spoke thus:  
‘What then? How is this man,  
A second rich young ruler become?  
He who bore not a watch on principle,  
Even before he’d scarce more than  
Heard of Holy Orthodoxy,  
Weareth a watch built to stand out,  
Even among later Apple Watches.  
He who declined a mobile phone,  
Has carried out an iPhone,  
And is displeased to accept,  
A less fancy phone,  
From a state program to provide,  
Cell phones to those at poverty.  
Up! Out! This will not do,  
Not that he hath lost an item of luxury,  
But that when it happened, he were sad.  
For the rich young ruler lied,  
When said he that he had kept,  
All commandments from his youth,  
For unless he were an idolater,  
The loss of possessions itself,  
Could not suffice to make him sad.  
This man hast lost a cellphone,  
And for that alone he grieveth.  
Knoweth he not that money maketh not one glad?  
Would that he would recall,  
The heights from which he hath fallen,  
Even from outside the Orthodox Church.’

## II.

Then the great Saint said, ‘But the time calls for something deeper than lamentation. Art thou not the man who sayedst that we cannot *achieve* the Holy Grail, nor even *find* it: for the only game in town is to *become* the Holy Grail? Not that the Orthodox Church tradeth in such idle romances as Arthurian legend; as late as the nineteenth century, Saint IGNATIUS (Brianchaninov) gaveth warnings against reading novels, which His Eminence KALLISTOS curiously gave embarrassed explanations. Today the warning should be greatly extended to technological entertainment. But I would call thy words to mind none the less, and bid thee to become the Holy Grail. And indeed, when thou thou receivest the Holy Mysteries, thou receivest Christ as thy Lord and Saviour, thou art transformed by the supreme medicine, as thou tastest of the Fount of Immortality?’

‘Thou wert surprised to learn, and that outside the Orthodox Church, that when the Apostle bade you to put on the whole armour of Christ, the armour of Christ wert not merely armour *owned* by Christ, or armour *given* by Christ: it were such armour as *God himself wears to war*: the prophet Isaiah tells us that the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation are God’s own armour which he weareth to war.

‘Thou art asleep, my son and my child; awaken thou thyself! There is silver under the tarnishment that maketh all seem corrupt: take thou what God hath bestowed, rouse and waken thyself, and find the treasure with which thy God hath surrounded thee.’

## Song III.

### A Clearer Eye.

‘We suffer more in imagination than reality,’  
Said Seneca the Younger,  
Quoted in rediscovery of Stoicism,  
That full and ancient philosophy,

Can speak, act, and help today,  
Among athletes and business men,  
And not only scholars reading dusty tomes.  
And if thus much is in a school of mere philosophy,  
An individualist pursuit deepening division,  
What of the greatest philosophy in monasticism,  
What of the philosophy,  
Whose Teacher and God are One and the Same?  
I stood amazed at God,  
Trying to count my blessings,  
Ere quickly I lost count.

### III.

Then said I, 'I see much truth in thy words, but my fortunes have not been those of success. I went to Cambridge, with strategy of passing all my classes, and shining brightly on my thesis as I could; the Faculty of Divinity decided two thirds of the way through the year that my promptly declared dissertation topic was unfit for Philosophy of Religion, and made me choose another dissertation topic completely. I received no credit nor recognition for the half of my hardest work. That pales in comparison with Fordham, where I were pushed into informal office as ersatz counselour for my professors' insecurities, and the man in whom I had set my hopes met one gesture of friendship after another with one retaliation after another. Then I returned to the clumsy fit of programming, taken over by Agile models which require something I cannot do: becoming an interchangeable part of a hive mind. I have essayed work in User eXperience, but no work has yet crystallised, and the economy is adverse. What can I rightly expect from here?'

Ere he answered me, 'Whence askest thou the future? It is wondrous. And why speakest thou of thy fortune? Of a troth, no man hath ever had fortune. It were an impossibility.'

I sat a-right, a-listening.

He continued, 'Whilst at Fordham, in incompetent medical care, thou wert stressed to the point of nausea, for weeks on end. Thy worry

wert not, “Will I be graced by the noble honourific of Doctor?” though that were far too dear to thee, but, “*Will there be a place for me?*” And thus far, this hath been in example “We suffer more in imagination than in reality.” For though what thou fearest hath happened, what be its sting?

‘Thou seekedst a better fit than as a computer programmer, and triedst, and God hath provided other than the success you imagined. What of it? Thou hast remained in the house of thy parents, a shameful thing for a man to seek, but right honourable for God to bestow if thou hast sought sufficiency and independence. Thou knowest that we are reckoned come Judgement on our performance of due diligence and not results achieved: that due diligence often carrieth happy results may be true, but it is nothing to the point. Thou art not only provided for even in this decline; thou hast luxuries that thou needest not.

‘There is no such thing as fortune: only an often-mysterious Providence. God has a care each and all over men, and for that matter over stones, and naught that happeneth in the world escapeth God’s cunning net. As thou hast quoted the [Philokalia](#):

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

- Wealth, so that one can perform acts of charity.
- Poverty, so that one can endure it with patience and gratitude.
- Authority, so that one can exercise righteous judgement and establish virtue.
- Obedience and service, so that one can more readily attain salvation of soul.
- Health, so that one can assist those in need and undertake work worthy of God.
- Sickness, so that one may earn the crown of patience.
- Spiritual knowledge and strength, so that one may acquire

virtue.

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

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

'And again:

He who wants to be an imitator of Christ, so that he too may be called a son of God, born of the Spirit, must above all bear courageously and patiently the afflictions he encounters, whether these be bodily illnesses, slander and vilification from men, or attacks from the unseen spirits. God in His providence allows souls to be tested by various afflictions of this kind, so that it may be revealed which of them truly loves Him. All the patriarchs, prophets, apostles and martyrs from the beginning of time traversed none other than this narrow road of trial and affliction, and it was by doing this that they fulfilled God's will. 'My son,' says Scripture, 'if you come to serve the Lord, prepare your soul for trial, set your heart straight, and patiently endure' (Ecclus. 2 : 1-2). And elsewhere it is said: 'Accept everything that comes as good, knowing that nothing occurs without God willing it.' Thus the soul that wishes to do God's will must strive above all to acquire patient endurance and hope. For one of the tricks of the devil is to make us listless at times of affliction, so that we give up our hope in the Lord. God never allows a soul that hopes in Him to be so oppressed by trials that it is put to

utter confusion. As St Paul writes: 'God is to be trusted not to let us be tried beyond our strength, but with the trial He will provide a way out, so that we are able to bear it (I Cor. 10 : 13). The devil harasses the soul not as much as he wants but as much as God allows him to. Men know what burden may be placed on a mule, what on a donkey, and what on a camel, and load each beast accordingly; and the potter knows how long he must leave pots in the fire, so that they are not cracked by staying in it too long or rendered useless by being taken out of it before they are properly fired. If human understanding extends this far, must not God be much more aware, infinitely more aware, of the degree of trial it is right to impose on each soul, so that it becomes tried and true, fit for the kingdom of heaven?

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

'Thou hast earned scores in math contests, yea even scores of math contests, ranking 7th nationally in the 1989 MathCounts competition. Now thou hast suffered various things and hast not the limelight which thou hadst, or believeth thou hadst, which be much the same thing. Again, what of it? God hath provided for thee, and if thou hast been fruitless in a secular arena, thou seekest virtue, and hast borne some



fruit. Moreover thou graspest, in part, virtue that thou knewest not to seek when thou barest the asceticism of a mathematician or a member of the Ultraneet. Thou seekest without end that thou mayest become humble, and knowest not that to earnestly seek humility is nobler than being the chiefest among mathematicians in history?

‘The new Saint Seraphim, of Viritsa, hath written,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

across, every offensive word, every slander and criticism, every obstacle to your works, which could cause frustration and disappointment, This is from Me.

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

All these things were from Me.

‘The doctors have decided that thy consumption of one vital medication is taken to excess, and they are determined to bring it down to an approved level, for thy safety, and for thy safety accept the consequence of thy having a string of hospitalizations and declining health, and have so far taken every pain to protect thee, and will do so even if their care **slay** thee.

‘What of it? Thy purity of conscience is in no manner contingent on what others decide in their dealings with thee. It may be that the change in thy medicaments be less dangerous than it beseemeth thee. It may be unlawful to the utmost degree for thou to seek thine own demise: yet it is full lawful, and possible, for our God and the Author and Finisher of our faith to give thee a life complete and full even if it were cut short to the morrow.

‘Never mind that thou seest not what the Lord may provide; thou hast been often enough surprised by the boons God hath granted thee. Thou hast written [Repentance, Heaven’s Best-Kept Secret](#), and thou knowest that repentance itself eclipseth the pleasure of sin. Know also that grievous men, and the devil himself, are all ever used by God according to his design, by the God who worketh all for all.

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

## Gods.

‘Know and remember also that happiness comes from within. Stop chasing after external circumstances. External circumstances are but a training ground for God to build strength within. Wittest thou not that thou art a man, and as man art constituted by the image of God? If therefore thou art constituted in the divine image, why lookest thou half to things soulless and dead for thy happiness?’

## **Song IV.**

### **Virtue Unconquerable.**

I know that my Redeemer liveth,  
And with my eyes yet shall I see God,  
But what a painful road it has been,  
What a gesture of friendship has met a knife in my back.  
Is there grandeur in me for my fortitude?  
I only think so in moments of pride,  
With my grandeur only in repentance.  
And the circumstances around me,  
When I work, have met with a knife in the back.

## IV.

The Golden-Mouthed said, ‘Child, I know thy pains without your telling, aye, and more besides: Church politics ain’t no place for a Saint! Thou knowest how I pursued justice, and regarded not the face of man, drove out slothful servants, and spoke in boldness to the Empress. I paid with my life for the enemies I made in my service. You have a full kitchen’s worth of knives in your back: I have an armory! I know well thy pains from within.

‘But let us take a step back, far back.

‘Happiness is of particular concern to you and to many, and if words in the eighteenth century spoke of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” now there are many people who make the pursuit of happiness all but a full-time occupation.

‘In ages past a question of such import would be entrusted to enquiry and dialogue philosophic. So one might argue, in brief, that true happiness is a supreme thing, and God is a supreme thing, and since there can not be two separate supreme essences, happiness and God are the same, a point which could be argued at much greater length and eloquence. And likewise how the happy man is happy not because he is propped up from without, by external circumstance, but has chosen virtue and goodness inside. And many other things.

‘But, and this says much of today and its berzerkly grown science, in which the crowning jewel of superstring theory hath abdicated from science’s bedrock of experiment, happiness is such a thing as one would naturally approach through psychology, because psychology is, to people of a certain bent, the only conceivable tool to best study to understand men.

‘One can always critique some detail, such as the import of what psychology calls “flow” as optimal experience. The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, outlined three versions of the good life: the

*Pleasant Life*, which is the life of pleasure and the shallowest of the three; the *Engaged Life*, or the life of flow, called optimal experience, and the *Meaningful Life*, meaning in some wise the life of virtue.

‘He says of the Pleasant Life that it is like vanilla ice cream: the first bite tastes delicious, but by the time you reach the fifth or sixth bite, you can’t taste it any more. And here is something close to the Orthodox advice that a surplus of pleasures and luxuries, worldly honours and so on, do not make you happy. I tell you that one can be lacking in the most basic necessities and be happy: but let this slide.

‘Of the Meaningful Life, it is the deepest of the three, but it is but a first fumbling in the dark of what the Orthodox Church has curated in the light of day. Things like kindness and mercy have built in to the baseline, curated since Christ or rather the Garden of Eden, so Orthodox need not add some extra practice to their faith to obtain kindness or gratitude. Really, the number of things the Orthodox Church has learned about the Meaningful Life far eclipse the [Philokalia](#): the fount is inexhaustible.

‘But my chief concern is with the Engaged Life, the life of flow. For flow is not “the psychology of optimal experience,” or if it is, the *theology* of optimal experience hath a different base. Flow is legitimate and it is a wonder: but it is not additionally fit to be a normative baseline for mankind as a whole.

‘*Flow*, as it occurs, is something exotic and obscure. It has been studied in virtuosos who are expert performers in many different domains. Once someone of surpassing talent has something like a decade of performance, it is possible when a man of this superb talent and training is so engrossed in a performance of whatever domain, that sits pretty much at the highest level of performance where essentially the virtuoso’s entire attention is absorbed in the performance, and time flies because no attention is left to observe the passage of time or almost any other thing of which most of us are aware when we are awake.

‘It seemeth difficult to me to market flow for mass consumption: doing such is nigh unto calling God an elitist, and making the foundation of a happy life all but impossible for the masses. You can be a subjectivist

if you like and say that genius is five thousand hours' practice, but it is trained virtuoso talent and not seniority that even gets you through flow's door. For that matter, it is also well nigh impossible for the few to experience until they have placed years into virtuoso performance in their craft. Where many more are capable of being monastics. Monastics, those of you who are not monastics may rightly surmise, have experiences which monastics call it a disaster to share with you. That may be legitimate, but novices would do well not to expect a stream of uninterrupted exotic experiences, not when they start and perhaps not when they have long since taken monastic vows. A novice who seeth matters in terms of "drudgework" would do well to expect nothing but what the West calls "drudgework" for a long, long time. (And if all goeth well and thou incorporatest other obediences to the diminution of drudgery, thou wilt at first lament the change!) A monastic, if all goes well, will do simple manual labour, but freed from relating to such labour as drudgery: forasmuch as monastics and monastic clergy recall "novices' obediences", it is with nostalgia, as a yoke that is unusually easy and a burden unusually light.

'And there is a similitude between the ancient monastic obedience that was *par excellence* the bread and butter of monastic manual labour, and the modern obedience. For in ancient times monks wove baskets to earn their keep, and in modern times monks craft incense. And do not say that the modern obedience is nobler, for if anything you sense a temptation, and a humbler obedience is perhaps to be preferred.

'But in basket making or incense making alike, there is a repetitive manual labour. There are, of course, any number of other manual obediences in a monastery today. However, when monasticism has leeway, its choice seems to be in favour of a repetitive manual labour that gives the hands a regular cycle of motion whilst the heart is left free for the Jesus Prayer, and the mind in the heart practices a monk's *watchfulness* or *nipsis*, an observer role that traineth thee to notice and put out temptations when they are a barely noticeable spark, rather than heedlessly letting the first temptation grow towards acts of sin and waiting until thy room be afire before fightest thou the blaze. This watchfulness is the best optimal experience the Orthodox Church gives us in which to abide, and 'tis no accident that the full and unabridged title of

the [Philokalia](#) is [The Philokalia of the Niptic Fathers](#). If either of these simple manual endeavours is unfamiliar or makes the performer back up in thought, this is a growing pain, not the intended long-term effect. And what is proposed is proposed to everybody in monasticism and really God-honoured marriage too, in force now that the [Philokalia](#) hath come in full blossom among Orthodox in the world, that optimum experience is for everyone, including sinners seeking the haven of monasticism, and not something exotic for very few.

‘And remember how thou wast admonished by a monk, perhaps in echo of St. James the Brother of God who said, “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.” For thou wert in the trapeza, with the monk and with a janitorial lady, and he told the janitorial lady that she was fortunate, for her manual labour left her free to pray with her mind, and thou, a computer programmer at the time, wert unfortunate because thy work demanded thy full mental attention.

‘Forsooth! If thou canst have optimal experience, the Jesus Prayer in thy heart as the metronome of silence, if thy business were to weave baskets or craft incense, why not indeed can one attend to the Jesus Prayer, rising as incense before God, in mopping a floor or cleaning windows? For however great monasticism may be, it hath not aught of monopoly in meditative work and prayer before God. Marriage is the older instrument of salvation. The door is open, if thou canst do some manual labour, to do so in prayer to God. And monks are not alone permitted prayerful manual labour: monasticism is but the rudiments of the Gospel, and if monasticism seeketh out perhaps a boon in prayerful manual labour, this is hardly a barbed wire fence with a sign saying that prayerful manual labour is reserved only for monastics.

‘Let us say that this is true, and the theology of optimum experience is virtually accepted for the sake of argument, or if thou preferest, thou mayest answer it “Yes” and “Amen.” Still, I say it is a quibble, compared to the darker import. Let us set the point aside, and with good reason.’

Then he paused, and ere a moment resumed explaining. ‘If I may pull a rare note from the wreckage postmodern, there is the concept of a



semiotic frame, perhaps a myth, that determines a society's *possibles et pensables*, that which is understood to be possible in a society, and that which is found to even be thinkable. The knife cuts well against some radicals. And people are in blinders about activism and psychology.

'Think of thy feminist theology professor, who said both right and full that she believed in Tradition, and in the same breath placed Arius, the father of heretics, alongside St. Athanasius as equally full representatives of that Tradition. When in your theological anthropology class she picked two texts for disability, the obvious agenda, the one and only thing to do for autism (as her agenda fell) was to engage some activist political advocacy for to make conditions in some wise more favourable for that particular victim class. No expression of love was possible save additional political activism. And I would say, and thou wouldst say, that she were too political in her response, and not nearly political enough. (For when all is civil warfare carried on by other means, real concern for the life of the polis but starves.)

'Yet one of these reading assignments contained what she did not grasp. Of the two, one was what could be straightforwardly be called either or both of political ideology and identity politics, and it was complete with the standard, footnoteless, boilerplate opening assertion that no one else in the whole wide world could possibly have suffering that could be compared to that of one's own poor, miserable demographic.

'But the other text was different in many ways. It was entitled "Love Without Boundaries," and it was a text about love written by the father of a severely autistic son. This latter text did not come close to calling for agitation or plans for a better future: far from it" on these points it is silent. What it did do, however, was take an approach in asceticism, and learn to love without limits. The father did not and could not cure his son, but whether or not the father's love transformed his son, the love the father expressed transformed the *father*. His love was cut from the same cloth as the peace with oneself which St. Isaac and St. Seraphim with one voice exhort us to acquire, and the love the father expressed rendered him Godlike, in a humble, everyday, ordinary fashion.

‘And in like wise to how thy professor automatically jumped to political activism as how one might exhibit right care for the severely autistic and other disabled, in this day and age the go-to discipline for understanding humans is psychology, and a psychology fashioning itself after hard science, introducing itself by what might be called *the physics envy declaration*: psychologists-are-scientists-and-they-are-just-as-much-scientists-as-people-in-the-so-called-hard-sciences-like-physics.

‘It is a side point that psychologists treat subjects as less-than-human: a near-universal feature of psychological experiment is some stripe of guile, because psychological experimental value would be ruined under normal conditions of intelligent and informed cooperation between fellow men. (Though the enterprise may be named “psychology”, the name were oafishly or treacherously applied: for the name be drawn from the Greek for the study that understands the psyche or soul, a *psyche* or soul is precisely what the discipline will not countenance in man.) Forsooth! Men running experiments think and make decisions; subjects in experiments are governed by laws. Moreover, since physics hath worked long and hard to de-anthropomorphise what it studies, physics envy biddeth psychology to seek well a de-anthropomorphised theory of  $\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^{1/2}\hat{I}$ ,  $\hat{I}\hat{\diamond}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}\hat{\epsilon}\hat{I}$ , (*anthropos*), man.

‘It hath been noted, as psychology reinvent more of religion, that classical clinical psychology can raise a person suffering from some mental illness to be as normal, but nought more. And so positive psychology chaseth after means of enhancement and excellence, to best make use of giftedness. Meanwhilst, whilst this invention is brand new, it is well over a millennium since monasticism was at one stroke a hospital for repentant sinners and an academy for excellence.

‘The point primarily to be held is that psychology is not the ultimate real way, but one among many ways, of understanding how people work, and one that hath stopped its ear to our being created in the image of God. All great Christian doctrines are rendered untranslatable. [The article form of what is also thine advisor’s thesis](#) hath as its subtitle “From Christian Passions to Secular Emotions,” and it discusseth the formation of psychology as an emergent secular realm which hath displaced older candidates. But in the West before the reign of psychology

there were pastoral paradigms for understanding the human person, and thou knowest that one of the first technical terms Orthodoxy asketh its converts to learn is “passion:” and if the passions thine advisor hath discussed are not point-for-point identical to the passions repented of in Eastern Orthodoxy, still they be by far closer than any of the several emergent framings and meanings of “emotion” as pushed for in the discipline of psychology.

‘That there be a common term for psychology, and more dubiously one for what it replaced, is of little import for us. The term “pneumatology” may have existed and named practitioners from an older tradition; but such were under religious auspices. The study and field of communication is, among fields of enquiry studied in the academy, of vintage historically recent: yet it would be right stunning to deny that people communicated, and tried better to communicate, before the change when a university department door now heralded and announced, “DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION.”

‘And what has psychology done since being established as a secular arena? Robert Heinlein in [Stranger in a Strange Land](#) gets on very quickly to utterly dismissing marriage. But no sooner does Michael stop flailing marriage’s lifeless corpse, but he hath made a gaping hole and buildeth up a bond of water brotherhood that is meant to be every bit as heroic, beautiful, and magnificent, that the only remaining way to make water brotherhood truly more wondrous and amazing were to enlarge it until it grew to become true marriage.

‘Psychology, whilst being secular, in its completion offers ersatz religion that, though meant to be value-free, provides a secular mystical theology. That this secular religion, fit for all religions and patients, uses guided imagery allegedly from some generic copy-paste of Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, Native American traditions, and goeth back to Graeco-Roman times; mindfulness from Buddhism’s Eightfold Noble Path; and yoga from Hinduism is but an illustration of G.K. Chesterton’s observation: *the man who does not believe in God does not believe in nothing; he believes anything*. But put this aside and take psychology’s claim of secularity at face value. The [Philokalia](#) is scarcely but a library of collected works about how to rightly live the inner life. It is not in the

main concerned with pleasure or joy: but it has an infinite amount to say about repenting from sins that bear Hell each and every one. Psychology does not trade in temptation, sin, or passion: but it too offers a rudder for one's inner life, and if it teacheth not the extirpation of things that sully the soul's purity, it has infinite reach in a battleplan to not be conquered by negative emotion.

‘And if I may speak to thee of TED talks, there is probably a TED talk to be made, “The Trouble with TED,” for they exacerbate this. As thou knowest, one talk gave the staggering announcement that after decades of each generation having higher self-esteem than the last, and the lamented consequence arising that our youth in particular reach record levels of narcissism. Well might she announce that if thou sprayest fuel around and throwest lighted matches on the fuel, sooner or sooner thou wilt have a blaze about thee.

‘She also talked about self-touch, about it being soothing to place thy hand over thy heart. Forsooth! This is placed among the same general heading of making love without a partner. Not a whisper was heard mentioning affection towards another person, or for that matter a pet; the remedy stepped not an inch away from solipsism. Monks as thou knowest are admonished to refrain from embraces: be that as it may, it would be healthier for a monk to embrace another than to embrace himself.’

I said, ‘What is the trouble with TED? For I sense something askance, yet to put a finger on it is hard.’

His All Holiness answered me and said, ‘All world religions have grandeur, and for an analysis secular all world religions represent a way that a society can live together and persevere. Hinduism is not the sort of thing one *uses up*, whether across years, lifetimes, or centuries even; its spiritual paths are millennia old, and to destroy it would likely take nuclear war or an apocalyptic event. By contrast, remember thou how thou hast said, “No form of feminism that has yet emerged is stable:” easily enough one finds the living force of body image feminism today, whilst it would scarce be live in the academy in fifty years. Thy friend answered thy remark of something called “Christian feminism,” which articulates how traditional Christianity cares for, and seeks, the good of

women: for an example, it takes politically incorrect words about husbands and wives and offers the breathtaking change of addressing women as moral agents, and never telling husbands to keep wives in line. That is if anything the exception that proves the rule: for it may bear the external label of “feminism,” but its core be much slower to decay than any feminism at all, for it is *not* feminism at all. In thy feminist theology class one author said that in feminist theology, “all the central terms are up for grabs.” Meanwhilst, remember thy superior when thou wert an assistant at a bookstore. He hath told thee that books of liberal theology have a shelf life; after five years, perhaps, they are hard to sell. Meanwhilst, his shop published and sold Puritan sermons three centuries old. Thou mayest have a care that they are heterodox: but do not have a care that they will go out of fashion, or if they do go out of fashion, it will not be because the sermons lost their appeal to future Protestants seeking Biblical faith, but something else hath changed features of Protestantism that have survived since the Reformation.

‘Thou needest not refute TED talks; a few years and a given talk will likely be out of fashion. There is something in the structure of TED that is liberal, even if many talks say nothing overtly political: forasmuch, there is more to say than that they are self-contained, controlled, plastic things, where world religions are something organic that may or may not have a central prophet, but never have a central planner. TED is a sort of evolving, synthetic religion, and it cannot fill true spiritual hunger.

‘But let us return to psychology, or rather treat psychology and TED talks, for psychology hath of ages hoped for a Newton who would lead them into the Promised Land full status of being scientists. The study of Rocks and Nothing is the exemplar after which to pattern the study of Man. Forsooth! The problems in psychology are not so much where psychology has failed to understand Man on the ensample of empirical science. The real concerns are for where they have *succeeded*.

‘In a forum discussion thou readst, a conversation crystallised on care for diabetes, and cardinally important advice not to seek a book-smart nurse, but a diabetic nurse. For it is the case with empirical science that it entirely lacketh in empirical character. In psychology, as oft in other disciplines, a sufficiently skilled practitioner can pick up a book

about part of the subject he does not yet understand, and understand well enough what there is to understand. Understanding were never nursed on the practice of direct experience, and understanding here is malnourished.

‘However, the Orthodox Church with monasticism as its heart has *genuine empiricism* as its spine; you know with the knowing by which Adam knew Eve. All else is rumour and idle chatter. If there are qualifications to being a spiritual father, one of the chief of these must be that he speaks and acts out of first-hand encounter and first-hand knowledge, not that he learned by rumour and distortion. Dost wish that thou be healed by a spiritual physician? Seek thou then a man which will care for thee as a diabetic nurse.’

## **Song V.**

### **O Holy Mother!**

O Holy Mother! Art Thou the Myst’ry?  
Art Thou the Myst’ry untold?  
For I have written much,  
And spent much care,  
In [The Luddite’s Guide to Technology](#),  
And looked all the whilst,  
Down the wrong end,  
Of the best telescope far and away that I could find.  
I have written of man and creation defiled,  
Yet for all my concerns,  
Of so-called ‘space-conquering technologies,’  
Which it beseemeth me ‘body-conquering technologies,’  
Sidestepping the God-given and holy bounds,  
Of our embodied state,  
Where better to seek healing,  
For an occult-free simulation,  
Of the unnatural vice of magick arts,  
Than in the perfect creaturely response,  
‘Behold the handmaiden of the Lord.

Be it unto me according to thy word.’  
Then, the gates, nay, the foundations,  
The foundations of Hell began a-crumbling,  
The New Eve, the Heavenly Mother,  
Whom Christ told the Disciple,  
‘Behold thy Mother!’  
In Her is the microcosm of Creation aright,  
And She is the Friend and Comfort,  
Of the outcast, and the poor:  
My money, my property, I stand to lose:  
But no man can take from me,  
A Treasure vaster than the Heavens;  
Perhaps I would do well,  
To say little else of technologies progressively degrading humanity,  
And pray an Akathist to the Theotokos,  
And put a trust in Her that is proto-Antiochian,  
Rather than proto-Alexandrian,  
And give Her a trust in the great Story,  
Diminished not one whit,  
If She happeneth not to be a teacher,  
Offering such ideas as philosophers like:  
Her place in the Great Story is far greater than that:  
And such it is also,  
With illuminã”d teachers,  
Who offer worship to God as their teaching,  
And are in travail,  
Until Christ be formed in their disciples.

## V.

He said, ‘But let us return to the pursuit of happiness, which hath scathingly been called “the silliest idea in the history of mankind.” And that for a junior grade of pursuing happiness, not the clone of a systematic science which worketh out a combination of activities and practices, an America’s Test Kitchen for enjoying life, studying ways of manipulating oneself to produce pleasure and happiness.

‘It were several years ago that thou tookest [a Fluxx deck](#) to play with friends, and the group included five adults and one very little boy. So the adults took turns, not just in their moves, but (for a player who had just played a move) in paying attention to the little one, so that he were not looking on a social meeting that excluded him.

‘When it were thy turn to look after the boy, thou liftedst him to thy shoulders and walkedst slowly, gingerly, towards the kitchen, because thou wishedst to enter the kitchen, but thou wert not sure thou couldst walk under the kitchen’s lower ceiling without striking his head.

‘Shortly after, thou realizedst three things: firstly, that the boy in fact had *not* struck his head on the kitchen ceiling, even though you had advanced well into the kitchen area; secondly, that the boy was dragging his fingers on the ceiling; and thirdly and finally, that he was laughing and laughing, full of joy.

‘That wert a source of pleasure that completely eclipsed [the game of Fluxx](#), though it were then a favourite game. And when thou askedst if it were time for thy next move, it were told thee that the game was won.

‘In the conversation afterwards, thou wert told a couple of things worthy of mention.

‘First, and perhaps of no great import, thou gavest the boy a pleasure that neither of his parents could offer. The boy’s father wert a few inches taller than thee, and were he to attempt what thou attemptedst, he in fact *would* have struck his son’s head against the ceiling. The boy’s mother could not either have offered the favour to her son; whether because her thin arms were weaker, or something else: God wot.

‘Second of all, as mentioned by an undergraduate psychologist, it gives people joy to give real pleasure to another person, and the case of children is special. She did not comment or offer comparison between knowing thou hast given pleasure to any age in childhood and knowing thou hast given pleasure to an adult, but she did comment, and her comment were this: the boy were guileless: too young to just be polite, too young for convincing guile, perhaps too young for any guile worthy of the name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that



name. That meant, whether or not thou thoughtest on such terms, that his ongoing and delighted laughter were only, and could only be, from unvarnished candour. Wherewith thou hadst no question of “Does he enjoy what I am doing with him, or is he just being polite?” Just being polite were off the table.

‘And this is not even only true for [the royal race of men](#). Thou hast not right circumstance to lawfully and responsibly own a pet, but without faintest compromise of principle, [thou visitest a pet shelter nearby to thine own home](#), and at the shelter also, guile is off the agenda, at least for the pets. A cat can purr, or if it hath had enough human attention for the nonce and thou hast perhaps not attended to its swishing tail, a light nip and swipe of claw is alike of unvarnished candour. Whereby thou knowest of a truth what a cat desireth and conveyeth if it purreth and perchance licketh thine hand.

‘Which were subsumed under a general troth, that it is better to serve than to be served, and it is better to give than receive. What is more, the most concentrated teaching about who be truly happy is enshrined in the [Sermon on the Mount](#), and enshrined again as the shorthand version of that great Sermon chanted in the Divine Liturgy:

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake:  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you,  
and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.  
Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven:  
for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

“The word translated, “blessed,”  $\hat{I}1/4\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}^0\hat{I}\pm\hat{I}\blacklozenge\hat{I}1\hat{I}\hat{I}\hat{I}$ , (*makarios*, hath what we would count as at least two meanings in English: “blessed,” and “happy.” Among English Bible translations there are some, but a few, translations which render the word as “happy,” including [Young’s Literal Translation](#):

Happy the poor in spirit — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy the mourning — because they shall be comforted.

Happy the meek — because they shall inherit the land.

Happy those hungering and thirsting for righteousness — because they shall be filled.

Happy the kind — because they shall find kindness.

Happy the clean in heart — because they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers — because they shall be called Sons of God.

Happy those persecuted for righteousness’ sake — because theirs is the reign of the heavens.

Happy are ye whenever they may reproach you, and may persecute, and may say any evil thing against you falsely for my sake — Rejoice ye and be glad, because your reward [is] great in the heavens, for thus did they persecute the prophets who were before you.

‘In English this is usually, but not always, found in more free translations; the [Amplified Bible](#) naturally shines in cases like these as an deliberately unusual translation style intended to render two or more faces of an ambiguity or a phrase bearing multiple meanings. Other languages can be different; in French, for instance, there are separate words *béni* and *heureux* which respectively mean “blessed” and “happy,” but *heureux* appears to be the term of choice in French translation of the Beatitudes.

‘Here, though, the Gospel hath aught in common with Plato. Plato investigated happiness, and the Greek term used was *εὐδαιμονία*, *eudaimonia*, almost exactly a literal equivalent to “in good spirits,” but the literal sense was taken much more seriously and much farther. It was a primary term for happiness, but what was seen as true happiness was having one’s spirit in good health. This happiness would not be easily confused by counterfeit pleasures such as one can immediately procure with narcotics; and the point is not that real-world narcotics create addiction and horrible misery. The happiness would be just as counterfeit in the pleasure of a person unhealthy in spirit to take some imaginary narcotic that created intense and endless pleasure, without either addiction or the misery that loom in the grievous backswing of narcotic pleasure.

‘Thou rememberest thy surprise, when reading thine undergraduate psychology text, when thou readedst what wert said of the pleasure principle. For the pleasure principle art an artifact of bad philosophy, which noting perchance that most of our actions bring some pleasure or pleasing result, assumes and defines that every action anyone ever takes is that which is calculated to bring thee the most pleasure. In settings less far back, thou hast listened to people saying that the only motivation anyone takes for any action is that it is calculated to bring them the greatest economic profit, and thou hast borrowed an answer, to say that several people have essayed to convince thee of this as truth, and so far as thou knewest, not one of them stood to gain financial profit from convincing thyself of this purported truth.

‘Thy textbook, like those who try to convince with a charming smile where a reasoned argument is ordinarily polite to offer, said that it were

more a virtue than a vice to show kindnesses to others because one enjoyed the feelings it gave, and thou hadst two answers in thy heart: first of all, past the sugar-coating of “more a virtue than a vice” lies an assertion that virtue is impossible in principle, and secondly, that the only theoretical possibility thou couldst care for the poor in order to help thy fellow men is if one received absolutely no pleasure or consolation in any stripe or dimension to care for the poor out of a genuine motive of benefitting others and not whatever probable pleasures their generosity and service might come back their way. That appalling price tag reaches beyond exorbitant. And thou desirest to speak of a “masochism principle” or “pain principle” whereby all decisions and all actions at all times by all men are whatever is calculated to bring them the greatest sufferings, alike useless to assert for any philosopher worthy of the name. It is hardly to be denied that most decisions bring some pain or have some downside on the part of the persons who make them, so a pain principle mirroring a pleasure principle is alike unprovable, and alike unfalsifiable, an untestable guess that hath not any place in science and scarcely more any place in disciplines seeking to be established as science. It was not until later that thou readst a competent philosopher who said that the existence of pleasure and a reward does not in and of itself make any action which brings pleasure to be motivated solely as a means to obtain pleasure. The thought-experiment were posed, that a man who gives to the poor and enjoys doing so were offered a pill which would give him the full pleasure and benefits of his generosity, but do nothing at all for the practical needs of the poor, would be in but rare cases utterly spurned as a right empty and worthless counterfeit.

## **Song VI.**

### **Crossing the Great Threshold.**

The tale were told,  
Of a child starkly scant of mind,  
Who received a glittering package, a gift,  
And kept the glittering package,  
Indeed taking it with him well nigh everywhere,  
And after long time,

When the disposable wrapping paper,  
Were well battered and now dingy,  
An adult asked,  
'Aren't you going to open the package?'  
The child exclaimed with joy,  
Once the toy emerged from the tatters,  
And squealed with joy, saying,  
"Oh, there's *another* present!"  
My Lord and my God!  
Perhaps I will never open,  
[The Sermon on the Mount](#).

## VI.

I said myself then, 'O John! O glorious Saint John! Canst thou lead me on a path into the [The Sermon on the Mount](#)? For I have trod the path of self-direction, and it well nigh destroyed me.'

Then the Saint said to me, 'Thanks to thee, son, for thy request. I awaited that thou mightest ask, for that thou mightest have the Heavenly reward for asking.'

'That which you ask were a work of years or lifetimes; let me chase a humbler quarry: unfolding the first verse only of that great Sermon, which declareth the poor in spirit to be blessed and happy. I will speak to you of the riches of poverty but not the heights of humility, though they be one and the same. Though I may call on other verses to tell what riches are in poverty, I will make no attempt to unfold these other Beatitudes, though to them that which declared the blessedness of poverty that wert one and the same. And I tell thee, through thine interests, that to be poor in spirit is to be no self-sufficient solipsist; rather, it is utterly dependent on the infinite riches of God, and that it is royal: for kings are forbidden to touch money, and in another sense all Christians and especially all monastics are forbidden to touch aught possession, not solely money, in stead of grasping as did the rich young ruler. But poverty be the unstopping of yon Sermon, an unstopping of virtue in which flowing fount eclipseth flowing fount.

That true poverty extendeth beyond a lack of possessions is taught by calling those blessed who are “poor in spirit,” beyond mere poverty of the body, and it is taught that the monastic vow of poverty includeth the other two: for a monk is bereft of the normal blessing of holy matrimony, and even of his own self-will. *That* thou knowest as treasure, for thou wishest to trade thine own idiorrhythmic self-direction for a coenobetic monastery, and to speak even more plainly, the direction of an abbot.

‘In the [Sermon on the Mount](#), poverty beseemeth to be special, for there are two passages: that which commendeth the storing treasures up in Heaven and rejecting the storing up of treasures on earth, then discussion of the eye as the lamp of the body, then exhortation to take no thought for the morrow, for God knoweth and willeth to care for our needs. And when thou hast wealth, be merciful to others, and thou wilt be repaid at great usury by thy true Debtor, God.

‘In fact there is one passage and topic, the longest though length in verses is a trivial measure. The tri-unity is harder to see in modern translations that translate something out to be accessible; one reads of one’s eye being “healthy” or “sound”. The King James version rightly renders “single”, for an undivided wholeness. Fr. Thomas Hopko hath said, before the surge of enthusiasm for mindfulness, “*Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.*” This attentiveness and full presence is the operation of an activity that is *single*, that neither layeth up possessions, nor defendeth them in worry, nor doubteth that the God who provideth will overlook thee in His care. In all these is dispersal and dissipation. Poverty of spirit maketh for singleness of eye, and a singleness destroyed by so many of the technologies you trade in.

‘It has from ancient times been reckoned that if thou givest to the poor, God is thy Debtor, and under what you would call third world living conditions, I told married Christians to leave to their children brothers rather than things. This too is poverty of spirit, even if it belong only in marriage, in a condition monks renounce. Thou hast read of those who suggest that thou asketh not, “Can I afford what I need?” but “Do I need what I can afford?”

‘It is monastic poverty that monastics do not defend themselves, not

only by force, but even with words, showing the power that terrified Pontius Pilate. It is monastic poverty not to struggle again over any temporal matter. It is poverty of spirit not to have plans, nor, in the modern sense, an identity. For in ancient times, Christians who were martyred, answered when asked their names, none other than “Christian.” And beyond this further layers yet beckon. Poverty is not an absence of treasures; it is a positive, active, thing that slices sharper than any two-edged sword. And monks who renounce property sometimes have something to say beyond “Good riddance!” The force of the rejection, and the freedom that is gained in letting riches go, is more like the obscene and *thundering* announcement: “I lost 235 pounds in one weekend!”

‘Thou readedst a church sign saying, “Who is rich? The person who is content.” And I tell thee that thou canst purchase by poverty of spirit many times and layers more than contentment with what thou possessest now. I have not even scratched the surface of experiences of monastics who were poor in spirit to a profound degree, but thou knowest that there are limits to what is lawful for me to utter to thee, and thou knowest that thou art not bidden to chase after experiences, but seek to repent of thy sins for the rest of thy life, which thou knowest to reckon as monastic privilege.’

## **Song VII.**

### **I Sing a Song to my Apple.**

Betimes my salad days were right begun,  
I programmed an Apple ][,  
In gradeschool adventure games and [a 4D maze](#),  
Simple arithmetic- and trigonometric-powered animations.  
My father a computer scientist,  
Who shared with me his joy,  
And in high school a Unix system administrator became.  
My family got, and still hath the carcass,  
Of one original ‘fat Mac’,  
So named because it had an available maximum 512k of RAM.

My calculator in high school,  
On which I programmed computer-generated art,  
[And a simple video game](#), had as much.  
Ere my salad days were dwindled,  
I remained a Unix programmer,  
And judged Mac OSX my preferred flavor of Unix.  
Later I had iPhones,  
And for the first time in my life,  
Owned a computer where I lacked root privilege.  
Along the way I got an Apple Watch,  
My desire increased as I read about it,  
And vanished when I learned it were,  
Bereft of such things as even a web browser.  
I gave it to my brother,  
Who later gave it back before it broke.  
I sing a song to my Apple,  
A peerless 17" MacBook Pro,  
Which through minor design flaw,  
Burned through video cards oft enough,  
And when the Apple Store stopped receiving those cards,  
So with it went any hope of keeping my Mac without frequent \$500  
repairs.  
And along the way,  
With the sweetness of a Linux virtual machine,  
[Realized that OSX had grown monstrous as a version of Unix.](#)  
When I asked about one cardinally important open source project,  
I were told that Apple had removed parts of the operating system,  
That the project needed to run,  
But information technology work in my Linux virtual machine,  
Was the command line equivalent of point and click.  
It were a discovery as if I had returned to Paradise.  
I sing a song to Apple's technical support,  
For when I asked a question,  
About command-line-driven Apache configuration,  
It took escalations up to level 3 technical support,  
Before a Genius knew that Macs *have* a command line.  
I purchased a computer meant to last many years.



I sing a song to my late iPhone,  
[Bewailed by men who made the Mac great,](#)  
Which slipped a pocket near a food bank,  
Booted my laptop into Windows and found,  
That Find My iPhone was now rendered useless.  
I went to see an Apple Store,  
And received a followup call,  
Giving a good ten days before I could access my iPhone,  
And found out also that Macs were as useless,  
As my computer booted into Windows,  
To Find My iPhone.  
Once I had one from each four,  
Offerings for Apple computers:  
A laptop one, an iPad one,  
An iPhone one, an Apple Watch one;  
And ere I were negotiating,  
For to buy a replacement iPhone on eBay,  
I said that there were many Android devices within my budget,  
And whilst in bed realized,  
I wanted full well that the negotiation fail.  
Apple's indirect gift to desktops may be Windows,  
And Apple's indirect gift to smartphones may be Android;  
For surely no iPhone killer before Android even came close.  
Certainly Windows Mobile answered the wrong question.  
But even if one may argue, legitimately,  
That a Mac and a PC have grown remarkably similar,  
And iOS and Android are also more alike than different,  
I was not poisoned by technical merits.  
I was poisoned by the corporate mindset,  
That all but killed my prospects,  
Of finding my iPhone before the battery were drained completely,  
And when I called my iPhone to perchance find it in my car,  
I went to voicemail immediately:  
My iPhone's battery wert already dead.  
I had known, but not paid attention earlier,  
To Steve Jobs as beyond toxic, as a boss;  
Screaming and abusive,

To employees he had every reason to cherish,  
And after a technical fumble,  
Publicly fired an Apple technician,  
At an employee motivational event.  
And I believed it.  
More disturbed I was,  
When I read of Jobs's spiritual practices,  
Such as an Orthodox might interpret,  
As opening the mind to listen,  
And draw the milk of dragons.  
Technology does things for us,  
Though I have found that when I shared my iOS devices with children,  
Squabble and squabble ensued.  
Technology does things for us,  
But this Trojan horse does things for devils also,  
Who cannot give exquisitely beneficial gifts,  
Even wert they to try.  
The power of devils is real but limited:  
Such teaches the [Philokalia](#),  
Which though it be filled with love of the beautiful,  
Says more about the operations and activities of devils,  
Than aught else that I have read.  
And one thing it sayeth,  
Through Orthodox Christian Tradition,  
Says that devils can tell a man's spiritual state,  
And try to inject venomous thoughts in temptation,  
Where men have free will, still,  
The devils cannot read minds,  
Even if they by ruse give one man certain thoughts,  
Sting another that the thoughts are in the first man,  
And behold, they speak and art deceived,  
That devils can read people's minds.  
Devilish predictions are called guesses,  
Which are sometimes wrong,  
The devils see a man walking to journey,  
And guess that he travels to visit another specific man,  
But 'tis guesswork; devils can well enough be wrong.

St. Nilus's alleged prophecies are dubious at present,

But we may not yet be in the clear.

And if the U.S. has been called "One nation under surveillance,"

Where No Such Agency has received every email,

It is now clear and open knowledge,

To those that will reflect,

That among most most Americans,

'Every breath and step Americans take,'

Is monitored by Big Brother,

But perhaps it is not just human agencies,

That reap the information collected.

++ungood

(Did anyone besides my most reverend Archbishop mention that it used to be that you had to seek out pornography, and leave your car in front of a store with papered-over windows, and wear your trenchcoat disguise for the mission, whereas now *pornography* seeks *you*?

It is something like a water cooler that hath three faucets,

Serving cold water, hot water, and antifreeze,

And the handles perplexing in their similitude.)

## VII.

The Saint turned to me and said, 'I would remind thee of Fr. Thomas's famous 55 maxims:

### **55 Maxims by Fr. Thomas Hopko**

1. Be always with Christ and trust God in everything.
2. Pray as you can, not as you think you must.
3. Have a keepable rule of prayer done by discipline.
4. Say the Lord's Prayer several times each day.
5. Repeat a short prayer when your mind is not occupied.
6. Make some prostrations when you pray.
7. Eat good foods in moderation and fast on fasting days.
8. Practice silence, inner and outer.
9. Sit in silence 20 to 30 minutes each day.
10. Do acts of mercy in secret.
11. Go to liturgical services regularly.
12. Go to confession and holy communion regularly.
13. Do not engage intrusive thoughts and feelings.
14. Reveal all your thoughts and feelings to a trusted person regularly.
15. Read the scriptures regularly.
16. Read good books, a little at a time.
17. Cultivate communion with the saints.
18. Be an ordinary person, one of the human race.
19. Be polite with everyone, first of all family members.
20. Maintain cleanliness and order in your home.
21. Have a healthy, wholesome hobby.
22. Exercise regularly.
23. Live a day, even a part of a day, at a time.
24. Be totally honest, first of all with yourself.
25. Be faithful in little things.
26. Do your work, then forget it.
27. Do the most difficult and painful things first.
28. Face reality.

29. Be grateful.
30. Be cheerful.
31. Be simple, hidden, quiet and small.
32. Never bring attention to yourself.
33. Listen when people talk to you.
34. Be awake and attentive, fully present where you are.
35. Think and talk about things no more than necessary.
36. Speak simply, clearly, firmly, directly.
37. Flee imagination, fantasy, analysis, figuring things out.
38. Flee carnal, sexual things at their first appearance.
39. Don't complain, grumble, murmur or whine.
40. Don't seek or expect pity or praise.
41. Don't compare yourself with anyone.
42. Don't judge anyone for anything.
43. Don't try to convince anyone of anything.
44. Don't defend or justify yourself.
45. Be defined and bound by God, not people.
46. Accept criticism gracefully and test it carefully.
47. Give advice only when asked or when it is your duty.
48. Do nothing for people that they can and should do for themselves.
49. Have a daily schedule of activities, avoiding whim and caprice.
50. Be merciful with yourself and others.
51. Have no expectations except to be fiercely tempted to your last breath.
52. Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.
53. Endure the trial of yourself and your faults serenely, under God's mercy.
54. When you fall, get up immediately and start over.
55. Get help when you need it, without fear or shame.

The Saint continued: 'Wouldst thou agree that we are in a high noon of secret societies?'

I answered, 'Of a troth.'

He asked, 'Wouldst thou agree that those societies are corrosive?'

I answered, 'As a rule, yes, and I wit that Orthodox are forbidden on pain of excommunication to join the Freemasons.'

He spoke again and asked me, 'And hast thou an opinion about the assassination of JFK, whether it wert a conspiracy?'

I said, 'A friend whose judgement I respect in matters political hath told me an opinion that there in fact was a conspiracy, and it were driven by LBJ.'

He said, 'And hast thou spent five full minutes in worrying about either in the past year?'

I said, 'Nay.'

He said, 'Thou hast secular intelligence if thou canst ask if "surveillance from Hell" in an obviously figurative sense might also be "surveillance from Hell" far more literally speaking, but such intelligence as this does not help one enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The devils each and every one are on a leash, and as thy priest hath said many times, *every thing that happeneth to us is either a blessing from God, or a temptation that God hath allowed for our strengthening*. Wherefore whether the devils have more information than in ages past, thou wert still best to live:

Focus exclusively on God and light, and never on darkness, temptation and sin.

## **Song VIII.**

### **A Hymn to Arrogance.**

The Saint opened his Golden Mouth and sang,  
'There be no war in Heaven,  
Not now, at very least,

And not ere were created,  
The royal race of mankind.  
Put on your feet the Gospel of peace,  
And pray, a-stomping down the gates of Hell.  
There were war in Heaven but ever brief,  
The Archangel Saint Michael,  
Commander of the bodiless hosts,  
Said but his name, "Michael,"  
Which is, being interpreted,  
"Who is like God?"  
With that the rebellion were cast down from Heaven,  
Sore losers one and all.  
They remain to sharpen the faithful,  
God useth them to train and make strength.  
[Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?](#)  
[Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?](#)  
[As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up,](#)  
[Or as if the staff should lift up itself,](#)  
[As if it were no wood.](#)  
Therefore be not dismayed,  
If one book of Holy Scripture state,  
That the Devil incited King David to a census,  
And another sayeth that God did so,  
For God permitted it to happen by the Devil,  
As he that heweth lifteth an axe,  
And God gave to David a second opportunity,  
In the holy words of Joab.  
Think thou not that God and the Devil are equal,  
Learnest thou enough of doctrine,  
To know that God is greater than can be thought,  
And hath neither equal nor opposite,  
The Devil is if anything the opposite,  
Of Michael, the Captain of the angels,  
Though truth be told,  
In the contest between Michael and the Devil,  
The Devil fared him not well.  
The dragon wert as a little boy,

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



## VIII.

I told St. John, 'I have just read the panikhida service, and it appeareth cut from the same cloth as the divine services in general.'

He said, 'Doth that surprise thee?'

I said, 'Perhaps it should not. But the [Philokalia](#) describes a contrast between life and death: for instance, in the image of an inn, where lodgers come for a night, bearing whatever they possess; some sleep on beds, some sleep on the floor, but come daybreak, all of them pick up their belongings and walk on hence.'

He said, 'How readest thou that parable?'

I said, 'In this life, some live in riches, and some in poverty, but all alike leave this life carrying only their deeds with them. The last English homily I heard, the priest quoted someone who said, "I have never seen a trailer attached to a hearse." Which were, "You can't take it with you," save that terrifying tale of a monk who died with over a hundred gold pieces. ('Twas said he was not avaricious, but merely stingy.) When he died, the community discussed what to do with his nigh incalculable sum of wealth: some suggested a building or other capital project, others some kindness to the poor. And when all was discussed, *they buried all the gold with him*, a costly, potent reminder to monastics that they should not want to be buried with even one gold piece. But the monk could not take the gold with him ere it were buried with him.'

The Saint told me, 'Thou hast read part of [Prayers by the Lake](#), in which St. Nikolai says that birth and death are an inch apart, but the ticker tape goes on forever.

'Rememberest thou also that in the [Philokalia](#) we read that those who wish one suffering to die were like one holding a deeply confused hope hope that a doctor would break up the bed of a sick man? For our passions we take with us beyond death, which passions the body mediateth to some degree.'

I said, ‘May I comment something? Which soundeth as a boast?’

He said, ‘Speak on.’

I said, ‘I am mindful that I am mortal, and that I am the chief of sinners. But the day of my death be more real to me than my salvation, and that I be the chief of sinners eclipseth that God be merciful. I have needed the reminder of the core promise in [For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.](#) Thus there be twain of deep pairs, and I have of the twain grasped each one the lesser alone.’

He said, ‘Hast thou not been astonished at God’s perfect Providence of years betimes?’

I said, ‘Yes.’

He said, ‘What thou sayest resoundeth not as boasting in my ears, but many people have wished for the remembrance of death and not reached it, no, not in monasticism even.’

I asked, ‘Will I reach monasticism?’

He smiled at me, and said, ‘Whither askest thou the future? It is wondrous.’

He said, ‘Remembrance of death doeth not to drain life. It is a reminder that life is not a dress rehearsal: or rather that it is a dress rehearsal, and *our performance in this rehearsal determineth what we will meet the Resurrection having rehearsed.*

‘With death cometh a realization of, “I shall not pass this wise again.”

‘Such death as we have giveth life a significance eternal in its import. For thou knowest that all ye in the Church Militant stand as it were in an arena before God and His Christ, before all the saints and angels and even devils, as God’s champions summoned to vindicate God as St. Job

the Much-Suffering and others vindicate God. And whereinever thou triumphest, Christ triumpheth in thee.

‘Knowest thou not that the saints who have run the race and be adorned with an imperishable and incorruptible crown stand about all ye, the Church Triumphant cheering on the Church Militant until every last one hath crossed the finish line in triumph?’

‘Knowest thou not that every saint and angel, the Mother of God and Christ enthroned on high, all cheer ye who still run the course, each and every one?’

‘The times preceding the Second Coming of Christ are not only apocalyptic; they are the very thing which giveth the term “apocalyptic” its meaning in thy day. And they be trials and tribulations which perhaps will happen in ages later on, and perhaps may already be begun. But in the end Christ will triumph, and all alike who are faithful. And if thou art alive for the Second Coming of Christ, or if not, God hath provided and will provide a way for thee. Be thou faithful, and remember, “The righteous shall live by his faith.”’

I said, ‘I should like to know where God will lead me. I can guess promises of good, but I am happier at least leaving a vessel open for God to fill.’

The Saint’s face began to glow, and he said, ‘In my day, I said something you may have met in the Reformers: that the age of miracles was no more, or in crasser tongue, “God wrote the book and retired.” So I called “opening the eyes of the blind” to be cleansing eyes from lust, which wert a fair claim in any case, and in particular if there miracles are no more. Thou, it seemeth, art in another age of miracles, or perhaps the age of miracles has never stopped from before the Nativity of Christ, but hath merely hid from time to time. Thou knowest thyself not to be the Orthodox Church’s fourth Theologian, but thou hast known some beginnings of theology already, and hath seen more miracles in thine earthly pilgrimage than have I. I perchance engaged in rhetorical discourse about God, and never on earth saw the Uncreated Light. Thou hast seen icons like and thou hast also seen a photograph of inside an altar, where notes and candles glewed purest white, and unlike mine own

and, where pain and chance glowed purest white, and unlike mine own self, thou hast been anointed with more than one miraculous oil, dear Christos...'

Then he bowed deeply, and prostrated himself before me, and his face glowed brightly, brightly, ten thousand times brighter than the sun and yet hurt not my mortal eyes, and he asked of me, 'Friend, wherewith askest thou the future? It is wondrous.'

Then there were a scintillating flash of light, beyond intense, and the Saint was gone.

I broke down and wept until I realized I was the happiest I had ever been in my life.

# Doxology

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

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

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

OF DIVINED MEN JOINING TALK OF TALK OF ANGELS.

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

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

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

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

Whilst remaining the only one god.

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

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

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

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



In a seed.

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

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

Let our spiritual eye be ever transfixed upon thine eternal radiant

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

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

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

Αμην,  
So be it. Amen.